The Mildura Sculpture Triennials 1961 – 1978 :

an interpretative history

ANNE E. SANDERS, M.A. (Hons)

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I declare that this thesis is entirely my own original work and all sources have been acknowledged. All rights reserved.

Anne Sanders

Braidwood, NSW.

November, 2009

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ABBREVIATIONS and ACRONYMS

AGAA	Art Galleries Association of Australia
AGDC	Australian Gallery Directors Council
AGNSW	Art Gallery of New South Wales
AGSA	Art Gallery of South Australia (previously National Gallery of South Australia)
ANG	Australian National Gallery (now National Gallery of Australia)
ANU	Australian National University
ASEA	Australian Society for Education through Art
CAAB	Commonwealth Art Advisory Board
CAE	College of Advanced Education
CAS	Contemporary Art Society
CRTS	Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Service
CID	Council of Interstate Directors
EAF	Experimental Art Foundation
IAC	Industries Assistance Commission
IMA	Institute of Modern Art
MACAC	Mildura Art Centre Advisory Council
MOMA	Museum of Modern Art, New York
NAS	National Art School
NGV	National Gallery of Australia
NLA	National Library of Australia
NCDC	National Capital Development Commission
NZ	New Zealand
PGAV	Public Galleries Association of Victoria (later became the RGAV)
RGAV	Regional Galleries Association of Victoria
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (previously Royal Melbourne Technical College, RMTC)
SASA	South Australian School of Art
SLV	State Library of Victoria

TSTC	Tertiary Secondary Teachers Certificate
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation
VAB	Visual Arts Board
VCA	Victorian College of the Arts
VIC	Victorian Institute of Colleges

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ABSTRACT

Thesis Title: The Mildura Sculpture Triennials 1961 – 1978 : an interpretative history.

The significance of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials' from 1961 to 1978 lies in their role as critical nodal points in an expanding and increasingly complex system of institutions and agents that emerge, expand and interact within the Australian art world. These triennial events provide a valuable case-study of the developments in sculptural practice in Australia and offer a close reading of the genesis of an autonomous field of visual art practice; a genesis dependent upon the expansion of the new tertiary education policies for universities and colleges of advanced education that arose in response to the generational pressure created by the post war baby boom.

Given that there was virtually no market for modern sculpture in Australia at the inauguration of these triennials in the 1960s, the extent of the impact of the pressures and expectations of a burgeoning young population upon tertiary education, specifically the art schools, art history departments and art teacher training and, the expanding desire for cultural fulfilment and rapid developments in the cultural institution sector, is delineated at these triennial events. The expansion of the education system and the consequent expanded employment opportunities this offered to young sculptors in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, posited the first real challenge and alternative economy to the existing heterogeneous market economy for artistic works.

In order to reinscribe the Mildura Sculpture Triennials into recent Australian art history as an important contributor to the institutional development of Australian contemporary art practice, I have drawn upon the reflexive methodological framework of French cultural theorist and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his explanation of the factors necessary for the genesis and development of autonomous fields of cultural production. Bourdieu's method provides an interpretative framework with which to identify these components necessary to the development of an institutional identity – the visual arts

profession. This autonomous field parallels, conflicts with and at times connects with the heterogeneous art market economy, depending on the strength of its relative autonomy from the field of economic and political power. However, this is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Mildura's significance lies in the way that the triennial gatherings provide a view into the disparate components that would connect to and eventually create an autonomous field of artistic production, that of the visual arts profession. However, the evolution of each of the components, which were the bedrock of Mildura, was driven by its own needs and necessities and not by the needs of the larger field of which they would eventually become a part. Bourdieu's understanding of the ontologic complicitiy between dispositions and the development of an autonomous field offers a non-teleological approach to the significance of Mildura as a site to map these rapid changes and also Mildura's subsequent displacement from the historical record.

Introduction

Thesis rationale

The history and significance of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials is a neglected area of recent Australian art history and has not been the subject of a detailed scholarly investigation. It is almost fifty years since the Mildara Sculpture Prize (as it was first known) was inaugurated in 1961 and thirty years since the departure of the event's second and key director Thomas McCullough in 1978. Sufficient time has elapsed to allow for a critical reappraisal.

There were ten Mildura triennial sculpture events between 1961 and 1988. However, this thesis focuses only on those seven events from 1961 to 1978, which encompass the directorships of Eric van Hattum who established this first national sculpture survey in 1961 and managed the second event in 1964, followed by Thomas (Tom) McCullough, who directed the triennials until his forced resignation in 1978.[1] These were nationally significant events and they provide a valuable case study of the developments in sculptural practice in Australia. The sculpture triennials were important nodal points, providing a window through which the rapid institutional changes in the Australian art scene at the time, can be observed and their impact assessed. Given that there was virtually no market for contemporary sculpture in Australia at the inauguration of the

[1] Following McCullough's resignation, the Mildura Arts Centre and the Mildura City Council reinstated the sculpture triennials in 1982. However, they were a much-diminished version of the original, competing as they were with national, metropolitan events such as the Australian Sculpture Triennial established by McCullough in Melbourne (1981–1993), ANZART (1981–1985), Australian Perspecta (1981–1999) and the Biennale of Sydney (1973 onwards). The changes in the cultural landscape in Australia between 1978 and 1982 were significant. Sculpture was no longer regarded as the radical form under which new types of art practice made their appearance and, by 1981, any event of national significance was based in the metropolitan centres.

Mildura events in the 1960s, the extent of the impact of the pressures and expectations of a burgeoning young population upon tertiary education, specifically the art schools, art history departments and teacher training, and the expanding desire for cultural fulfilment and rapid developments in the cultural institution sector, is clearly delineated at these triennial events.

In order to reinscribe the Mildura Sculpture Triennials into recent Australian art history as an important contributor to the institutional development of Australian sculptural and contemporary art practice, I have drawn upon the reflexive methodological framework of French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, and his concept of the development of an autonomous field of artistic production. Bourdieu's method provides an interpretative framework with which to identify the components necessary to the development of an institutional identity; an 'ecological' view of art as a system of interlocking, recursive elements that become the dynamically evolving system that is an autonomous field of artistic production.

Mildura's significance lies in the way in which it brought together the disparate components that would connect to and eventually create an autonomous field of artistic production – the visual arts profession. However, the evolution of each of the components, which were the bedrock of Mildura, was driven by its own needs and necessities and not by the needs of the larger field of which they would eventually become a part. Bourdieu's understanding of the ontological complicity between dispositions (habitus) and the development of an autonomous field offers a non-teleological approach to the significance of Mildura as a site to map these rapid changes and also Mildura's subsequent virtual erasure from the historical record.

Thesis topic and its significance

It is my argument that the Mildura Triennials, between 1961 and 1978, provide a valuable case study through which to investigate the development of a radically new context for art making in Australia. During this period, new ideas about art forms, new curricula for the teaching of art within a tertiary rather than technical sector, new ways of viewing and

exhibiting contemporary experimental art, new critical theories and political awareness, within expanded institutional structures, backed by significant government patronage, came into effect throughout Australia. This change was rapid and interconnected. Mildura Arts Centre and its triennials, under the direction of Tom McCullough, became a unique site for the convergence of many significant players within these rapidly expanding institutions to exchange, discuss, argue, lobby, teach and make art in one place, at the same time.

I am arguing that Mildura, far from being just a provincial centre that offered the Australian art world a sculptural jamboree every three years, was actually an integral part of these new institutional processes. It is significant that at the beginning of the 1970s, a public art gallery with sufficient government funding was able to present and commission non-commercial, experimental art works by an increasing number of emerging artists, who could interact with some of Australia's leading contemporary sculptors at a gathering of major critics, art lecturers and academics, curators, state and regional gallery directors, art bureaucrats, dealers and frequently, board members of various art organisations and institutions. The gatherings at the Mildura Sculpture Triennials encouraged the development of a concept of being a member of a professional group. The logic of the institution, of a visual arts profession, has its beginnings in these gatherings at the Mildura Sculpture Triennials during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s.

The Mildura Sculpture Triennials and McCullough were part of a complex feedback loop of shared professional identity that developed a momentum of its own. The move from a series of separate entities with localised contact in the 1960s to a nationally recognised field of professional practice, sculpture, in the visual arts by the mid to late 1970s was very rapid and largely happened within one decade. The triennials and McCullough's vision are pivotal to this process; they provide, literally, a 'field' on which the various entities – professional associations, organisations and individuals – could gather, interact, jostle for position within this emergent, increasingly institutionalised field of professional practice.

The triennials of the 1970s represent a transitional phase. McCullough's insistence on non-hierarchical, encyclopaedic survey shows, inclusive of object to post-object to

spontaneous collaborative and performative works, where students' works (although in a separate section), were exhibited with major artists, *was* his trademark. They were mostly characterised by a sincere desire to change the world and, in spirit and intention, they were radical. His collaborative selection process was based around a core group of artist-teachers (lecturers at art schools, art history and theory departments, lecturers in related university disciples such as architecture and teacher training colleges) as advisors, and drew on their recommendations of students and emerging artists for invitation. The rapid expansion in the number of participants, both as exhibitors and students, of each subsequent triennial from 1970 onwards was indicative of the expansion in the number of art schools required to cope with the enrolment demands of a new generation. What was perhaps masked by the increase in the numbers at Mildura, was that an active peer selection process was in place.

The core artists were based in institutions in the cities of Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Auckland, with participation from Launceston from 1975. These tastemakers, who competed for control of the definition of art and how it was taught and were responsible for the production and certification of a new professional class of artists, were a critical part of the coming into being of a 'field of competition for the monopoly of artistic legitimation' or consecration that developed in the late 1960s and gathered momentum in the 1970s in Australia.[2]

The increasing professionalism of many of the core triennial artists was not based on involvement in or consecration by the commercial market, but through a new economy made possible via government patronage. This is evident in their employment within the new tertiary art training systems, their status as lecturers, their recognition through Australia Council grants and residencies, inclusion in international biennales, their inclusion in the survey exhibitions of contemporary art at state galleries as well as their participation in various new art organisation boards and committees. The rapidity of the development in Australia of a parallel economic structure for artists, and most

[2] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on art and literature*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1993, p. 252.

specifically for sculptors and related professionals, is remarkable. In less than a decade a new economic system for art and artists had come into being. As Bourdieu observed:

> The appearance of this new definition of art and the role of the artist cannot be understood independently of the transformations in the field of artistic production. The constitution of an unprecedented ensemble of institutions … the growth in personnel … dedicated to the *celebration* of the work of art, the intensification of the circulation of works and of artists … and the multiplication of galleries … everything combines to favour the establishment of an unprecedented relationship between the interpreters and the work of art.[3]

Underpinning Bourdieu's observation of the development of an autonomous field of artistic production is his recognition of the system's 'profound dependence on the educational system, the indispensable means of its reproduction and growth'.[4]

The Mildura Sculpture Triennials offer a unique perspective on this development. The difference between the events of the 1960s and 1970s is marked by major changes from prize format to invitational exhibition, from selections made by the directors of the state galleries to recommendations provided by the core group of artists in consultation with the triennial director, from a locally sponsored event to one supported principally through state and federal arts funding, from established sculptors and sculpture to experimental works by emerging artists that are the precursors to the new media in contemporary art practice. By definition, emerging artists are unknown outside the autonomous field, hence their dependence on their selection by recognised participants within the field, in many cases, their lecturers.

Because sculpture had little profile and virtually no market in Australia, the impact of expansionary factors between 1961 and 1978 and their convergence, is particularly marked and identifiable. The expansion of the education system, and the consequent expanded employment opportunities this offered to many young sculptors in the late 1960s and 1970s, posited the first real challenge and alternative economy to the existing heterogeneous market economy for artistic commodities. It was through the expanded educational institutions, with their emphasis on status and professionalism, their

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[3] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, C.A., 1995, p. 170.
[4] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 123.

legitimating credentials, that a 'field of competition for the monopoly of artistic legitimation' was made possible.[5]

This thesis claims neither that Mildura was the genesis of the development of new areas of art practice, nor that it was the cause of the development of an autonomous visual art field. What *is* claimed is that Mildura's significance lies in its role as a critical nodal point in an expanding and increasingly complex network of systems of institutions and agents and that it provides a close reading of the genesis and development of an autonomous field of visual art practice in Australia.

Chapter structure

This thesis is chronologically arranged in six chapters. Each chapter is structured around three primary case studies: the Mildura Arts Centre and its triennial events, director Tom McCullough, and sculptor-teacher John Davis. This polyphonic approach allows the emblematic voices to remain distinct, yet it is through the interweaving of the stories of each case study that the cumulative significance of these events – and what they reveal about developments and changes within the Australian art world – become manifest.

Davis and McCullough are emblematic of emerging professional positions of sculptor-teachers and art administrators and their individual trajectories point to the development of habituses displaying dispositional preferences for autonomy suited to the emerging field of artistic practice that evolved, independent of the existing market. Given the virtual lack of a significant market for sculpture in Australia, even with the best efforts of the early sculpture triennials, the emergence of an autonomous field of behaviour in sculpture was particularly and clearly marked. Davis and McCullough were both born in 1936, both undertook the Victorian Tertiary Secondary Teachers Certificate (TSTC) in order to be secondary school art teachers and both taught in Mildura in the early 1960s. In fact, they met in Mildura through the auspices of the Mildura Art Gallery and, for the purposes of this thesis, their early careers were, it could be said, 'made in Mildura'.

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[5] ibid., p. 252.

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.*[6] *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.[7] 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.[8]

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[6] *Global conceptualism: points of origin, 1950s–1980s*, Queens Museum of Art, New York, 1999; *Zero to Infinity: arte povera 1962–1972*, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis MN, 2001; Lyn Zelevansky (ed.), *Beyond Geometry: Experiments in Form, 1940s–70s*, MIT Press in association with the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Cambridge Mass., 2004; Anne Rorimer and Ann Goldstein (eds), *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965–1975*, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, Los Angeles and Cambridge, Mass., 1995; *Mono-ha – the School of Things*, Kettle's Yard, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, 2001; Donna De Salvo (ed.), *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c.1970*, Tate Publishing, London, 2005.

[7] Willoughby Sharp, 'Luminism and kineticism', in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, E.P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1968, p. 318. Also Jack Burnham, 'System aesthetics', *Artforum*, vol. 7, no. 1, September 1968.

[8] Arthur Danto, 'The artworld', *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 61, no. 19, 1964, pp. 571–82, and Lawrence Alloway, 'Network: Art and the complex present', in Donald Kuspit (ed.), *Contemporary American Critics*, no. 1, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, Mich., 1984.

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 Mildara 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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[9] Vincent Todoli, Foreword, in De Salvo (ed.), op. cit., p. 6.

[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

Images have been removed for copyright reasons

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.

Images have been removed for copyright reasons

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.

Images have been removed for copyright reasons

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'.[11]

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.[12] *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'.[13]

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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[11] Graeme Sturgeon, *The Development of Australian Sculpture 1788–1975*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1978, p. 224.
[12] Graeme Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura: The Story of the Mildura Sculpture Triennial, 1961–1982*, Mildura City Council, Mildura, Vic., 1985.
[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'.[14] 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*.[15] 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'.[16] 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.[17] 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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[14] Robert Lindsay, 'An assembled view of sculpture', in Leon Paroissien (ed.), *Australian Art Review 2*, Warner Associates with Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1983, pp. 70–71.
[15] Graeme Sturgeon, *Australian Sculpture Now: Second Australian Sculpture Triennial*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1984, pp. 4–8 and 18–19.
[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.[18] 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'.[19]

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'.[20]

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.[21] 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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[18] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge, London, 1984, p. 481, cited in Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999, p. 192.
[19] Noel Hutchison, 'Lead kindly light amid the encircling doom', *Art Network*, spring 1985, pp. 37, 36.
[20] Margaret Plant, 'Quattrocentro Melbourne: Aspects of finish 1973–1977' in Paul Taylor (ed.), *Anything Goes: Art in Australia 1970–1980*, Art & Text, Melbourne, 1984, p. 85.
[21] Charles Green, *Peripheral Vision: Contemporary Australian Art 1970–1994*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1995, p. 34.

as a result of the deepening financial crisis following the 1989 stockmarket crash.[22] 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.[23] 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.[24] 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.[25] This fits the new definition of 'professional artist', trained within the new tertiary art education system and recognised by peers.

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[22] David Hansen, interview with the author, 3 August 2006. It rang the final death knell for the Australian Sculpture Triennials.
[23] Beryl Donaldson, 'Cultural legitimacy in the Australian art world: A study in the sociology of cultural production', PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1980.
[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.[26] 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

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[26] Michael Grenfell & Cheryl Hardy, *Art Rules: Pierre Bourdieu and the visual art*s, Berg Publishers, Oxford and New York, 2004, p.59.

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'.[27] 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.[28] 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*.[29] Although it is not a scholarly text, Scarlett's *Australian Sculptors*, published

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[27] David Schwarz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1997, p. 7.
[28] ibid., p. 77.
[29] Ken Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis: Places & Locations, Hyland House*, Melbourne, 1988; *Venice Biennale 1978: From Nature to Art, from Art to Nature: Australia: John Davis, Robert Owen and Ken Unsworth,* Visual Arts Board, Australia Council, Sydney, 1978; *Survey 1: John Davis*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1978.

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.[30] 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.[31]

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

[30] *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1969 and *Systems: Arts Council 1972-73*, Arts Council of Great Britain, London, 1972.
[31] Paul Sinclair, *The Murray: A River and Its People*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2001.

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 Triennials. 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 Mildara 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

[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.[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'.[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.[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.[36]

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[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.

[34] Jean Battersby, *Cultural Policy in Australia: Studies and Documents on Cultural Policies*, UNESCO, Paris, 1980, p. 20.

[35] Australia Council, 'Visual and Plastic Arts Board, 9 March Agenda Papers [circa 1970]', *The Australia Council: The First Eighteen Months*, Australia Council, Sydney, 1989, n.p. The quote is on p. 3 of the Agenda Papers.

[36] Dr Jean Battersby of the Australian Council for the Arts interviewed in *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, 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'.[37] 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.[38] 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."[39]

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.
[39] E.G. Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government 1972–1975*, Viking, 1985, pp. 553, 555.

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.'[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.[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'.[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

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[40] Australia Council, *Annual Report 1975–1976*, Australia Council, Sydney, pp. 12–13.
[41] John Gardiner-Garden, 'Arts policy in Australia: a history of Commonwealth involvement in the arts', Research Paper, Parliamentary Library, 1994, p. 8.
[42] Bourdieu, *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'.[43]

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'.[44] 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.[45] 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.
[44] John Polesel & Richard Teese, 'The "Colleges": Growth and diversity in the non-university tertiary studies sector (1965–1974)', Educational Outcomes Research Unit, University of Melbourne, 1998, p. 6.
[45] For more detailed information of the history and foundation of art training in Australia, two unpublished PhD theses, specifically focused on the South Australian and Victorian models, are useful: Neville Weston, 'The professional training of artists in Australia, 1861–1963, with special reference to the South Australian model', Department of Education, University of Adelaide, December 1991; and Geoff Hammond, 'Changes in Art education ideologies: Victoria 1860s to mid 1970s', Faculty of Education, Monash University, Melbourne, June 1970.

Parr was the first student to complete a Diploma in Art, majoring in Sculpture, at the RMTC.[46] 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 destablising 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

[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.’[47] 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.[48]

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’.[49] 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.[50] No mention appears in the report proceedings

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[47] Bernard Smith (ed.), *Education through Art in Australia*, University of Melbourne Press, Melbourne, 1958, pp. 88–89, quoted in Hammond, op. cit., p .364.
[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.
[49] ASEA Constitution, 1964, quoted in Hammond, ibid., p. 363.
[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'.[51] 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.[52]

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.[53] The report also noted that a school of art

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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.[54] 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

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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, viewed 18 December 2008.

[54] Bernard Smith, 'Art historical studies in Australia with comments on research and publication since 1974', *Proceedings 1982–1983*, Australian Academy of the Humanities, vol. 12, p. 46.

University under the direction of Professor Peter Tomory.[55] 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.[56]

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"'.[57] 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.
[56] Smith, 'Art historical studies in Australia', op. cit., pp. 48–9.
[57] Australia Council, *Artists-in-residence/Visual Arts Board*, Arts Information Program, Australia Council, Sydney, 1980, p. 1.

> 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-

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[58] Terry Smith, 'Official culture and the Visual Arts Board', *Meanjin Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 2, winter 1975, p. 124. The Conference of the Arts Association was held in Melbourne, 23 February 1975. At the time, Terry Smith was teaching part-time at the Fine Arts Department at the University of Melbourne and part-time at Preston Institute of Technology.
[59] Bernard Smith, MS 8680 Folder 29, File 34, Elitism and the arts 1975, National Library of Australia.
[60] Bernard Smith observed that Burke's engagement 'gave an added weight and authority [to a reform movement within art education] … and made it possible to institute a new approach to art teaching in the secondary schools, to improve methods of training teachers, and to introduce art as a matriculation subject'. Bernard Smith (ed.), *Education through Art in Australia*, p. 6, quoted in Hammond, op. cit., p. 365.

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'.[61] 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.[62]

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.[63] 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.
[62] Smith, 'Art historical studies in Australia', op. cit., p. 48.
[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 Mildara 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'.[64] 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

[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, scientistic, 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

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[65] Donald Brook, 'What is wrong with art training in technical colleges?', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 January 1968.
[66] Mike Parr, quoted in Noel Sheridan (ed.), *Noel Sheridan: On Reflection*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2001, p. 112, and Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, op. cit., p. 61.
[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].[68] 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*![69]

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.[70]

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[68]Donald Brook, 'Flight from the object', in Bernard Smith (ed), *Concerning Contemporary Art: The Power Lectures 1968–1973*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1975, p. 32.
[69] Donald Brook, interview with the author, Adelaide, 25 May 2006.
[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"'.[71] 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.'[72] 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

[71]Experimental Art Foundation, http://www.eaf.asn.au/mission_statement.html, viewed 12 October 2008.
[72] Singerman, *Art Subjects*, op.cit.,p. 157.

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.[73] 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.

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[73] Robyn Taylor & David Watt, *Backward Glance: A Survey of Western Australian Sculpture from the mid 1960s to the 1990s*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth, 1991, n.p.

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'.[74] The Martin Report noted that in 1964, 'higher technological education outside universities was more advanced in Victoria than in any other State'.[75]

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'.[76] 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.[77]

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'.[78] 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'.[79] 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

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[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.
[76] Philip Law, 'The Victorian Institute of Colleges', *The Australian University*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1967, p. 54.
[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.[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.[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.[82]

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[80] Polesel & Teese, op. cit., p. 10.
[81] Law, op. cit., p. 62.
[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'.[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.[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'.[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.[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.'[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

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[83].ibid., p. 7.
[84] Australia Council, *Tertiary Visual Arts Education in Australia*, op. cit., p. 65.
[85]ibid., p. 65.
[86] 'Mixed feelings on elitism', *The Age*, August 1977, newsclipping, McCullough Papers P/A 97/33 Box 20, State Library of Victoria.
[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. 1n 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'.[88] 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'.[89] 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.[90] By reinforcing the close association of

[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

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

[92] Report of Meeting of Convenors of Working Parties appointed by Conference of Victorian Sculptors, 28 November 1962, Mildura Art Centre Archives.

[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'.[94]

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

[94] Report of Meeting of Convenors of Working Parties, op cit.

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'

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[95] In 1972 the NSW Society of Sculptors and Associates moved to new premises (disused Bond stores) in The Rocks, Sydney.
[96] Alan McCulloch, *The Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, revised and updated by Susan McCulloch, 3rd edn, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994, p. 12.

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.

> [U]ntil 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

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[97] Australia Council, 'Visual and Plastic Arts Board, 9 March Agenda Papers [circa 1970]', *The Australia Council: The First Eighteen Months*, Australia Council, Sydney, 1989, n.p. The quote is on p. 3 of the Agenda Papers.
[98] Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, op. cit., pp. 51, 48.

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'.[99] 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.[100] 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.[101] 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

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[99] ibid., p. 55.
[100] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 109.
[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.[102] 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.

[102] ibid., p.123.

Chapter Two

In the beginning: 1956 – 1966

Mildura, McCullough and Davis

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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[104] Although there was a flourishing tradition of Edwardian sculpture between the wars and some commissions for commemorative sculpture after the Second World War, developments in sculpture did not match those in painting. As Margel Hinder observed of her experiences in the interwar period: 'We had, up until this time [c. 1938], been living more or less in a vacuum as the Society of Artists was very firmly entrenched in academic-cum-modernish types of art ... There was only a small group of us who shared the same concerns …Painting was the dominant art at this period and there seemed to be little understanding of, or desire for, the three dimensional. In exhibitions, sculpture was usually placed to finish off a line of paintings.' Quoted in Sturgeon, *The Development of Australian Sculpture 1788–1975*, op. cit., pp. 117–18.
[105] Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, op. cit., p. 55.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[107] Christopher Heathcote, *A Quiet Revolution: The Rise of Australian Art 1946–1968*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 148–154.
[108] ibid., p.154.
[109] Interestingly, in 1969, the new director of the National Gallery School was the sculptor-educator Lenton Parr who, in consultation with the Victorian Institute of Colleges, would steer the school into a new multi-artform tertiary institution, the Victorian College of the Arts, in 1973.

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

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

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

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[110] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 35.
[111] ibid., p. 116.

developments; however, by 1967 there was a perceptible transition, with the inclusion of much younger sculptors, some either still at art school or just graduated, whose practice straddled the traditional fields of painting and sculpture. It was a period of the return of a number of younger Australian artists from overseas, or the brief emigration of British and American artists, who had trained and taught in the new art school systems in the UK and the US, and had lived and worked in the metropolitan art scenes of London and New York during the 'swinging sixties'. Many of them took up teaching positions in the art schools of Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide and their impact would be registered particularly by the 4th Mildura Sculpture Triennial of 1970.[112]

The Case Studies

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

[112] They included sculptors, painters and ceramicists. In Adelaide, from the South Australian School of Art were Charles Reddington, Bill Clements, Bill Gregory, Milton Moon and Sydney Ball; in Melbourne, James Doolin, C. Elwyn Dennis and Clive Murray-White; in Sydney, at the National Art School Sculpture Department after the departure of Lyndon Dadswell, Robert Klippel (briefly) and Ron Robertson Swann; in Auckland, New Zealand, William (Jim) Allen.
[113] Interview with Tom McCullough for *Women's Day*, 23 January 1967, pp. 34–5, NGA Research Library, Mildura Arts Centre box.

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

Mildura Art Gallery 1956–1966

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

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

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

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

Eric Westbrook had first suggested the idea of an open-air sculpture exhibition on the lawns of the Chaffey Mansion, Rio Vista, to Reg Etherington and Rex Bramleigh on a visit to the recently opened Mildura Art Gallery (Figure 13).[115] Westbrook had been inspired by the Battersea Park Open Air Exhibitions of Sculpture in London, particularly the first in 1948 and the Festival of Britain in 1951, both of which he would have visited.[116] Credited as the first of its kind and the catalyst for many similar events in Europe, the Battersea Park Open Air Exhibition in 1948 presented forty-three sculptures by major British and European sculptors. Given that it was presented as a celebration in the still bomb-blasted and ration-ravaged capital and that commentators at the time noted that 'British cities had less public sculpture than anywhere else in Europe', one of its objectives must have been the promotion of sculpture as a civilising and necessary part of London's regeneration: sculptural commissioning as part of the massive public rebuilding programme.[117] Eric Westbrook, in his role as chief exhibitions officer for the British Council, had been responsible for sending a major exhibition of the British sculptor Henry Moore's small sculptures and drawings to Australia to tour to five cities in 1947–1948.[118] That exhibition was a stimulus to Australian sculptors and one of the first of a

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[115] Eric Westbrook, Foreword, and Graeme Sturgeon, 'The Mildura sculpture exhibitions 1961–1982', in Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura*, op. cit., pp. 7, 11 respectively.
[116] In 1948 Sir Kenneth Clark appointed Westbrook as chief exhibitions officer at the British Council in London. He held this post until 1952, when he accepted the position as director of Auckland Art Gallery in New Zealand. Philip Jones, 'Driven by an artistic passion', Obituary: Eric Westbrook 1915–2005, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 November 2005 at http://www.smh.com.au/news/obituaries/driven-by-an-artistic-passion/2005/11/10/1131578167621.html, viewed 12 November 2008.
[117] Tom Maxwell, 'Sculpture in the park: part 3', *The Review: Friends of the Battersea Park*, issue 50, autumn/winter 2000, p. 12. The original exhibition committee comprised sculptor Henry Moore; Sir Kenneth Clark; Frank Dobson, Professor of Sculpture at the Royal College of Art; and the directors of the Tate Gallery and the National Gallery of Art. The first exhibition ran from May to September 1948.
[118] Palmer, *Centre of the Periphery*, op. cit., p. 121. In the first post-war Venice Biennale of 1948, Henry Moore was awarded the international sculpture prize. By 1952, the British Council presented Moore, along with six young British sculptors, to great acclaim in Venice. Britain, it was claimed was, 'a country with no

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

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

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

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

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

Sponsorship for the sculpture event was a key issue as there was no government funding available for such a program at that time. The Victorian State Government had been generous in infrastructure funding for the establishment of the gallery and in its planned extensions. The touring Council of Adult Education sculpture exhibition provided an introduction to contemporary Victorian sculpture and the example and national success of the first Adelaide Festival of Arts in 1960, sponsored entirely by local companies with the backing of Adelaide City Council, was sufficient encouragement for van Hattum and Etherington to propose sponsorship arrangements for the planned Mildura sculpture prize. The arrival of the Victorian State Government Cabinet in Mildura in March 1960, led by premier and farmer Henry Bolte, provided the appropriate promotional opportunity to announce the confirmed major sponsor – Mildara Wines – for the forthcoming prize.[120] Freight sponsorship was provided by the Buronga Transport Company, which would return transport entries to Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. There was just over a year to organise the event. Etherington's and Westbrook's negotiations ensured that the chief secretary of Victoria, the Hon. Arthur Rylah, MLA, was invited to be the official guest to launch the 1st Mildara Sculpture Prize on Easter Saturday, 22 April in 1961.[121]

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

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

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

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

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

The 1st Mildara Sculpture Prize 1961

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[123] Joseph Burke, 'Tradition and innovation in Western sculpture', *Mildara Prize for Sculpture 1961*, op. cit., p. 14.
[124] Ernst van Hattum, Preface, *Mildara Prize for Sculpture 1961*, ibid., p. 7.
[125] ibid., p. 6.

Images removed for copyright reasons

Figure 10: top left, Norma Redpath, *Dawn Figure* 1961, plaster, 213 cms. Winner of 1st Mildara Prize for Sculpture, Monumental Work.
Figure 11: top right, Clement Meadmore, *Steel Form 14* 1961, welded steel, 91.5cms.
Figure 12: bottom left, installation view of the 1961 inaugural Mildara Sculpture Prize exhibition, interior of either the Bolte Gallery in Rio Vista house or the Mural Hall (building on the right in Fig. 13).
Figure 13: bottom right, exterior view of Rio Vista house containing Mildura Art Gallery and museum, 1961.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[129] van Hattum, Preface, ibid., p. 8.
[130] *Sculpture in the Home: Re-staging a Post-war Initiative* exhibition, http://www.henry-moore-fdn.co.uk/matrix_engine/content.php?page_id=6597, viewed 5 December 2008. The first *Sculpture in the Home* exhibition toured in 1946 to Wakefield Art Gallery in Yorkshire, where Eric Westbrook was the director.
[131] Burke, 'Tradition and innovation in Western sculpture', op. cit., p. 14.

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

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

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

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

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[132] Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura*, op. cit., p. 15.
[133] Hattum, Preface, op. cit., p. 7.
[134] Mildura Art Gallery, *Director's Report to the Mildura Art Gallery Advisory Council*, 1961, p. 2, Mildura Art Centre Archive, 1961 File.
[135] Sturgeon observed that Jean Likic did not exhibit again and Margaret Adams did not exhibit after the 1964 triennial, see his *Sculpture at Mildura*, op. cit., p. 16.

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

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

The cost of organising the event and producing the catalogue totalled £3000, a significant sum in 1961.[136] The breakdown of sponsorship was as follows: Mildara Wine Company – prize and acquisition funding £750, plus £350 towards the cost of the catalogue production – total contribution £1100; Buronga Transport Company – freight valued at £450; and £350 was contributed towards the cost of the ballet commissions by the A.E. Rowden-White and Kilburn Family Trusts.[137] Thus the total value of the sponsorship provided amounted to £1900, or almost two-thirds of the total cost of the event. Van Hattum announced to his advisory council that 'purchases with a list price of near to £2000 have been made making the gross total of direct benefit to the sculptors of £2500 [includes the non-acquisitive prize money]'.[138] For a regional town and gallery, this was a sophisticated achievement.

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

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

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

Towards a cultural centre

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, while the exhibition toured Australian state art galleries, at the same time, in London, a 'new wave in sculpture' was being heralded in an exhibition by the 'London Group' (including a young Ron Robertson Swann), which rejected the 'cryptic and figure-sculpting of the 1950s'; it also announced the presence of the first of the Caro-generation of young sculptors from St Martin's School of Art.[146] Although the *Recent British Sculpture* exhibition provided Australian sculptors and students with first-hand observation of the works by this important generation of post-war British sculptors, it was not contemporaneous with British developments, including the impact of two major reports on art education in Britain, the Coldstream Reports of 1960 and 1962.[147]

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

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

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

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

The 2nd Mildura Sculpture Prize 1964

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[150] Hal Missingham, 'Mildura Prize for Sculpture', *Art and Australia*, vol. 2, no. 2, September 1964, p. 131.
[151] Smith, *Australian Painting 1788–1900*, op. cit., p. 334.
[152] Missingham, 'Mildura Prize for Sculpture', op. cit., p. 132.

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

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

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

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[153] Smith, 'Australian sculpture gathers strength', op.cit.
[154] ibid.
[155] The lecturers included the recently appointed Max Lyle, Owen Broughton and Aina Jaugietis; the students were Geoff Sharples (whose work was acquired for the Mildura Art Gallery collection) and Sandy Taylor.

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

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

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[156] Alan McCulloch, 'Impact of a work in bronze', *Herald*, Melbourne, 16 October 1963, p. 27.
[157] 'Norma Redpath: Casting the relief fragment', *The Western Australian Art Gallery Bulletin*, vol. 1, no. 20, June 1966, quoted in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit, p. 542.
[158] Although a work by Meadmore was included in the exhibition, he had already emigrated to New York where he was to live permanently.
[159] Robert Hughes, 'Robert Klippel', *Art and Australia*, vol. 2, no. 1, June 1964, p. 18.
[160] Klippel returned to Australia in 1963 with the hope of earning his living from his sculpture. In 1965 he was quoted as saying: 'Australian sculpture? Most of it is awful – fashionable, but dead …I don't think there are any good sculptors working in Australia at the moment. Everybody has gone mad with commissions instead of developing their own particular vision. They are just designers, adding something decorative to a building …', Craig McGregor, 'Australian sculpture comes of age – or does it?', *Sydney*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In 1964 the Mildura Sculpture Prize was still the only national survey of contemporary sculptural practice in Australia. Its emerging reputation for talent spotting was evident in Gordon Thomson's selection of works for *Recent Australian Sculpture*, a touring exhibition to all state galleries during 1964 and 1965.[161] The first and second Mildura Sculpture Prizes (1961, 1964), Lenton Parr's little book on sculpture published in 1961 and Thomson's exhibition featured many of the same names and clearly reflected the teaching styles in art schools in each state.

New directorship

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[163] 'Mr Van Hattum to study overseas. Resignation of two city leaders', *Sunraysia Daily*, 28 January 1965, p. 1.
[164] 'Controversy raged about the plans and Mr Etherington lost the seat he had held on the council. The city was divided on whether it could afford an arts centre complex', see George Tilley, *Mildura into the 70s: Yesterday and Today*. *Mildura District in Words and Pictures*, Sunraysia Daily, Mildura, 1970, n.p.
[165] 'Cultural leaders accept invitation', *Sunraysia Daily*, undated clipping, c.late May 1964. Mildura Arts Centre archives.

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

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

Opening of Mildura Arts Centre

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

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

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

were not driven by the local Mildura community needs but rather by frustrated metropolitan aspirations. Hal Missingham's admission of the failure of consensus by the Conference of Interstate Directors to organise a touring national sculpture exhibition, its prohibitive costs and the lack of funding for its realisation confirmed this analysis. Westbrook, given his immediate post-war experience of sculpture in Battersea Park and his exhibition touring experience with the British Council, had identified the Mildura Art Gallery and its lawns as an ideal location. With the appointment of Ernst van Hattum as director, a facilitating network was established between Westbrook, Etherington and van Hattum that enabled the project to be realised. In essence, the Mildura Art Gallery, through its commitment to a major national sculpture event, became a kind of regional annexe of the NGV, which brought it within the realm of metropolitan political and cultural influence.

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

John Davis 1955–1966

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

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

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

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

Background

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

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

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

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

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

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[166] Paul Sinclair, interview with John Davis, 3 February 1997, John Davis Estate.
[167] Paul Sinclair, *The Murray: A River and its People*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2001, quoted on back cover.
[168] Swan Hill was a major horticultural centre, similar to Mildura. Like many parts of south-eastern Australia, it had weathered the withering drought of 1940–45 with its Armageddon-like plagues and dust storms, followed a decade later by the Murray River flooding in 1955 and the catastrophic flood of 1956, caused by the banked-up floodwaters of the mighty Murray-Darling river systems.
[169] Malcolm Abbott & Chris Doucouliagos, 'The changing structure of Higher Education in Australia, 1949–2003', School Working Papers – Series 2003, SWP 2003/07, Deakin University, Burwood, pp. 7–8. Located at URL: http://www.deakin.edu.au/fac_buslaw/sch_aef/publications.default.htm, viewed 2 December 2007.

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

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

The earliest carved-wood sculptures by Davis were *Standing Figure 1*, completed in 1956 and *Cry Out*, 1958. In 1960 Davis submitted a work for the Council of Adult Education Prize for Sculpture. Although there is no documentation as to which work Davis submitted, one work listed in his catalogue raisonné, *Standing Figure II* (now destroyed), was created in 1960. The sculpture would have been produced while he was teaching woodwork in Numurkah, a town on the Murray River about 233 kilometres downstream of Swan Hill. He won the prize.

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

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

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

The Mildura experience

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

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

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

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Figure 20: left, Julius Kane, *Group Organism* 1960, wood, 253.5 cms.
Figure 21: right, John Davis, *Murray Form I* 1962, Murray pine on wooden base, 137cm.

Images removed for copyright reasons

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

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

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

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

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

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[172] Noel Hutchison, 'Australian Sculpture in the 1960s', *Other Voices*, vol. 1, no. 3, Sydney, 1970, p. 13.
[173] Graeme Sturgeon interview with John Davis, undated, from 'Interviews with Australian artists on cassette tapes 1976–1989', Graeme Sturgeon Papers Box 7, NGV Research Library. I deduced that this interview was conducted in 1975 prior to the *Artists' Artists* series of exhibitions, based on an exchange of letters between John Davis and Graeme Sturgeon in preparation for the exhibition. Letters located in John Davis Estate Archive, Correspondence.
[174] The following quote from Lenton Parr encapsulated the optimism and aspiration of Australian sculptors and the intention behind the Mildara Sculpture Prize: 'Contemporary sculpture in Australia has almost no foundation in our past. If there is little of national character in the earlier work is there then something distinctively Australian in the contemporary sculpture of today? … Films, art books and magazines tend to keep the artist closer to what is happening abroad than was possible in the past. The result is that artists all over the world are working in styles that belong to no one country in particular but to all. This internationalism need not cause us concern … there are contributions to this world culture that only we can make … Perhaps someday a youthful sculptor will show us these things through his eyes and hands, and that time may not be so far distant when the native artists of New Guinea and Australia will join the mainstream of the world's art as living contributors.' See Lenton Parr, *Sculpture*, op. cit., p. 4.

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

Sculptural training in Melbourne

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[175] For details of the Centre 5 program, see footnote 90, Chapter I of this thesis; also Introduction to catalogue, Centre 5, Geelong Gallery exhibition, quoted in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit., p. 303.
[176] Margaret Plant, 'Centre Five: A note on a decade of activity', in C.B. Christesen (ed.), *The Gallery on Eastern Hill*, Melbourne, 1970, p. 107.

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

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

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

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

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[177] Polesel & Teese, op. cit., p. 9.
[178] Lenton Parr, 'The artist teacher', *Art Teachers Association of Victoria News Sheet*, Melbourne, March, 1967, cited in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit., p. 516.
[179] The exhibition had toured to Canada and New Zealand between 1961 and 1962 before proceeding to Australia. The nine artists were Robert Adams, Kenneth Armitage, Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick, Hubert Dalwood, Barbara Hepworth, Bernard Meadows, Henry Moore and Eduardo Paolozzi.
[180] Robert Hughes, *Nation*, 10 August 1963, quoted in Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura*, op. cit., p. 24. Of the nine artists whose works were exhibited, two were personally known to Lenton Parr: Moore, with whom he had worked as an assistant, and Paolozzi. These were the artists whose works Parr had seen, and admired, in the mid 1950s in Britain.

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

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

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

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[181] Jennifer Phipps, *I Had a Dream: Australian Art in the 1960s*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1997, p. 44.
[182] The young Melbourne sculptors referred to are Ron Upton, David Tolley and George Baldessin. John Davis is also included within this group after 1966, when he begins to exhibit in the Victorian Sculpture Society exhibitions. See alphabetical entries for David Tolley and Ron Upton in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit. Baldessin, on the other hand, studied at the Brera Academy of Fine Art in Milan (1962–63) under the guidance of Marino Marini and Alik Cavaliere.

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

Sculptors were also the winners in 1966 in two new, metropolitan national art prizes that would rival the Mildura Sculpture Prize, whilst increasing the profile of Australian sculpture as a contemporary artform. George Baldessin won the Alcorso Sekers Exhibition and Travelling Scholarship valued at $2000 and Norma Redpath won the Transfield Prize, dedicated to sculpture for the first time, and valued at $2000.[186] Davis had witnessed the rapid shift in five years from the groundbreaking national Mildara Sculpture Prize, which had inspired him to return to Melbourne to study sculpture, to a situation in 1966 of a plethora of national metropolitan sculpture prizes, offering more money than Mildura and raising the profile of sculpture within the visual arts, thereby transferring symbolic and economic capital to a previously marginalised artform. He had

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[183] Ken Scarlett, *The sculpture of John Davis: Places and Locations*, Hyland House, Melbourne, 1988, p. 7.
[184] ibid., p .6.
[185] Alan McCulloch, 'Parade of black rhythms', *Herald*, 5 October 1966, quoted in Scarlett, *The sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit., p. 5.
[186] Davis was also selected to exhibit in the first Alcorso-Sekers exhibition in 1966, which was held at the AGNSW. This prize, which continued for three years (1966–68), used the same model for selection as the Mildura Sculpture Prizes and probably posed the most serious challenge to Mildura, given that it was a metropolitan-based prize that alternated between the two most important state galleries in Australia (AGNSW and NGV). It is highly probable that these issues were discussed between John Davis and Tom McCullough in the lead up and preparations to the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize in 1967, McCullough's first solo management of this triennial event.

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

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

Tom McCullough 1956–1966

Background

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New career

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

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[189] Following the demise of the Borovansky Ballet in 1961, of which Essex had been a part, the Australian Ballet Foundation was established in 1961 by Sir Frank Tait of J.C. Williamson and Dr H.C. Coombs, in his capacity as chairman of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust.
[190] Tom McCullough, interview with the author, 30 March 2006.

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

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

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

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[191] Tom McCullough, interview with author, 30 March 2006.
[192] Eric Westbrook, Mildura Art Centre, NGV Directors Correspondence Files 1962–1971, VPRS 12731/P0002/6, Public Records Office Victoria.
[193] Cr Etherington had arranged sponsorship by the Mildura Rotary Club for the symposium and instructed McCullough to contact all other groups to ensure a full house at the theatre.

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter Three

On the brink of a new decade: 1967 – 1969

Introduction

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

[195] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 132.

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

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

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

prizes of the middle decade and the new alternative, commercial spaces were, in part, a response to this need.

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

Davis's trajectory reveals the intensity of the level of competition for legitimacy amongst the Melbourne sculptor-teachers. This competition created increasing fragmentation and the resultant search for points of differentiation drove the change in Mildura's policy. By 1969 the arbitrary ranking process used by prizes was beginning to be regarded unfavourably by a new generation of artists and sculptors. Ranking radically different works that defied the traditional definition of sculpture required new sets of criteria. What was needed for this new generation of sculptors and artists was also a recognised exhibiting venue. Instituting an invitational process for future Mildura Sculpture exhibitions implied that to be invited and included, one was recognised as part of a network: 'a public of equals who are also competitors' in a new orthodoxy.[196] Although all these factors came into being through their own necessity, it is their convergence at the end of the decade that signals the emergence of what would become an autonomous field of artistic practice.

3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize

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

[196] ibid., p. 116.

landscaped lawns outside the new Mildura Arts Centre. Selected by the directors of the state galleries or their nominated curators, the eighty-eight works by sixty-eight sculptors revealed a significant shift in the selection towards younger participants, many being recent art school graduates and three of whom were still students.[197] A number of previous participants were overseas and, of the Centre 5 Melbourne group, only Inge King and Clifford Last were present. Despite the absence of these established sculptors, Daniel Thomas, curator at the AGNSW, noted in his review of the sculpture prize:

> It is still Australia's most important sculpture exhibition. Previously, it was partly by invitation but this year it was completely open. It is the invasion of sculpture by painting and on the other hand, the conscious reaction towards anti-pictorial sculpture, which is producing the best work today.[198]

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

New selectors, new dispositions

John Bailey, who had previously been an art educator and inspector for the Department of Education in South Australia, had just been appointed as director of the National Gallery of South Australia. At the time of his new appointment, Bailey was also the president of the following organisations: the South Australian branch of the Contemporary Art Society (CAS), the Art Galleries Association of Australia (AGAA) and the Australian Society for Education through Art (ASEA). His background in art education, interest in contemporary art and commitment to professional development of

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[197] Eighteen (over 25 per cent) of the 68 participants were born after 1940.
[198] Daniel Thomas, 'Mildura Sculpture Prize', *Art and Australia*, vol. 5, no. 1, June 1967, p. 351.

gallery employees ensured that he had a very different network of contacts and interests from his predecessor, Robert Campbell.[199] In his previous position in the Department of Education, Bailey would have been very familiar with the changes and developments of the South Australian School of Art (SASA), especially the impact of the appointment of the sculptor Paul Beadle as the principal from 1958 to 1961, artist-educators such as Charles Reddington from Chicago and Australian Sydney Ball who had recently returned from living and working in New York. Significantly, during the 1960s, a number of recent graduate artists had been appointed as teachers.[200]

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

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[199] McCulloch, *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art*, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 68. Robert Campbell was a member of the CAAB from 1953 until his death in 1972.
[200] Weston, 'The professional training of artists in Australia', PhD thesis, op. cit., p. 199.
[201] This was the first curatorial appointment in sculpture in Australia. From 1968 to1970, Dennis was formally appointed as curator of Sculpture and Ethnic Arts at the NGV.
[202] Thomas McCullough, Editorial Comment, *Mildura Prize for Sculpture 1967*, Mildura Arts Centre, Vic., 1967, p. 6. As well as holding the position of curator of Sculpture and Ethnic Art at the NGV, Elwyn Dennis was also, during 1968, a lecturer in sculpture at the Prahran Technical College and from 1970 to 1971 was a part-time lecturer at the National Gallery School under Lenton Parr's directorship. With his teaching assignments, and in his capacity as curator responsible for sculpture at the NGV, Dennis (with Thomson as NGV deputy director) was in a good a position – along with Mervyn Horton, editor of *Art and Australia* – to undertake a survey of Australian sculptors. (In a letter from Horton to John Davis, dated 27 April 1970, Horton indicated his intention to publish 'a possible book about Australian sculpture to be published shortly by me in conjunction with Mr C. Elwyn Dennis, Curator of Sculpture at the National Gallery of Victoria', Davis Estate.) This did not eventuate and it was not until 1978 and the publication of Graeme Sturgeon's *Development of Australian Sculpture: 1788–1975* that the first scholarly history of Australian sculpture was published. Sturgeon's first resource was Dennis's initial files on Australian sculptors.

important in order to raise the standard of critical debate in Australia. Such a project had the support of his senior administrators at the NGV, notably the assistant director Gordon Thomson (a great supporter of Australian sculpture and curator of the first touring exhibition, *Recent Australian Sculpture*, in 1964, which drew extensively upon the first two Mildura Sculpture Prizes) and director Eric Westbrook.

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

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

In Sydney, young art-school teachers did not play a part in the selection of participants in the Sculpture Prize. In New South Wales, the development of a new tertiary art school system lagged behind Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. However, the 'openness'

Daniel Thomas referred to in his review of the Mildura Sculpture Prize indicated new selectors with a different set of dispositions with preferences for 'new art'. Thomas, in his roles as curator at AGNSW and art reviewer for a number of Sydney metropolitan newspapers, was connected into the CAS in Sydney, the commercial gallery network and Central Street Gallery and its constellation. With the gradual decline of the NSW Society of Sculptors and Associates organisation, many younger artists – the more experimental – were being shown at the annual CAS Young Contemporaries exhibitions. Sculpture at the National Art School, and its feeder technical colleges, was in a moribund state under the control of the Department of Education. Thomas's comment about the 'invasion' of sculpture by painting was particularly evident in the Sydney selection. With regard to Adelaide and Melbourne, the elision between the new selectors and art education was obvious. A similar proposition could be raised in regard to the participation of young sculptors from the Elam School of Fine Art, Auckland.[203]

New gallery space

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

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

[204] Central Street Gallery in Sydney, established in 1965, was the exception. It was a large industrial warehouse space in Sydney's CBD with exposed beams, concrete floor and white painted walls and ceiling.

The influence, after 1964, of new art magazines such as *Artforum*, *Art International* and *Studio International* and publications such as *Private View*, was another factor distinguishing this sculpture prize from the previous Mildura events. Photography, particularly colour reproductions of 'new British sculpture' or minimalist works using highly coloured and reflective materials became increasingly important as part of the discursive medium of these new publications and later exhibition catalogues. Sited in the white cube of a loft studio or industrial gallery space (like Central Street Gallery in Sydney), this 'new art' highlighted the need for uncluttered exhibition spaces.

These same art magazines were filled with discussion and argument concerning the 'theatricality' of contemporary art, the inert and impersonal aspects of minimalism and the direct engagement of such works with the viewer's space.[205] Michael Fried's famous polemic, 'Art and objecthood', although published after the Mildura Sculpture Prize, was written in response to earlier published writings: Donald Judd's 'Specific objects' and Robert Morris's four-part 'Notes on sculpture', two parts of which were reproduced in *Artforum* in 1966. In 'Notes on sculpture: part 1', Morris's explanation of minimalism's approach was to 'take relationships out of the work and make them a function of space, light and the viewer's field of vision. [The viewer] is more aware than ever before that he himself is establishing relationships as he apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context.'[206] Morris was concerned with the non-mimetic, anti-illusory functions of minimalist works, in direct contrast to the formal and expressive concerns in the works shown in the 1964 touring exhibition, *Recent British Sculpture*, and the two previous Mildura Sculpture Prize exhibitions.

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

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[205] Michael Fried, 'Art and objecthood', *Artforum Special Issue: American Sculpture*, vol. 5, no. 10, summer 1967, pp. 12–23. Fried's article provided an extended meditation on the autonomous quality of the modernist project, its 'presentness' as opposed to the 'theatricality' of minimalism. Theatre, he maintained, was the enemy of art because of 'the duration of the experience' of the work, hence its openness to interpretation. Donald Judd, 'Specific objects', *Arts Yearbook 8*, 1965, quoted in De Salvo (ed.), *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c. 1970*, op. cit., pp. 172–4.

[206] Robert Morris, 'Notes on sculpture: part 1', *Artforum*, vol. 4, no. 6, February 1966, reprinted in Gregory Battock (ed.), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, E.P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1968, pp. 222–8.

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

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

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

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[207] Schwarz, *Culture and Power*, op. cit., p. 206.
[208] 'The prize of the inland', *BP Accelerator*, no. 144, June 1967, n.p. In an attempt to ensure further metropolitan exposure for the sculptors and also for the prize, a number of entries in the Mildura Sculpture Prize were exhibited in July 1967 at Georges Gallery in Melbourne. This was probably organised by Tom McCullough and Alan McCulloch, the art critic and organiser of the Georges Invitational Prize in Melbourne. The mention of this mini-Mildura exhibition is listed in an entry for Margaret Sinclair, winner of the 1967 small sculpture prize, in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit., p .601.

Local sponsorship was also critical to the success and continuance of the Mildura Sculpture Prize, particularly during this period of competition from annual metropolitan-based sculpture prizes and scholarships. Mildara Wines Ltd agreed to host the formal opening dinner and freight sponsorship provided by the Mildura freight forwarders McGlashan Transport Pty Ltd took care of works to and from Melbourne and Sydney. W.A. Young's Transport Service offered a similar arrangement to and from Adelaide and the Union Steam Ship Co. of New Zealand offered free sea transport for New Zealand participants. The value of the Triennial Sculpture Prize as a major tourist attraction and income generator for the businesses of Mildura was acknowledged when the Mildura Chamber of Commerce and the Sunraysia District Tourism Association provided $400 (not an insignificant amount in 1967) for the small sculpture award.

Commentary on selected works

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

However, this traditional perception of sculpture as something modelled, cast or carved was directly challenged by a number of other works in the triennial; significantly, the acquisitions for the Mildura Art Centre collection. *Phoenix II*, 1967, by Michael

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

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

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[209] 'The prize of the inland', op. cit.
[210] Works by Eduardo Paolozzi were included in the British Council exhibition, *Recent British Sculpture*, which toured NZ in 1962, a year before touring through Australian state galleries.
[211] Paul Beadle, the first participant sculptor from New Zealand in 1961, was, until just prior to the Prize, the dynamic principal of SASA. Therefore, from the Mildura Sculpture Prize's inception, the NZ link was firmly established through the Australian art school network.

provocatively when handled. None of the purchased works were monumental outdoor works. All were conceived for display within a white walled gallery space.

The least traditional works – by Nigel Lendon, Warren Viscoe (NZ) and Michael Nicholson – drew on minimalist or hard-edge influences. Made from geometrically crafted wood with highly coloured and finished surfaces, these objects oscillated between the illusion of two-dimensional painting and the three-dimensionality of sculpture. Lendon's *Slab Construction II*, 1967 and Viscoe's *Red Shift-Green Shift*, 1966, eschewed the traditional plinth in preference for the floor as base. *Slab Construction II* was exhibited while Lendon was still a sculpture student at SASA and the work aligned him with the hard-edge painting movement.[212] Apart from the influence of international art magazines and the reviews of contemporary international exhibitions in the reborn (and renamed) local journal, *Art and Australia*, Lendon and his contemporaries would have seen the travelling exhibition, *Contemporary American Painting: A Selection from the James A. Michener Foundation Collection*, which opened at the Adelaide Festival in 1964 (in tandem with the 2nd Mildura Sculpture Prize) and then toured Australian state galleries and Newcastle City Gallery throughout 1964.[213]

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

[213] This exhibition included works from the following artists: David Adickes, Walter Barker, William Baziotes, Robert Beauchamp, Lawrence Calcagno, Giorgio Cavallon, James Dine [Jim Dine], Jimmy Ernst, Sam Fischer, Sam Francis, Helen Frankenthaler, Morris Graves, Sante Grazian, John Grillo, Philip Guston, Hans Hofmann, John Hultberg, Alfred Jensen, Lester Johnson, Ellsworth Kelly, Franz Kline, Karl Knaths, Morris Louis, Conrad Marca-Relli, Nicholas Marsicano, Joan Mitchell, Kyle Morris, Kenneth Noland, George Ortman, Stephen Pace, William Palmer, Raymond Parker, Robert Rauschenberg, Larry Rivers, William Ronald, Ben Shahn, Theodorus Stamos, Harold Stevenson and Esteban Vicente. This exhibition predated the Museum of Modern Art's *Two Decades of American Painting* by more than three years. *Two Decades of American Art* was only shown at two venues in Australia: it opened at the NGV on 6 June 1967 for one month and at AGNSW in late July 1967. *Two Decades of American Art* exhibited works by the following artists: Josef Albers, Allan D'Arcangelo, Norman Bluhm, Gene Davis, Sam Francis, Helen Frankenthaler, Arshile Gorky, Adolph Gottlieb, Philip Guston, Al Held, Hans Hoffman, Jasper Johns, Alex Katz, Ellsworth Kelly, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Roy Lichtenstein, Morris Louis, Joan Mitchell, Robert Motherwell, Barnett Newman, Kenneth Noland, Jackson Pollack, Larry Poons, Robert Rauschenberg, Ad Reinhardt, Larry Rivers, James Rosenquist, Mark Rothko, Frank Stella, Clifford Still, Mark Tobey, Bradley Walker Tomlin, Cy Twombly and Andy Warhol.

Images have been removed for copyright reasons

Figure 24: top left, Director of Mildura Arts Centre, Tom McCullough with Jim Allen's *Slotzyman and Slotzywoman* 1967, cast aluminium, 81.5 cms(h). Collection Mildura Arts Centre.
Figure 25: Margaret Sinclair, *Fallen Warrior* 1966, bronze, 61 x 152.5 cms. Mildura Prize for Small Sculpture, 1967. Gifted by the artist to Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, Canberra 1972.
Figure 26: Mike Kitching, *Phoenix II* 1967, aluminium and Perspex, 202 cms (h). Collection Mildura Arts Centre.
Figure 27: Herbert (Bert) Flugelman, *Equestrian* 1966, cast iron, 242 cms (h). First Prize, 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize. Collection Mildura Arts Centre.

Images have been removed for copyright reasons

Figure 28: top, Darcy Lange*, Cadmium Red* 1966, painted steel, 25.5 x 152.5 cms.

Figure 29: above, Christo's *Wrapped Coast, Little Bay*, 1969. Photo: Wolfgang Wolz . 1st Kaldor Art Project.

Darcy Lange, a young sculptor who had just completed a Diploma of Fine Arts in sculpture at the Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland, exhibited the first Caro-esque works in Australia.[214] Lange's works, *Cadmium Red* and *Scarlet Chrome*, both made in 1966 of painted steel, were flowing floor-based works (Figure 28). Like *Slab Construction II* they made the most of the new professional gallery premises in Mildura.

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

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

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

[215] Mike Kitching's work, *Phoenix II*, acquired for the gallery with funds from BP Australia, was valued at $1000 and was loaned to the NGV for its gala opening exhibition of contemporary Australian work, *The Field*, in August 1968. The local poultry farmer and Councillor Lloyd Beasy took umbrage at Ron Upton's work, *Push-Pull*, which was acquired for the Mildura collection with the approval of the MACAC; and Councillor Mills described the works purchased as 'monstrous'. *The Herald*, 28 April 1967, quoted in Brad Leonard, 'The First Australian Sculpture Triennial', *Art Network*, issue 3-4, winter/spring 1981, p. 21.

Sales of sculpture from the exhibition to private and corporate clients, which had been a successful feature of both previous triennial prizes, were limited in 1967. McCullough was concerned and, in response, organised with Alan McCulloch for selected works to be shown at the Georges Gallery in Melbourne in July 1967. [216] One of the prize's founding aims was to build an audience for contemporary Australian sculpture and generate income for sculptors. Failure to do so, in such a competitive climate, could damage Mildura's pre-eminent position amongst the various metropolitan sculpture prizes. Nevertheless, for many of the younger graduate sculptors, particularly from Melbourne, where the opportunities to secure a part-time teaching position were beginning to expand, the cultural and symbolic gains in being selected and exhibited that accrued to one's professional standing was as important as potential sales.

Catalogue essays: developing the discourse

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

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

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[216] 'The Georges Exhibition of "Prize Winners and Selected Entries" from the competition seems to be going well … I don't know whether Georges will sell any but for the sculptors' sakes, I certainly hope so.' Tom McCullough, letter to Donald Brook, 5 July 1967, Donald Brook Archive, Mildura Correspondence.

art at technical school, mostly for teaching purposes. However, public understanding and appreciation of sculpture still lagged behind that of painting and the expanding commission opportunities for sculptors exposed this dysfunctional relationship.

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

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

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

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[217] Burke, 'Tradition and innovation in Western sculpture', *Mildara Prize for Sculpture 1961*, op. cit., p. 14.
[218] Lynn, 'Trends in recent Australian sculpture', *Mildura Prize for Sculpture 1967*, op. cit., p. 17.

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

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

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

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[219] Smith, 'Sculpture abroad', *Mildura Prize for Sculpture 1967*, op. cit., p. 42.
[220] ibid., p. 43.
[221] van Hattum, Preface, *Mildara Prize for Sculpture 1961*, op. cit., pp. 6–8.

produces works to specific briefs. He then challenged architects and commissioning agencies to 'think much more seriously of their duty to provide spaces where works of art can be sympathetically displayed' and in his concluding lines warned sculptors: 'but one way or another, he must keep those patrons in their place, or they will surely ruin him'.[222] In acknowledging the tension between these two categories, Brook indicated the beginning of the shift in the meaning of 'professional' for sculptors from one of a reputation based on a recognised skills-base and market success in gaining commissions while satisfying client objectives to one of the autonomy of self-expression. Implicit within the conception of a separate category of artist-sculptor was the necessity of a separate market for such a category; one that was not based on sales or successful commissions.

Assessment of 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize

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

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

[222] Brook, 'Sculpture and public sculpture', *Mildura Prize for Sculpture 1967*, op. cit., p. 32.

recognised by a peer group of which they were a part. It is the introduction of a new set of cultural dispositions, tentatively evident in the selection process and in the acquisitions for the Mildura collection, that marks the beginning of 'the critical phase of the constitution of an autonomous field claiming the right to define for itself the principles of its legitimacy'; a field of activity that is fundamentally linked to, and shaped by, the increasing autonomy of art education.[223]

Tom McCullough 1967–1969

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

In an astute move as the new director, McCullough subscribed to a media service that provided him with monthly clippings of all arts reviews and reports in the metropolitan dailies around Australia.[224] It was an excellent way to become familiar with the critics and follow what they were recommending as interesting and new art. He was introduced to Dr Donald Brook, an academic and sculptor, as the art critic for *The Canberra Times*, through the clipping service. McCullough wrote to Brook in March 1966 introducing the Mildura Prize and requesting Brook to consider being one of the judges for the forthcoming Prize in 1967.[225] He also asked whether Brook would consider writing an article for the catalogue.

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

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[223] Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, op. cit., p. 61.
[224] McCullough, interview with the author, 30 March 2006, Mt Martha, Vic. Ansett Airlines is also credited as a sponsor in the Mildura Arts Centre Annual Reports.
[225] Tom McCullough, letter to Donald Brook, 24 March 1966, Donald Brook archives, Mildura correspondence.

Sydney, where he intended to view the 1st Alcorso-Sekers Travelling Scholarship Award for Sculpture at the AGNSW.[226] McCullough was also hoping to meet with Mrs Lesta O'Brien, the proprietor of the recently opened Australian Sculpture Centre, a commercial enterprise located in the diplomatic circuit in Canberra, of which Brook had kept him informed. The clippings service would also have informed him that the Transfield Prize, which since 1961was the richest art prize in Australia, would be dedicated to Sculpture in 1966. Organised through the auspices of the NSW Society of Sculptors and Associates, the exhibition was held in November in Hyde Park, Sydney and the £1000 prize was won by Norma Redpath for her cast bronze work, *Immortal Warrior*.[227]

McCullough also realised that, given the competition in 1966 from other sculpture prizes established in the major cities of Melbourne and Sydney, he would have to secure increased publicity to ensure that the triennial Mildura Sculpture Prize maintained its pre-eminent position. By 1967, apart from the Mildura Sculpture Prize, there were now a number of other prizes focused on sculpture. These included the Flotta Lauro Prizes and the Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture.[228] This invitational award, which continued until 1970, was specifically aimed at aluminium 'sculpture for architectural environments'. Between 1966 and 1969, these annual prizes were perceived as stealing a march on the triennial Mildura Sculpture Prize.

As part of the preparations for 1967, McCullough negotiated a sponsorship arrangement with Ansett Airlines that would allow him to fly free of charge (when the flights were not fully booked) and secure return air tickets for the prize opening event as an incentive for art critics to come to Mildura and review the exhibition. He also planned a national sculptors conference to strengthen and differentiate the Mildura Prize from the metropolitan competitors. However, the conference did not eventuate.[229]

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[226] George Baldessin won the Alcorso-Sekers Award (exhibition ran from 27 July to 28 August 1966).
[227] Redpath had also won the 1st and 2nd Mildura Prize for Sculpture in 1961 and 1964, and her 1964 Mildura Sculpture Prize-winning work *Dawn Sentinel* was purchased by the NGV.
[228] Although established in 1967, the Comalco Award was not conferred in the first instance until 1968.
[229] Tom McCullough, email response to author's questions, 18 October 2006. In his Editorial Comment in the 1967 exhibition catalogue, McCullough noted that the director of the Victorian Council of Adult Education (VCAE), Colin Badger, organised a sculpture appreciation school for the final weekend of the

The national professional body, the Art Galleries Association of Australia (AGAA), held its annual conference on the opening weekend of the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize.[230] This ensured that members had a chance to view the new facilities at the Mildura Arts Centre and also enjoy the triennial Sculpture Prize exhibition.[231] It also provided important professional recognition for McCullough as the newly installed director of Mildura Arts Centre, and for his successful management of the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize. This was only the third annual meeting of the AGAA and the selection of Mildura indicated the significant position it occupied in the hierarchy of member galleries and the triennial Sculpture Prize's importance as a network hub.

McCullough learnt significant lessons from directing his first Sculpture Prize at the Mildura Arts Centre. The change in the dispositions of the selectors made him aware of the beginning of a shift of the focus of the Mildura Prize from 'designer-sculptor' for public commissions to 'artist-sculptor'. Of the sixty-eight participants, thirty-two per cent were either still students or very recent graduates of sculpture diploma courses (some already teaching in the system), and a number of these sculptors produced the most exciting work.[232] A number of the exhibits in 1967 were indicative of an opening out of the category of sculpture, such changes already becoming apparent in the CAS Young

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Prize (10–12 June 1967). I located a promotional brochure, 'Mildura Weekend Sculpture School, 10, 11, 12 June 1967', produced by the VCAE in the Mildura Arts Centre box at the NGA research library. However, like the initially proposed national sculptors symposium, McCullough noted in a further email exchange to the author, 22 February 2007: 'I think the CAE eventually cancelled because of a lack of attracting visitor enrolments …We thereafter discontinued our ambitions to attract an audience …realising that the exhibition and celebratory action was mainly focused on the opening weekend. We later added various programs throughout the display period, such as visiting performance artists … artists in residence and follow up publications to encourage interpretation and reflection.'

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

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

[232] Calculated on the basis of brief biographical data provided by each participant in the 1967 catalogue. Daniel Thomas, telephone interview with the author, 31 July 2006.

Contemporaries shows and at new, innovative commercial galleries such as Central Street Gallery and Watters Gallery in Sydney, and in Melbourne at Argus Gallery, Gallery A, and, from 1967, at Tolarno Gallery and Pinacotheca. For many, this Mildura Sculpture Prize was their first major public exhibition.

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

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

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[233] Tom McCullough, email to author, 18 October 2006.
[234] Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, op. cit., p. 121.
[235] ibid., p. 121.

In 1968, the impact of *The Field* as the launch exhibition of the new NGV premises, at that time the leading Australian state art gallery, and its promotion of the NGV as the 'institutional sponsor … of an "avant-garde" context for contemporary art in Australia' was evidence of the changing role of art galleries and curators.[236] In adopting this new institutional orientation, the NGV provided the necessary status and impetus for McCullough to begin contemplating a radical new format for the next Mildura sculpture event in 1970.

Preparations for 1970

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

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

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[236] Nigel Lendon & Ian Burn, 'Purity, style, amnesia', in Ian Burn, *Dialogue: Writings in Art History*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1991, p. 100. This essay was originally published in the exhibition catalogue *The Field Now*, Heide Park and Art Gallery, Melbourne, 1984.

inferiority.[237] The most significant works in the bequest eventually went to Mildura, which did not endear McCullough to Finemore.

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

> I suppose I had aspirations to become a global kind of museum person and by 1969 I had won the Gulbenkian Fellowship to travel overseas to study art exhibitions and sculpture parks … That year, aged 33, I felt I was really walking on air.[238]

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

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

> In the past two or three years, competitions … have been attracting strong criticism in Australia. The approaches to sculptural philosophy are diversifying … degrees of excellence become obscured among a complex of aesthetic ideals … let Mildura then avoid the mudslinging aspect attendant upon most competitions/exhibitions today.[239]

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[237] This collection was valuable to both galleries. Senator R.D. Elliott had been a trustee of the combined State Library, Museum and National Gallery from 1924 to 1940; in the institutional reorganisation he was appointed a trustee of the NGV from 1944 until his death in 1950. He was a newspaper proprietor with substantial regional titles including the *Sunraysia Daily*, Mildura's daily newspaper.
[238] Tom McCullough, interview with the author, 30 March 2006, Mt. Martha, Vic.
[239] Mildura Arts Centre, *Director's Report to Mildura Arts Centre Advisory Committee*, 28 February 1969, Public Records Office Victoria, VPRS 12731/P2/File 6, Mildura Arts Centre.

McCullough clearly identified the fact that the discrete category 'sculpture' that had been the foundation of the first Mildura Sculpture event in 1961 had collapsed, and that the various practices and conceptions of what now constituted sculpture were diverse and irreconcilable, leading to competition for control of the definition among the various factions, and thus control of the process of consecration.

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

The proposed format change was symptomatic of decline in the symbolic value of art prizes in Australia, which for sculpture had grown from one in 1961 (Mildura) to a plethora by 1967.[241] By 1972, the major sculpture prizes had ceased to exist and in the case of Alcorso-Sekers and Transfield, they had transformed into internationally focused events that continue to the present.[242] However, the proposed transformation of the Mildura Sculpture Prize to a national survey exhibition by invitation was dictated by necessities greater than simply the decline in symbolic value of prizes and concerns about 'unnecessary freight expense among a number of established sculptors'.[243]

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

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[240] ibid.
[241] Selection processes and selection criteria adopted by various prizes were a source of increasing conflict and controversy. McCullough's quote on p. 101 above reflected a growing disquiet amongst curators and critics. Some of these issues were addressed in Elwyn Lynn's article 'Art prizes in Australia', *Art and Australia*, vol. 6, no. 4, March 1969, pp. 314–18.
[242] The Alcorso-Sekers Travelling Scholarship Award for Sculpture became Kaldor Art Projects, with the first in 1969 being Christo's wrapping of Little Bay in Sydney. The Transfield Prize ceased in 1971 and by 1973 had become the Biennale of Sydney. A feature of both transformations is that access to exhibition and invitation was controlled by one person, either the patron John Kaldor, or, in the case of the Transfield, the invited director for the Biennale of Sydney. The first successful application of this model for the Biennale of Sydney was the second Biennale, 1976, directed by Tom McCullough.
[243] Mildura Arts Centre, *Director's Report to Mildura Arts Centre Advisory Committee*, 28 February 1969, op.cit.

Prize. Therefore, the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize 'distinguished [itself] by whom [the selectors] exclude[d] than by whom they include[d]'.[244] In proposing an invitational format, the control of access to exhibition was shifted to McCullough and his network of spotters, giving greater power to the dispositions that this network would select for. The necessity to control access to exhibition and thus validation, particularly within the burgeoning tertiary art school sector, was symptomatic of the need to establish their autonomy and differentiate themselves from the low status, vocational training that sculpture had endured under the Department of Education. The success of such a proposal was dependent on developing a network of peers, or 'agents of consecration' – teachers, curators, critics – who shared a set of criteria that defined their preferences and which would 'ensure the reproduction of [those sets of] cultivated dispositions' manifested 'in a certain type of work and a certain type of cultivated person' recognised by these agents. [245]

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

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

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[244] Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, op. cit., p. 52.
[245] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 121.

Mildura Sculpture Triennials. Rather than sending an Australian sculptor overseas on scholarship, it proposed to bring to Australia an international artist 'who represent[s] important trends in contemporary art practice and to help [them] realise major projects of their work'.[246] Christo Javacheff and his partner Jeanne-Claude were invited but at some stage during the process, the company, Alcorso-Sekers, withdrew and John Kaldor, the company's managing director, decided to run with the project with his own backing, renaming it the Kaldor Art Project No. 1 (Figure 29).

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

> I have noticed that some of the better artists in Sydney in recent years have emerged not from the art schools, but from the universities. Perhaps they feel that there is little intellectual stimulus to be had in the art schools … that technical aspects can be learnt at part time courses … they have often been architecture students.[247]

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

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[246] John William Kaldor, biography, http://www.kaldorartprojects.org.au/biography-jk.asp , viewed 10 November 2006.
[247] 'Submission to the Committee of Enquiry – Art and Design', by Daniel Thomas, Curator, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 9 December 1969, Donald Brook Archives, Art Education.

think I was quite inspired by that aspect.'[248] There was no longer a single authority that proscribed what an artist was and what art was. Artistic legitimation was now sought within a contested field of competitors all vying for position.[249]

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

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

Professional development

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

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[248] Imants Tillers interviewed on ABC TV, broadcast 6.30 pm, 19 April 2004: transcript located at: http://www.abc.net.au/gnt/history/Transcripts/s1090226.html, viewed 10 November 2006.
[249] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 250.

Mildura Sculpture Triennial, with him as the curator, represented a radical redefining of the concept behind the triennial. Recognition would become a recursive function of this emerging field: in order to be invited to participate in the new Mildura Sculpture Triennial, one had already to be recognised by the selectors (McCullough and his network) as a member of that group.

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

By 1968 the AGAA, the professional gallery body, realising that galleries were now competing for staff with the expanding (and better paid) tertiary art education sector, initiated the Gulbenkian Scholarships.[250] Professional development was now an important issue in terms of one's status and employment opportunities within the expanding art world. In awarding the second Gulbenkian Scholarship to McCullough, the AGAA was rewarding his capabilities as a director and legitimating his claim to the title, as well as investing in its claim to be the professional body representing the art gallery network.

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

John Davis 1967–1969

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

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

New professional career

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

met with some resistance, but the matter was cleared in time for him to commence the new teaching year at Caulfield.[251]

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

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

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[251] John Davis, handwritten notes (a kind of memoir of his time as a teacher), Davis Estate Archive, Melbourne.
[252] Fred Cress, telephone interview with the author, 18 January 2008.
[253] Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit., p. 14. The quotes are from an interview by Scarlett with Vic Majzner, who taught with Davis at Caulfield Technical College at that time.
[254] ibid.

Images have been removed for copyright reasons

Figure 30: John Davis (centre) with students at Lake Mungo during their visit to the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Triennial.

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

Figure 32: John Davis, *Relief Image* 1967, carved, black stained Oregon on white painted hardboard, 112cm (h).

Images have been removed for copyright reasons

Figure 33: top, John Davis, *Bent on Mayhem* 1967, wood, stained black with some areas painted red, on white painted hardboard, 122 x 212 cms. Collection James Baker.

Figure 34: bottom left, John Davis, *Sixteen or 16* 1969, white fibreglass and polyester resin on hardboard and timber structure, painted white, 103 x 99x x25 cms.

Figure 35: bottom right, John Davis, *Maquette for Prize* 1968, painted fibreglass, aluminium and red laminex, 50 x 58 x 17.5 cms with pedestal, 107 cms (h).

Technical College; both were selected for exhibition and were also recent sculpture graduates of RMIT. Of the sixty-eight selected sculptors, more than a quarter were recently graduated sculptors under twenty-seven years of age, including four who were still students: Sally Eastman from Caulfield Technical College, Noel Essex and Craig Haire from RMIT, and Nigel Lendon from SASA.

Davis's entry *Relief Image* was made of carved oregon, stained black and mounted on white painted masonite (Figure 32).[255] The work was indicative of a style termed 'Melbourne biomorphic sculpture', mostly practised by some recent RMIT sculpture graduates. At Mildura, Davis was made aware not only of new forms of sculpture but also, more importantly, that this 'new art' was mounting a serious challenge to the previously accepted notions of sculpture. There were a number of exhibits which reflected the influence of Britain's 'New Generation' sculptors – Anthony Caro, William Tucker, Philip King and others – in their use of industrial materials and finishes, their colourful whimsy, their impersonal 'design' finish which showed no mark of the individual maker and an engagement with the viewer which rendered the pedestal redundant. The impact of new publications on the participants and selectors marked a significant difference from the previous triennials, and indicated a growing contemporaneity with developments overseas. Works by Nigel Lendon, Mike Nicholson, Darcy Lange and Mike Kitching were particularly indicative of this new trend.[256] None of the Centre 5 members who were Davis's lecturers at RMIT participated in this prize exhibition.

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

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[255] There are no images of the work that was listed as 'destroyed' in Scarlett's *The Sculpture of John Davis*, p. 193; however, there is a reproduction of the work in situ in the Caulfield students' newsletter, which reported on the students visit to the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize, Davis Estate Archive, Melbourne.
[256] C. Elwyn Dennis, 'The Alcorso Sekers Travelling Scholarship Award for Sculpture', *Art and Australia*, vol. 5, no. 3, summer 1967, p. 505.

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

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

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

[257] Alan McCulloch, 'World boom in graphics' [review of 'Zetetic Ex'], Argus Gallery, Melbourne 28 August – 8 September 1967, *Herald* cited in Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit., p. 12.

Bourdieu's words, 'the least endowed with specific capital', in an attempt to accrue symbolic capital to their new professional method and raise their status as lecturer/practitioners, independent of the Department of Education.[258] Competition was generated from within the emerging group of young sculptor-teachers as they struggled to establish their professional identities and 'create new positions [for themselves] ahead of the positions already occupied'.[259]

By the second *Zetetic* student exhibition in August 1968, also a critical success, it was clear that 'the emphases fell firmly and openly on the deliberate subversion of the stereotyped conception of art and the art object'.[260] This definitional challenge was an important part of the initial process of what would constitute the coming into being of an autonomous field of art practice.

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

1968: Tumultous Melbourne

The major stylistic change that Davis brought to his works in 1968 was made in response to the increasing critical prominence given to 'new art', particularly sculpture at the new NGV premises, and its elision with the 'professional' identification of the new sculpture-lecturers. Davis abandoned an instinctual method of working that was successful for him

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[258] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 58.
[259] ibid., p .60.
[260] Patrick McCaughey, 'Art', *The Age*, 14 August, 1968, quoted in Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit.,
p. 12. The second and last *Zetetic Ex 2* was shown at the Argus Gallery (12–29 August 1968), concurrently with *The Field* at the NGV (21 August – 28 September 1968).

and adapted an approach that reflected the emergent prestige of a kind of cool, minimalist abstraction that was exerting its dominance in both painting and sculpture. The evident exclusion in the NGV's opening exhibition, *The Field*, of the kind of organic carved works that Davis had exhibited at the previous Mildura Sculpture Prize in 1967, and the elevation of the works termed 'new abstraction' by artists such as Nigel Lendon and Mike Kitching who had both exhibited in Mildura, was a confirmation of the new direction his work was beginning to take in 1968.[261] The consecration of this 'new art' in the high citadel of Australia's major art galleries had significant impact on the expectations of what art was and how it was taught.

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

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

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[261] Kitching's work, *Phoenix II*, 1966, exhibited in *The Field*, was on loan from the Mildura Art Centre. It had been exhibited at the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize in 1967 and purchased for the Mildura Art Centre collection with funds provided by BP Australia. Nigel Lendon's work was part of a series entitled *Slab Construction* and was similar to the work he had exhibited at the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize.
[262] Alan McCulloch, 'Sculpture that can breathe', *Herald*, 20 September 1967, cited in Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit., p. 12.

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

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

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

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[263] McCulloch, *Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, vol. II, op. cit., p. 931 and Sturgeon, *The Development of Australian Sculpture 1788–1975*, op. cit., p. 191.
[264] Comalco's commitment to ensuring the widest possible access and promotion of sculpture to architects was outlined in its 1970 catalogue: 'Every effort will be made to bring the models submitted each year to the attention of architects. This will be by public display in Melbourne, Sydney and elsewhere …and this brochure … distributed to architects throughout Australia. This publication will … become a growing source of reference for architects …'. *The Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture in Aluminium 1970*, n.p.
[265] Report of Meeting of Convenors of Working Parties appointed by Conference of Victorian Sculptors, 28 November 1962, Mildura Arts Centre Archives.
[266] The selected sculptors were: Mike Nicholson (senior tutor, School of Architecture, University of New South Wales, Sydney) and the remaining four were all members of Centre 5: Lenton Parr (head of art division, Prahran Technical College and Fellow of RMIT), Vincas Jomantas (senior lecturer, RMIT), Inge King and Norma Redpath, all from Melbourne.

internationally profiled modernist cultural icon, and the commensurate economic incentives for each participant, ensured its unique and prestigious position within the competitive world of art prizes. The nature of the selectivity ensured that in order to be considered, one had to be recognised as part of a group whose dispositions were compatible with and recognised by the 'agents of consecration', in this case NGV director Eric Westboork, AGNSW deputy director Tony Tuckson and Melbourne architect Roy McCowan Simpson of Yuncken-Freeman architects. This very selectivity increased the competition and anxiety amongst those sculptors who considered themselves, or aspired to be considered, 'professional'.

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

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

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[267] Vincas Jomantas, a member of the influential Centre 5 group, had been one of Davis's lecturers in sculpture at RMIT.
[268] Hutchison, 'Australian sculpture in the 1960s', op. cit., p. 14.
[269] ibid., p. 14.

anthropomorphic cast iron work, *Equestrian*, with its classical references, that had won him first prize at the 3rd Mildura Sculpture Prize in 1967.

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

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

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[270] John Davis interviewed by Graeme Sturgeon, c. 1975. Sturgeon MS Box 7, NGV research library.
[271] The new foundation course objectives at Caulfield Technical College were: '1. emphasis on criteria and methodology of creativity, 2. the drive to think rather than discover, 3. emphasis on answer to problem rather than personal expression, as the latter is always and automatically present, 4. a contained and controlled development, 5. state art area of interest and ask open-ended questions, 6. do not envisage end products – leave students free to astonish both themselves and us!, 7. free flow integration', Fred Cress, 'First Year Art at Caulfield Technical College', *ATAV Journal*, Melbourne, September 1968, cited in Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit., p. 13.

identified with a modernising, professional group of lecturer-practitioners who would take on the challenge of the tertiary training of professional artists, was significant. The 'look' of the work, its sophistication of 'finish', would become a significant point of differentiation between the 'old guard' of the Department of Education and the new professionals. It was this 'new work' that was increasingly included in and winning the burgeoning national sculpture awards. Amongst the sculpture teachers, those advocating for a professional, autonomous system were already being selected to participate in exhibitions and awards.

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

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

[272] Elwyn Lynn, 'Sculpture', *Broadsheet of the Contemporary Art Society of Australia NSW Branch*, March 1969, p. 4.

Farey's bureaucratic authority of the college.[273] At the end of 1968, as part of Caulfield Technical College's transition to autonomy under the VIC, all positions were readvertised and staff required to re-apply for their positions. However, Farey's will prevailed and Fred Cress was informed that his contract would not be renewed; Ken Scarlett, shortly afterwards, resigned.

Alan Warren, the principal at Prahran Art and Design School, had outlined his attitude to art education: 'The least concern of an art school – to my mind – is to produce artists (by that I mean oil painters). Creative designers, craftsmen and draughtsmen, Yes. Artists in a vacuum, No.'[274] Warren and Lenton Parr (head of sculpture at Prahran from 1966) held differing views as to the purpose and nature of art education. Parr was accused of pursuing an 'art for art's sake' or 'artists in a vacuum' agenda in opposition to Warren's pursuit of training artists for vocational occupations. This enmity reached a crescendo in October 1968 with the dismissal of Parr and a number of younger lecturers that Parr had appointed. Davis recalled a 'full scale student revolt against prevailing educational philosophies at Prahran'.[275] One of the young sculpture-lecturers, Clive Murray-White, held classes in the local Town Hall and, with some of his students, established the fictitious Independent Sculpture School.[276] Ironically, Warren invited Fred Cress to become head of painting, encouraging him to teach the same foundation course structure that Cress had developed at Caulfield.[277] However, the fallout over the dismissals at Prahran damaged Warren and when the VIC announced that the principal's position was to be upgraded and readvertised in preparation for the transfer to a college of advanced education, he did not reapply.[278] Parr was hired as head of the prestigious National

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[273] Ken Scarlett, *Limited Recall*, Palgrave Macmillan, South Yarra, Vic, 2005, p. 13.
[274] Minutes of School Council Meeting, 20 April 1961 quoted in Judith Buckrich, 'The best time of their lives: Researching the history of Prahran Technical School', *The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria*, no. 5, September 2006, n.p. URL://www.prov.vic.gov.au/provenance/no5/PrahranTechPrint.asp, viewed 12 January 2008.
[275] John Davis, handwritten notes (a memoir of his time as an art school lecturer), Davis Estate Archive.
[276] Clive Murray-White, interview with the author, 4 August 2006, Melbourne.
[277] Fred Cress, telephone interview with author, 18 January 2008.
[278] Minutes of School Council Meeting, 20 April 1961, quoted in Buckrich, op. cit., URL://www.prov.vic.gov.au/provenance/no5/PrahranTechPrint.asp, viewed 12 January 2008.

Gallery of Victoria School; he was the first sculptor to hold this position. The avalanche of change that was now coursing through the education system could not be held back.

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

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

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

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

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[279] Hutchison, 'Australian Sculpture in the 1960s', op. cit., p. 8.
[280] loc. cit.

influenced Davis when he was a student at RMIT; and he was inspired by the teaching innovation initiated by Fred Cress at Caulfield between 1967 and 1968. In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, Davis was part of a close-knit group of artist-teachers that included Lenton Parr, Fred Cress, Ken Scarlett, Geoff La Gerche, Clive Murray-White, Ti Parks, David Wilson and Alun Leach-Jones, who lived and socialised in the Melbourne bayside suburbs of Hampton, Brighton and Sandringham.[281] It was a lively network with links across Melbourne's contemporary art scene. [282]

In 1969, aged thirty-three, Davis held his first solo exhibition at Sweeney Reed's Strines Gallery from 5 to 17 October in the inner-city suburb of Carlton.[283] The six works revealed a new development in his use of industrially produced materials and highly stylised forms. [284] Interest in serialisation and grid formats was present in the paintings of Dale Hickey and Robert Rooney, both young Melbourne painters who exhibited in *The Field* and were associated with Pinacotheca Gallery. Three of Davis's works indicated the impact of *The Field* and, more specifically, Davis's relationship within the close Melbourne contemporary art world. *Three Thirds*, *Sixteen or 16* and *Hanging Three* were all serialised variations of an earlier moulded spatulate form, made from polyester resin and fibreglass (Figure 34).

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[281] *The Age*'s young art critic and Greenberg protégé, Patrick McCaughey, was a regular associate and referred to this artistic grouping as the 'Hampton or Bayside mafia'. Noel Hutchison, interview with author, 25 June 2007, Melbourne.

[282] The opening of the new NGV premises in 1968 and international exhibitions such as MOMA's *Two Decades of American Art*, *Aspects of Recent British Art* (organised by the ICA and toured by the British Council) and *Marcel Duchamp: The Mary Sisler Collection* (from the US and managed by Auckland City Gallery, NZ) which all toured Australian state galleries during 1967 and 1968, and the visit by Clement Greenberg in 1968, would have been dissected and argued over in their social gatherings.

[283] Strines Gallery (which opened in 1966 and closed in December 1970) was just down the road from the experimental theatre workshop, La Mama (opened in 1967) run by Betty Burstall and near the University of Melbourne. The inner city suburb of Carlton was the cheap student quarter of Melbourne and this strip between Strines and La Mama was a meeting point for alternative and experimental performers, young filmmakers, musicians, visual artists and students.

[284] In an email exchange with the author, 27 February 2008, Ken Scarlett indicated that Strines Gallery space was very small and that he had a photograph that included all the works Davis exhibited which would have been completed in 1969. Although there is no extant exhibition list, in his review of the exhibition Alan Warren indicates that there were six works, all of which were fabricated in 1969. Alan Warren, 'John Davis: Premeditation takes the place of instinct', *The Sun*, Melbourne, 8 October 1969, p. 28 quoted in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit., p. 162.

In a notebook including drawings and notations for the works *Sixteen or 16* and *Three Thirds or 3/3*, Davis indicated the direction of his thinking: 'Art as deliberate acts … expression interferes with deliberate decisions in the making of art.'[285] He referred to the above works as 'Modular pieces [where] segments [are] deliberately placed in obvious relationships to eliminate expression as much as possible.'[286] His equating of modular repetition, seriality, with 'deliberate' 'elimination' of 'expression' had a strident quality that demarcated this new work, and Davis's attitude, from his previous expressive works (which perhaps too closely identified with woodwork and the manual arts of secondary school art teaching). The stridency implied a sublimation of the very set of dispositions that had led him to pursue a practice in sculpture. These descriptors also indicated that Davis's work was informed by an emerging, critical discourse necessary in order to establish a 'degree of recognition within the peer competitor group' of sculptor-lecturers in the hothouse of the Melbourne art world.[287]

Davis's extensive use of synthetic plastics represented a complete break with his previous working methods. The tactile, reflective process of carving wood was replaced by a series of quick-reacting chemical processes that dictated the method and rate of application, and were highly toxic. Polyester resin and fibreglass were suited to producing modular, repeated forms; as materials they produced durable, lightweight artworks that did not require specialised or heavy machinery. The adoption of industrial techniques – repeated processes of moulding, fast application of resin or fibreglass and chemical catalyst, followed by sanding the surface till smooth and, finally, spray-painted with car duco – produced works which emulated the 'impeccably smooth curves and swells of the car body, the perfectly straight lines, the high-gloss lacquer and bright colours and chrome, the absolutely identical repetition of forms'.[288] Process, finish and the photogenic qualities of seriality were important; the slight imperfections and variations of the

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[285] Davis's artist notebooks, Davis Estate Archive, Melbourne.
[286] ibid.
[287] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 116.
[288] Eric Gronberg, 'The new generation of ceramic artists', *Craft Horizons*, vol. XXIX, no. 1, January–February 1969, p. 28.

handmade were regarded as flawed.[289] His new work seemed to resonate with Donald Judd's comment from his, by 1969, much quoted essay, 'Specific objects', that 'art could be mass-produced'.[290]

The exhibition was a critical success, though no sales were made. Davis's deductive approach to working produced highly finished, stylised forms; a kind of industrial perfection 'effect' where, as Bourdieu observed of the French Academy, 'all marks of work, of manifattura' are removed.[291] Davis's work distinguished him as a contemporary professional sculptor within the now competitive and increasingly crowded Melbourne art scene and this recognition brought him further notice within critical and curatorial networks. Solo exhibitions were the mark of a professional artist and essential in terms of increasing his social and cultural capital as a professional art school lecturer. Clearly, Davis's audience was his Melbourne peers and students where the emergent field itself was becoming its own market.

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

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[289] ibid.
[290] Judd, 'Specific objects', cited in da Salvo (ed.), op. cit., p. 174.
[291] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 247.

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

Conclusion

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

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

In Bourdieu's conception, the 'morphological explosion' caused by the sheer numbers of young people requiring tertiary education and the consequent demand for, and government-funded expansion in, the education sector, plus, in Victoria, the state-government funding of cultural infrastructure, 'favoured the emergence of an

artistic…milieu which was highly differentiated'.[292] The years from 1967 to 1969 were emblematic of this transitional phase of an emerging field. The 'competition for the power to grant cultural consecration' had shifted in favour of new set of cultural dispositions which favoured 'new art', manifested through the appointments of younger curators-selectors within the expanding gallery networks, and the rapid expansion and increasing status of art schools within the developing tertiary education sector – the system for reproducing producers – offered employment opportunities to younger sculpture graduates whose dispositions favoured a new definition of professional practice.[293]

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

By 1969, 'autonomy' was a word in common usage in association with 'professional' dispositions applied to artists, sculptors in this case, teaching in the new tertiary art school system. It was implied in McCullough's proposal for an invitation-only and acquisition event format for the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial. It was this disposition for autonomy which shaped all the participants and which was an essential disposition in defining how 'professional' was understood. It was the introduction of these new sets of cultural dispositions that marked the beginning of 'the critical phase of the constitution of an autonomous field claiming the right to define for itself the principles of its legitimacy'.[294]

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[292]ibid., p. 238.
[293] ibid.
[294] ibid., p. 61.

Chapter Four

The Heroic Years of Mildura

Part 1: 1970 – 1974

> To change the nature of art one must first change its institutions.[295]

Introduction

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

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

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[295] Mike Parr quoting Donald Brook, in Noel Sheridan (ed.), *Noel Sheridan: On Reflection*, op. cit., p. 112.

Tom McCullough and sculptor John Davis – will address the framework underpinning the development of an autonomous field of artistic production that becomes evident in the selection and presentation of the triennial events.

Christo's participatory project of wrapping the coastline of Little Bay, Sydney, in 1969 was a timely and very public exemplar of Donald Brook's assertion that 'To change the nature of art one must first change its institutions.' The realisation of this art project – its scale, ephemerality and spectacular location, the co-ordination of hundreds of volunteer assistants, mostly art and architecture students – transformed the understanding of what an artist and art could be. It transformed the work and the public experience of it into an event, to be experienced over time; the condition of 'theatricality' that Michael Fried had warned of in his controversial *Artforum* article 'Art and objecthood' in 1967.[296] It also introduced the concept of photographic documentation as a work of art in itself.[297]

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

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

[297] Framed photographic collages and small wrapped objects were shown at the Central Street Gallery in Sydney following the installation.

autonomous, alternative field of contemporary artistic practice possible in Australia. State governments' commitment to funding arts infrastructure saw the reopening of the AGNSW in 1972 with modern extensions and the opening of the internationally renowned Sydney Opera House in late 1973.

What became evident was a tension that manifested between an uncomprehending public, sometimes referred to as 'philistine' and a contemporary art world increasingly characterised as 'elite'. As Bourdieu observed, 'the progress of the field … towards autonomy is marked by … the disjunction between [the field's] own principles of evaluation and those [of] the general public.'[298] This tension between the public of taxpayers and an increasingly separate world of art experts who competed for the right to determine the allocation of money and prestige within that world was itself evidence of the existence of an autonomous field.

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

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

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[298] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 116.

4th Mildura Sculpture Triennial 1970

The sculpture prizes that had posed a threat to the 1967 Mildura Prize event were in abeyance; the Alcorso-Sekers scholarship prize had been rescinded and transformed into the Kaldor Art Projects (the first being Christo's *Wrapped Coast* in November 1969) and the Transfield Prize (which ceased in 1971) would in 1973 transform itself into the Biennale of Sydney. Other sculpture prizes simply disappeared after a few years.[299] However, the decline in the importance and prevalence of prizes was indicative of a more profound shift in the very definition of what constituted art, how it was taught, transmitted, critiqued, theorised, exhibited and supported.

Selection Process

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

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

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[299] One of the other major metropolitan competitors was the *Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture in Aluminium*, launched in 1967. It ceased in 1972.

acquisitions rather than prizes ensured a greater recognition of the Mildura Arts Centre in developing Australia's leading contemporary sculpture collection.[300]

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

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

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[300] Tom McCullough also noted that the Mildura Arts Centre developed a separate purchase fund for sculpture of $1000 per annum, which came into operation after the triennial, email to the author, 26 March 2008.
[301] Margaret Plant, 'Sculpture carnival', *The Australian*, 14 March 1970.

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

The launch, the judges and the acquisitions

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

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[302] Tom McCullough, Introduction, *The Fourth Mildura Sculpture Triennial 1970*, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, 1970, p. 5.
[303] Australia Council, 'Visual and Plastic Arts Board, 9 March Agenda Papers [circa 1970]', op. cit.
[304] A Visual and Plastic Arts Board agenda paper noted: 'Until recently the attitude to the encouragement of artists has been that the market itself has operated as the most satisfactory supporter of the artists of ability, and that while it continued to function adequately in this way it was undesirable to interfere with the mechanism by introducing other forms of assistance to artists. However, it now appears that while this may be true with regard to painters, it may not have the same validity when applied to certain other branches of the visual arts such as sculpture and possibly to the truly "avant-garde" artists of any generation whose work rarely has much initial appeal except perhaps to a limited public.' 'Visual and Plastic Arts Board, 9 March Agenda Papers [circa 1970]', op. cit., quoted on p. 3 of the Agenda Papers.

adventurous brilliance for which they were selected.'[305] Reviewers referred to the carnival atmosphere, the 'fun fair giddinesss' as well as the energy and liveliness of the event and the range of works on display.[306] The timing of the opening of the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial, one week prior to the opening of the 6th Adelaide Festival with the triennial open throughout the duration of the festival, indicated the response of the MACAC to the perceived dominance of what had become Australia's major international arts festival.

The attendees at the opening cocktail party – three-quarters of the participant sculptors, the high number of gallery directors and curators as well as commercial dealer representatives and art critics – confirmed that the Mildura sculpture events, by 1970, could claim the title as the premier, recurrent visual arts event in Australia.[307] In network terms, the 4th Mildura Sculpture Triennial established the regional arts centre of Mildura as a dominant node in a nascent national visual arts network.[308]

The judging panel for the 1970 Sculpture Triennial comprised Melbourne sculptor Lenton Parr, Daniel Thomas and McCullough. Importantly, both Parr and Thomas were well known to many artists, particularly younger ones, and familiar with the rapid changes in the art scene in their respective cities.[309] In an article entitled 'Australian

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[305] McCullough, Introduction, *The Fourth Mildura Sculpture Triennial 1970*, op. cit., p. 4.
[306] Elwyn Lynn, 'Salad days: the Fourth Mildura Sculpture Triennial', *The Bulletin*, 14 March 1970.
[307] McCullough's handwritten list (of those who had responded affirmatively) for the official cocktail party opening included the following: 45 sculptors, 40 Melbourne gallery society ladies, 12 art critics, 12 representatives of the Victorian Public Galleries Group, 7 representatives from the state galleries, 20 dealers, 15 sponsors' representatives, 9 Mildura City Councillors, 13 representatives of the MACAC, 21 representatives from Wentworth and Mildura Shire Councils and 4 state and federal government representatives. There were also 6 members from the Chaffey family and one representative from BP Australia (the primary sponsor in 1967), Mildura Arts Centre archives, 4th Mildura Sculpture Triennial 1970 File.
[308] The high level support by the NGV of the Mildura Arts Centre and its triennial sculpture event represented an important transfer of institutional prestige from Australia's pre-eminent gallery (recognised for its recent active championing of contemporary art) to contemporary Australian sculpture, Mildura Arts Centre and its director. The attendance of the director, Eric Westbrook, the recently appointed curator of Sculpture (the first curatorial position for sculpture in an Australian gallery), Elwyn Dennis and other gallery staff members along with the invitation to the NGV Trustee Col. Aubrey Gibson to launch the event and, the new director of the National Gallery School, sculptor Lenton Parr, as one of the judges, is testament to this assertion.
[309] Daniel Thomas said that he always attended the biennial Adelaide Festival and was keen to see what was happening in The Fringe events, interview with the author, 31 July 2006.

sculpture in the 1960s', sculptor-critic Noel Hutchison, drawing directly from his experience of the Mildura Triennial, noted: 'What was of great importance was that Parr had the intelligence to gather a staff that was at least as innovatory – if not more so – as himself. By 1970 the list of excellent young sculptors with ideas coming out of a number of Victorian colleges was impressive.'[310]

Parr's appointment as principal of the National Gallery School at the NGV was a major symbolic victory for those pushing for professional accreditation and increased status for artists, particularly sculptors, within the new tertiary system in Victoria. Read against this struggle for control between an old and a new regime in the burgeoning tertiary educational sector, Parr's appointment as a judge, the first principal of an art school to be asked to decide on appropriate acquisitions for the Mildura collection, along with his co-judge curator Daniel Thomas, was a significant example of the circularity of the logic of 'a closed field of competition for cultural legitimacy'.[311] Both judges had also been active in recommending sculptors for invitation.

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

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

[311] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 115.

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

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

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

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

[314] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., pp. 115, 251.

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

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

Participants

Of the sixty-one invited artist participants, almost fifty per cent were under thirty years of age, with the youngest at twenty being Aleks Danko who was still completing his studies in sculpture at the SASA. The number of New Zealand participants rose to nine in 1970. Although the total number of participants was lower than in 1967, there was a total of 123 entries, the most so far in any of the events.[316] Women's participation dropped to its lowest point at ten per cent, (starting from a high thirty-one per cent in 1961), and would persist at these low levels throughout the 1973 and 1975 events, and only rising to seventeen per cent by 1978 as a result of pressure from women's art groups.[317]

The rapid expansion in institutional support for sculpture, particularly in education, would have a profound effect on the definition of sculpture itself. Noel Hutchison observed that at the beginning of the 1960s, in both Sydney and Melbourne, sculptors and the art schools where sculpture was taught were similarly under-recognised and under-resourced. However, by the end of 1969, the situation between the two states was radically different. The 'revitalisation of art education in Victoria' as undertaken by the VIC compared with the slow process by the Department of Education in NSW was the key.[318] In Melbourne, sculpture was taught at several technical colleges and institutes as

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[316] According to Graeme Sturgeon, 'sixty-two percent were showing at Mildura for the first time … consistent with McCullough's aim to revitalise the exhibition … [which provided] exposure to a dozen unknown sculptors who have since made substantial contributions to the growth and maturation of Australian sculpture'. He listed the sculptors as follows: Tony Bishop, Peter Cole, Tony Coleing, Aleksander Danko, Noel Hutchison, Les Kossatz, Kevin Mortensen, Clive Murray-White, Ti Parks, Ken Reinhard, Ron Robertson-Swann and Michael Young. See Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura*, op. cit., p. 41.
[317] It is interesting to note that the drop in women's participation coincided with the increased importance and role of sculptor-teachers as selectors at the Mildura Triennials. Employment in the expanding colleges of advanced education art schools, particularly in Melbourne, favoured men.
[318] By 1969, under the NSW Higher Education Act an Advanced Education Board and Higher Education Authority was established and the state government set up a committee of inquiry into art and design education. In 1970, the Gleeson Report recommended the establishment of 'a corporate college of advanced education … for the purpose of providing tertiary education for persons preparing for

well as the National Gallery School at the NGV, from 1969. In Sydney, sculpture at the NAS was in a depressed state. In NSW, as Hutchison noted: 'The necessity for a revolution in the entire theoretical and practical structure of art education has not been accepted.'[319] Adelaide had also witnessed progress in the development and expansion of SASA during the sixties decade, a development attributed by Hutchison to the stimulus provided by the biennial Adelaide Arts Festival and the establishment of a second university, Flinders, and Bedford Teachers College.

The invited participants for the1970 Mildura triennial reveal a metropolitan focus: Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Auckland. These were the centres of concentrated cultural and educational expansion during this period. What is most distinct is the high proportion of participants linked to educational establishments. Sculptor-teachers and recent graduates from five of Melbourne's main art schools attended. The institutions represented included the National Gallery School, RMIT, Prahran Technical College, Caulfield Institute of Technology and the specialist teachers college, Melbourne State College. All the participants from South Australia were from SASA, whether current lecturers, recent graduates or current students. The predominance of participants linked to the education system confirmed what was by now accepted as common knowledge, as Elwyn Dennis observed in an article on Lenton Parr: 'It is both constructive and valid that artists today accept the educational system as the appropriate substitute for the patron.'[320] As patronage for sculpture was very limited, this statement is significant in confirming that the principal economic basis, particularly for sculptors, was the expanding, autonomous tertiary education system.

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

[319] Hutchison, 'Australian Sculpture in the 1960s', op. cit., p. 8.

[320] Elwyn Dennis, 'Lenton Parr: an Australian asset', *Art and Australia,* vol. 6, no .4, winter 1969, p. 307.

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

Many of the participants camped either in a small building at the back of the gallery or at the Mildura Apex caravan park. As Noel Hutchison described it, 'we met for the first time as a core group'.[321] This core was made up of particular city groupings that would become important in the development of future triennials. From Adelaide, Tony Bishop, Bill Clements, Max Lyle and Bill Gregory, all teaching at SASA, while Sydney consisted of two camps loosely gathered around two institutions: the NAS (with Ron Robertson Swan, recently returned from almost a decade in the UK) and the University of Sydney, incorporating The Power Institute of Fine Arts (Noel Hutchison and Donald Brook) and the Sydney University Art Workshops, colloquially known at the Tin Sheds (with Bert Flugelman). The key New Zealand member was Jim Allen, who on return from his

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

sabbatical year in 1968 instituted important innovations at Elam Art School, part of the University of Auckland.[322]

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

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

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[322] Jim Allen, like Lenton Parr in Melbourne, was an important educator and practitioner in NZ; his influence would become more significant with the 1973 and 1975 Mildura Triennials. In 1976, while completing a year-long residency at the EAF in Adelaide he was offered, and accepted, the position of founding head of Sydney College of the Arts in 1977. Allen taught at the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland from 1960 to 1976. 1968 was something of a turning point for him and his practice. He took a sabbatical sojourn in Europe, the UK and US and on his return was promoted to associate professor and head of Sculpture at Elam School. Auckland was an important centre for contemporary art in NZ at this time. The combination of energetic directors at the Auckland City Gallery, Paul Beadle, a sculptor, as professor of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland and Jim Allen as head of Sculpture, boded well for NZ experimental art practice and also for Mildura as a recipient of this NZ energy and connection.
[323] There were 24 sculptors from Melbourne compared with 16 from NSW, ten from SA, nine from NZ and two from overseas.
[324] Kevin Mortensen, although not Hampton based, was linked to this group through his association with Davis as they both trained together at RMIT and with Clive Murray-White and the important group exhibition of emerging young Melbourne sculptors (curated by Murray-White) *24 Point Plug Show* at The Argus Gallery in May 1968. Patrick McCaughey nicknamed this group, which also included artists Fred Cress and Alun Leach Jones, as the Bayside or 'Hampton Mafia'.

Elwyn Dennis and the editor of *Art and Australia*, Mervyn Horton, proposed the publication of a book on present day Australian sculpture.[325]

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

Selected artists and works

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

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

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

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 36: top, foreground: Nigel Lendon*, Untitled Systemic Structure 69-2* 1969, five units sandblasted steel, dimensions variable. Collection Mildura Arts Centre. Mid-ground: Ron Robertson Swann, *Beethoven* 1963 London, remade 1968 Transfield Foundry, yellow painted steel, 137 x 91 x 274 cms. Collection Mildura Arts Centre.

Figure 37: bottom left, Les Kossatz, *Spent Heap/Segment* 1970, mild steel, dimensions variable.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 38: top left, Tony Coleing, *Wind Construction* 1970, painted steel, 122 metres (h).

Figure 39: bottom, Jim Allen, *NZ Environment # 5* 1969, scrim, steel tube, greasy wool, saw dust, tow underfelt, nylon string, barbed wire, neon tube (green), 183 x 183 x 549 cms.

acquired by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in September 1970.[326] *New Zealand Environment No. 5* was a radical departure from the work Allen submitted for the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize which was acquired for the collection through funds provided by BP Australia Ltd.[327] A participatory and multi-sensory environment – smell as well as texture and the visual and spatial senses were as much a part of the work – Allen created a 'non-indigenous, European' New Zealand environment using greasy wool, pine wood chips, hessian sacking and lurid green neon lighting.[328]

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

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[326] Blair French, 'Jim Allen: From Elam to the Experimental Art Foundation', n.p., located at http://www.imageandtext.org.nz/blair_sym.html ,viewed 7 November 2006. The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery (New Plymount, NZ) acquisition file, written in September 1970 mentioned the Mildura Sculpture Triennial and also mentioned reviews in *Art and Australia*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1970 and *Art International*, vol. 14, no. 6, 1970. This information was conveyed in an email exchange from Govett-Brewster Art Gallery to the author on 21 November 2006.

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

[328] Blair French, 'Jim Allen: From Elam to the Experimental Art Foundation', op. cit.

[329] In interview with Coleing, he indicated that this work was selected by Harald Szeeman in 1971 for his 2nd Kaldor Art Project exhibition, *I want to leave a nice well done child here*.

However, within two weeks of an anonymous gift of $100 being offered to start a purchase fund, the Letters to the Editor pages of the local paper were filled with letters from indignant ratepayers concerned about wasteful expenditure on 'junk'. The management of the Arts Centre came under increased scrutiny. An article in the paper on 17 March 1970 reported a packed public gallery at the previous evening's council meeting, attributing this to the 'sculpture controversy'.[330]

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

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

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[330] 'Art Centre query: No discussion on ratepayer's letter', *Sunraysia Daily*, 17 March 1970, p. 3.
[331] Duchamp's collaged breast work, *Prière de Toucher*, 1947 which also has a velvet backing was on the front cover of the exhibition catalogue, *Le Surrealism 1947* organised by André Breton at the Maeght Gallery in Paris. Danko had seen the exhibition of 78 Duchamp works from the Mary Sisler Collection, which toured Australian state galleries between 1967 and 1968. Margaret Plant in her exhibition catalogue *Irreverent Sculpture* discussed Danko's oeuvre.
[332] Margaret Plant, *Irreverent sculpture*, Monash University Gallery, Dept. of Visual Arts, Melbourne, 1985, p. 69.

art was an object. The new art is a system.'[333] The artists selected and the works they presented explored the expanding field of sculptural practice in Australia. The prevalence of works that were 'of a kind that is open, discursive, exploratory' revealed the diversity of investigations into the concept of sculpture as idea, process and object.[334]

Tom McCullough 1970–1972

Professional Development

As indicated in Chapter Three, by 1969 McCullough had established his credentials as both a regional gallery director and the director of a national triennial sculpture prize. The training and keeping of professional staff in the expanding state and regional gallery networks was now a key issue, as 'a critical shortage of trained staff … has been aggravated by losses to art schools and universities'.[335] The AGAA, of which McCullough was a member, was established in 1965 as a direct outcome of a UNESCO-funded conference on the professional development of museum and gallery staff held in 1963 at the NGV. The organisation's aims were 'to provide opportunities for the interchange of information and ideas between full-time professional gallery officers and to maintain and to improve the standards and welfare of the profession and of public art galleries in Australia'.[336]

A pilot professional development scheme, an initiative of the AGAA, commenced in 1969 and offered a diploma course which covered art gallery and museum administration adapted from the British Museums Association model.[337] This initiative signalled a

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[333] Willoughby Sharp, 'Luminism and Kineticism' in Gregory Battcock (ed.), *Minimal Art*, E.P Dutton, New York, 1968, p. 318. A similar sentiment was expressed by Jack Burnham in his article, 'Systems aesthetics', *Artforum*, op. cit., p. 31: '[W]e are in a transition from an object-oriented to systems-oriented culture … change emanates not from things but the way things are done.'
[334] Terry Smith, 'Propositions', *The Situation Now: object or post-object art?*, Contemporary Arts Society Gallery (NSW), Sydney, 1971, p. 4.
[335] Ron Appleyard, 'Art Galleries Association of Australia', *Art and Australia*, NGV Special Number, vol. 6, no. 3, autumn 1968, p. 191.
[336] ibid.
[337] The principal tutors were Dr Ursula Hoff and Dr Eric Westbrook (both NGV), Hal Missingham (AGNSW) and Ron Appleyard (National Gallery of South Australia). In 1966 Dr Eric Westbrook was

commitment to developing career pathways for professional gallery staff, with improved standards of performance and recognised qualifications. Given the level of state and local government infrastructure investment in the Mildura Arts Centre, and the noted shortage in trained staff, McCullough was encouraged to undertake the course.

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

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

McCullough and the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial

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

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appointed as a member of the International Council of Museums' (ICOM) Executive Committee (a position he would occupy until 1974). Westbrook's professional, international vision for the NGV, and by association his professional vision for the VPGG, was an important guiding model for McCullough.

[338] David Thomas, 'Provincial art galleries in New South Wales and Victoria', *Art and Australia*, vol. 6, no. 2, summer 1968, p. 121.

[339] McCullough travelled to Sydney and Melbourne frequently to meet artists, attend conferences and see exhibitions. He recalled attending Donald Brook's 2nd Power Lecture on Contemporary Art entitled 'Flight from the object' and seeing Christo's *Wrapped Coast* installation. In a diary entry he noted that he was in Melbourne and Sydney on 10 and 11 September 1969 'for the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial arrangements'. Tom McCullough, email to author, 26 March 2008.

events: from prizes to acquisitions for contemporary collection development, from organiser and venue manager to curator. McCullough observed:

> I took full responsibility for what appeared on the lawns of Mildura Art Centre … In 1970 it was all there because I visited sculptors, or by recommendations from colleagues who I trust or who had told me about works or from photographs … they had sent me.[340]

The sculpture events were important to Mildura but even more important to McCullough and the Arts Centre in maintaining a national profile. Therefore it was important to keep them fresh and relevant, particularly to younger practitioners who required exhibiting opportunities and purchases of their works into reputable collections. Opportunities for sculptors and more experimental artists were relatively few in comparison to painters. There was a limited commissioning market for government and industry and even more limited commercial outlets for the number of burgeoning young artists: 'I invited artists who were not known primarily as sculptors to exhibit at the 4th Mildura Sculpture Triennial. The show was acclaimed and provided a new impetus for sculpture in Australia …'.[341] McCullough clearly saw himself as part of a generational shift of art museum professionals who were coming to prominence as the new agents of consecration.[342]

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

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

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[340] Tom McCullough quoted in Margaret Huxley, 'Trends in Australian sculpture as revealed by the Mildura Triennial', Diploma of Art Education Honours, National Art School, 1973, p. 13.
[341] Tom McCullough, 'Painted images or real objects, an illusion of discord', unpublished notes following Perspecta '83, May 1983, p. 1, McCullough archives, PA 97/33 Box 20, SLV.
[342] Following only 18 months after the international launch of the new NGV building and the prominence given to *The Field* exhibition – initiated by two young curators, Brian Finemore and John Stringer, in consultation with a number of young artists including many returning expatriate artists associated with Central Street Gallery in Sydney, and championed by young art critic Patrick McCaughey – McCullough was modelling his professional career according to the example set by the NGV and its management.

> take advantage of the genuine popularity which *Wind Construction* generated at the beginning of the exhibition and the whole idea of Deakin Avenue becoming a sculptural showplace will have to be abandoned by our Chamber of Commerce and City Council as a result.[343]

Gulbenkian Fellowship

The Gulbenkian Fellowship awarded to McCullough was valued at £1000, the equivalent of $2135 in 1970 and was awarded through the AGAA to 'young professional art gallery officers in Australia' in recognition of the need to travel overseas 'to further their general knowledge of the culture of the past, the contemporary overseas developments in the various fields of fine arts and *particularly in museum architecture and presentation*'.[344] The fellowships were part of a program of professional development advocated by the AGAA in response to the shortage of trained staff.[345] The push for qualifications and professional development was driven by the concentration of power and resources in the expanding tertiary education system with its preferred conditions of pay and status. In order for the expanding gallery sector to retain staff and encourage new appointees, it would need to improve the status and conditions of its gallery positions with recognised qualification and opportunities for professional development.

McCullough's ambitious proposal included visiting ten countries in seven months. As he noted in a letter to Eric Westbrook, he would need to 'seek grant-in-aid assistance from a variety of organisations such as the British Council and the French Cultural Ministry, to cover living expenses' as the major part of his salary would 'be required by my family in Australia'.[346] Given the scarcity of these fellowships and seven months leave from his position, the implied support of the Mildura City Council and its arts advisory committee represented an important commitment to McCullough's professional position. McCullough had a forward exhibition plan and the seconded education officer's position

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[343] Tom McCullough, letter to Eric Westbrook, 17 March 1970, VPRS 1273/P2, Unit: 6, File: Mildura Arts Centre, Public Records Office Victoria.
[344] Letter of introduction from R.G. Appleyard, Hon. Sec., AGAA, 26 September 1969, Public Records Office Victoria, ibid.
[345] Ron Appleyard, 'Art Galleries Association of Australia', *Art and Australia,* vol. 6, no. 3, autumn 1968, p. 191.
[346] Tom McCullough letter, to Eric Westbrook, 17 March 1970, op. cit.

was vital in the continued management and installation of the exhibition program at the Mildura Arts Centre while he was away. [347]

The seven-month study tour through Japan, Europe and the United States not only provided him with professional development opportunities and an international perspective but, equally importantly, provided thinking time for him to digest some of the implications of the Mildura Triennial, to develop plans for it and the Mildura Art Centre collection's future expansion and their national significance.[348] The recognition that a new direction for many younger artists was in the production of, as he put it, 'virtually non-saleable experiments with a limited life expectancy', combined with the percolating implications of Christo's monumental collaborative environmental project, would coalesce into a radical plan for the 1973 Sculpture Triennial.[349]

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[347] Tom McCullough, email exchange with author, 30 May 2007.

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

[349] Tom McCullough, Introduction, *The Fourth Mildura Sculpture Triennial 1970*, op. cit., p. 5.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 40: Preparation for Sculpturscape ’73. Two of the four views that comprised a printed information sheet sent out by Tom McCullough to invited sculptors in October 1972, to enable them to grasp his radical proposal for Sculpturscape ‘73 which he described as a kind of ‘post-Christo outstallation’.

Fellowship outcomes for Mildura

McCullough was interested in the latest developments in museum education and access, travelling exhibitions and touring networks, particularly in relation to sculpture.[350] He visited a number of sculpture parks and later developed a feasibility study for a 'cultural park' on the banks of the Murray River in front of the Mildura Arts Centre.[351] The proposed 20 acres of river frontage was a disused rubbish tip.[352] The overall plan in the feasibility study was structured in a series of stages that could be implemented individually as finance became available. In May 1972, Mildura City Council granted permission for the Arts Centre to use the site for Sculpturscape '73 (Figure 40).[353].

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

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

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[350] Thomas G. McCullough, '1969 Gulbenkian Travel Grant Study Programme', VPRS 1273/P2, unit 6, file: Mildura Arts Centre, Public Records Office of Victoria, op. cit.
[351] This was developed with the guidance of Reg Etherington, who continued to hold a position on the MACAC, and was the Mildura Arts Centre's representative trustee on the VPGG and also held a position on the Building Committee of the Victorian Arts Centre.
[352] As the press release for Sculpturscape '73 announced: 'In 1971, Mildura City Council decided that this site will eventually become a "cultural park" based upon a feasibility report which Thomas McCullough published, comprising native tree plantations, permanent sculpture pavilions and courts, lakes, amphitheatre, restaurant and sculpture playground. This development of Australia's first open air museum for sculpture and related activities will integrate past, present, nature, culture and leisure into one flexible system', press release, 'Sculpturscape '73', Mildura Arts Centre, February 1973, NGA Research Library, Mildura Arts Centre box.
[353] Tom McCullough, 'Site preparation', *Sculpturscape '73: an exhibition in Mildura, Australia*, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, 1975, np.

also intended to leverage further economic investment in the Mildura Arts Centre and its expansion plans.

John Davis 1970–1972

Of the 61 sculptors selected to participate, almost two-thirds of them were showing at the Fourth Mildura Sculpture Triennial for the first time. McCullough observed that: 'for various reasons, the artists interested in sculpture are far more numerous than nine years ago'.[354] Although a number of young painters began moving into sculpture, because there was less pressure and scrutiny to conform to particular late modernist styles, the under-recognised factor for the increased number of participants was the economic support offered by the expanding educational sector, increasingly acknowledged as 'the appropriate substitute for the patron' and particularly in Melbourne, the increasing numbers of students enrolling in art schools.[355] However, in expanding the category of sculpture to include experimental, emerging and in many cases, unproven participants, the selection criteria were determined by the individuals McCullough asked to make recommendations. Thus the artists consulted, such as Davis, were given the 'power to confer value on that which does not intrinsically possess it', thereby reinforcing what they, the selectors, considered to be 'legitimate members of [an emerging] profession[al] group'.[356]

Davis and the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial

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

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[354] McCullough, Introduction, *The Fourth Mildura Sculpture Triennial*, op. cit., p. 5.
[355] C. Elwyn Dennis, 'Lenton Parr: an Australian asset', *Art and Australia*, vol. 6, no. 4, autumn 1969, p. 307.
[356] James English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards and the circulation of Cultural Value*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass. & London, 2005, p .9; Bourdieu, 'Manet and the institutionalisation of anomie', *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 251.

visual arts profession.[357] Davis, a lecturer and selector, and like a number of the younger Melbourne sculptors, the product of training at RMIT under the direction of Centre 5 members Vincas Jomants, Teisutis Zikaras and Lenton Parr, would have sensed the significance of this new professional recognition. Noel Hutchison's clear recollection that Mildura 1970 was 'where we all met as a core group', captured the shared sense that the 'power to define [the field's] own criteria for the production and evaluation of its products' lay within their grasp.[358] Further, that as active participants in the unfolding and new tertiary art education field, their control of the reproduction and accreditation process innate to professional education enabled them to 'change the nature of art by changing its institutions' by a process of redefinition.[359]

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

Artwork and exhibitions

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

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[357] Max Weber defined a 'status group' as a 'group that can be differentiated on the basis of non-economic qualities like honour, prestige and religion'. An occupational or formal educational status group defines itself by those it excludes. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Status_class, viewed 5 May 2009.
[358] Noel Hutchison, interview with author, 25 June 2007; and Bourdieu, 'Market for symbolic goods', *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 115.
[359] Mike Parr quoting Donald Brook in Sheridan, op.cit., p.112.

in which he participated increased significantly and extended to Sydney and Newcastle. The quality of the contacts and networks that Davis established at the 1970 Mildura Triennial were critical to this development.

Davis's critically successful solo exhibition at Strines Gallery and his serial work in aluminium at the Mildura Sculpture Triennial contributed to his selection in the 3rd Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture in Aluminium in September 1970. The selection process sought recommendations from 'gallery directors, critics and others concerned professionally with the Arts in Australia'.[360] From these invited contributions, six sculptors were chosen to produce maquettes for 'specific architectural environments', the aim of which was 'to bring together entrants in the Award and members of the architectural profession, with the object of interesting the latter in arranging commissions of entries for the Award'.[361] Professionally organised, the award ensured that each participant sculptor received $750 for a maquette and the winner would receive a further $3000 plus Comalco's guarantee that it would 'assist with the supply of all or part of the aluminium' required if a sculptor's work was commissioned by an architect.[362]

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

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[360] *Sculpture for Architectural Environments: The Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture in Aluminium 1970*, Comalco Ltd, Melbourne, 1970, n.p.
[361] ibid.
[362] The six invited sculptors for 1970 were: Tony Coleing, John Davis, Nigel Lendon, Max Lyle, Lenton Parr and Ken Reinhard. Parr had been one of the judges in selecting acquisitions for the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial and the other five sculptors were all invited participants in Mildura. In comparison with the Mildura Sculpture Triennial's total of $4000 for acquisitions, this award was a prestigious and highly lucrative event. The $4500 (6 x $750) paid to the selected sculptors totalled more than the Mildura's sculpture acquisitions budget. Of the six invited sculptors, all had been involved with the 1970 invitational Mildura Sculpture Triennial, ibid.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 41: John Davis, *Maquette for Comalco Invitation Award for Sculpture* 1970, cast aluminium, 109 x 76.2 x 24 cms. Photo: Mark Strizic.

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Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

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Figure 42: previous page, John Davis, *Grass Process Work – Part 1* 1971, reproduced images 2 and 3 from a series of 11 photographs documenting the process of the impact of plastic outlines on grass growth. As noted in Ken Scarlett, The Sculpture of John Davis; Places and Location, p.78: "Process evolved at the home of the artist between 12 March and 2 May 1971." Photo: John Davis. This process work was the prototype for his later *Grass Process Works* at John Reed's property, Heide, in November 1971.

Figure 43: above, John Davis, *Greene Street Piece* 1972, black and white photograph, part of a series of four, 47.5 x 32.5 cm. Collection NGV.

John Davis was doubly feted; he won the award for his serialised maquette in cast aluminium on the theme of 'Energy' and had his work commissioned for the foyer of the Hydro Electric Commission building in Hobart (Figure 41). The judges – Eric Westbrook, director of the NGV, Elwyn Lynn, artist, critic and curator of the Power Institute collection in Sydney and Melbourne architect Rod Macdonald - were unanimous in their decision. As the art reviewer for *The Bulletin*, Lynn commented that: 'It [the winning Comalco work] is a development of his square pedestals with trifid heads seen this year at Mildura and Sydney's State Office Block [Captain Cook Bicentennial Sculpture Exhibition].'[363]

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

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

> [L]ots of problems with so many different processes to go thro'[sic] – costing multiples, machinery, anodising, polishing, fabricating and finally assembling. Too many people makes for all sorts of added complications.[364]

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

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[363] Elwyn Lynn, 'How to stimulate sculptors', *The Bulletin*, 3 October 1970, quoted in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit., p. 162.
[364] John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, undated but later inscribed 1971, in the possession of Noel Hutchison.

wall relief made from fibreglass and polyester resin and supported on white painted hardboard.

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

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

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

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

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[365] Elwyn Lynn, 'Trends in recent Australian sculpture', *Mildura Prize for Sculpture 1967*, op. cit., p. 18.
[366] Ken Scarlett, interview with John Davis, 26 October 1982, quoted in Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit., p. 28.
[367] Terry Smith, interview with Clive Murray-White, 23 May 1971, quoted in *The Situation Now: object or post-object Art?*, op. cit., p. 28.

shower caps marked a clear move away from industrial, toxic materials requiring a high degree of finish. Chance, in the form of the river flooding, added another element to this work. In an interview with Graeme Sturgeon, Davis described this period:

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

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

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

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[368] John Davis, interview with Graeme Sturgeon, c.1975, Graeme Sturgeon papers Box 7, NGV Research Library.
[369] Donald Brook, 'Art review', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 May 1971, quoted in Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit., p. 164.
[370] The exhibition *The Situation Now: object or post-object Art*? was held at the new CAS Gallery, previously the Central Street Gallery, Sydney, 16 July – 6 August 1971. See Margaret Plant, 'A reading of Robert Morris (with notes on Paul Partos, Guy Stuart and Ti Parks)', *Other Visions*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1970, pp. 36–42.
[371] This edition also included part one of Noel Hutchison's extended essay on 'Australian Sculpture in the 1960s'. The similarity in comments posited by Bruce Pollard and John Davis in their transcribed interviews

and discussions that formed the basis for the exhibition catalogue, *Situation Now*, which happened only a few days after the opening of Davis's first solo exhibition with Watters Gallery in Sydney in May 1971, corresponded to this tentative shift in Davis's work.[372] Morris advocated works that were random, ephemeral, used non-traditional materials (such as latex, grass, dust, found materials) with bodily gesture and attitudes; an embodied perceptual shift that enacted the phenomenological sense of 'being in the world'. While Morris's ideas may not have been directly responsible for Davis's shift, they offered a discursive potential to many artists disenchanted with the emphasis on style progression and formal concerns.

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

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with Terry Smith in the *Situation Now* catalogue, indicated that these writings and concerns had been discussed at artists' gatherings at Pinacotheca in Melbourne.

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

[373] *Tubes and Box* was the embodiment of such Zen qualities as 'limitlessness, unfinishedness and naturalness'. Toshimitsu Hasumi, *Zen in Japanese Art: a way of spiritual experience* (trans. from German by J. Petrie), Philosophical Library, New York, 1962, p. 65. Noel Hutchison in interview stressed the influence of Zen and other eastern philosophies on many artists during the early 1970s.

Whether Davis encountered this amongst the ceramicists who participated in the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial or in discussion with other sculptors (such as Bill Clements who had studied under two major Japanese ceramicists between 1965–1967) or whether he attended the American raku firing specialist Paul Soldner's workshop at the Monash University Summer School in early 1971, is not clear; however, the sensibility is present in this quiet work. For Davis, it was an embodiment of the processes of thinking and making. Like a touchstone, he would return to and rework it, finally exhibiting the completed process in 1974, renamed *Redaction*, in his one-man exhibition at Pinacotheca.

One senses in Davis an urgent need to find the freedom of discovery in his working method, and then to bring this realisation into an alignment that would not jeopardise his professional status. Neil Leach extends Bourdieu's concept of habitus as a practical and dynamic sense embodied-in-action through exploring spatial practices as 'repetitive gestures aimed at overcoming the alienation of all conceptual, abstract space'.[374] This statement seems to have particular resonance with the artistic habitus of a sculptor such as Davis. Returning to investigations into the process of making art became increasingly central to Davis's practice.

Professional recognition

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

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

Academic Board of Studies. Davis's appointment exemplified the logic of an emergent professional field (of restricted cultural production) to maintain its autonomy through control of the definition of what constituted professional practice and the mechanism for its evaluation.[375]

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

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

Overseas in 1972

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

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[375] As Bourdieu stated: "It is impossible to understand the peculiar characteristics of restricted culture without appreciating its profound dependence on the educational system, the indispensable means of its reproduction and growth". See his *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 123.
[376] ibid., p. 252.

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

A valuable Melbourne expatriate community in New York included John Stringer at Museum of Modern Art, artists Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden and Robert Jacks and the gallerist Max Hutchison. Patrick McCaughey, the 'godfather' of the Hampton Mafia, recently returned from a Harkness Scholarship in New York, provided contacts in that city.[377] Elwyn Lynn provided contacts in Germany. Davis and his family departed shortly after Christmas in December 1971 for one year's travelling. Although the proposed tour included Canada, the US, Britain and Europe with side visits to Mexico, Thailand and Bali, he intended to spend three months in New York city, five months travelling through Europe and two months in London.[378]

Jim Doolin, an American painter who had lived and taught in Melbourne for three years between 1965 and 1967, who had been closely associated with Central Street Gallery in Sydney, Gallery A in Melbourne and had exhibited in *The Field* exhibition, was a helpful contact for Davis in Los Angeles as he was teaching at University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). Doolin assisted Davis in getting appointments to meet lecturers at a number of art schools in Los Angeles including UCLA, University of California at Berkeley, Otis Art Institute and CAL Arts where he met John Baldessari and Alan Kaprow: a 'most exciting experiment, under threat of closure … but enormous potential'.[379] Davis was keen to compare curriculum and program developments with the rapidly evolving tertiary art school situation in Victoria.

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[377] Robert Hughes, art critic for *Time* magazine, recently arrived in New York (1970), was originally from Sydney, via Italy and some years in London.

[378] 1972 saw the concurrence of the Venice Biennale and importantly, Documenta 5, under the entrepreneurial direction of Harald Szeeman, whom Davis had met at a meeting of artists associated with Pinocotheca in Melbourne in April 1971. Both Bruce Pollard and the NGV exhibition manager, Graeme Sturgeon (on a Gulbenkian Fellowship) were also travelling overseas in 1972. Sturgeon and Davis had trained together for their TSTC in the late 1950s and Sturgeon had taken over John Stringer's position at the NGV when Stringer was appointed to MOMA in 1970. As part of his professional development, funded by the Gulbenkian Foundation and auspiced by the AGAA, Sturgeon would spend one month working as part of the installation team at Documenta. Szeeman had extended the invitation when in Melbourne in 1971.

[379] John Davis, handwritten notes on art colleges, c. 1972, Davis Estate.

However, it was the extended stay in New York that was pivotal to his practice: 'Three months in New York changed my life.'[380] Davis encountered the SoHo area during the particularly tumultuous and expansive period of the early 1970s. Artists claimed a level of control and autonomy with respect to institutions and institutional discourse: boycotting exhibitions, issuing manifestos, establishing alternative exhibiting venues, supporting the publication *Avalanche* in its claim to promote artists and their working processes through their own words (interviews), rather than through the market driven intermediaries of critics and gallery promotional literature, while at the same time demanding that MOMA incorporate regular exhibition programs for solo contemporary artists within their schedule.[381] For Davis, this politicisation, this critiquing of the

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

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

established institutional networks and the subversive intent of alternative practices, discourses and networks established by artists, was a potent influence on his artistic habitus.

In spring 1972, Davis saw the major MOMA exhibitions of Matisse and Picasso, Richard Long's Project exhibition at MOMA, a group show at John Weber Gallery which included Sol LeWitt's drawings, and many more. Davis's handwritten notes from the Whitney Museum catalogue, *Anti –Illusion: procedures/materials*, revealed his interest in Robert Morris's writings on process, and further notes quote passages from Sol LeWitt's 'Paragraphs on conceptual art' and 'Sentences on conceptual art', probably taken from magazine articles and interviews.[382] His notebooks from this period record quotes from various writers and artists such as Arthur Koestler, Carl Jung and Marcel Duchamp.[383]

The physical contact with works, the sheer volume and range of exhibitions in New York city, the daily, intense discussions with fellow artists, the availability of exhibition catalogues (many of which were in Robert Jacks's SoHo studio), visiting, talking to artist-lecturers at art schools and the immediacy of the interview style and critical stance of *Avalanche* contributed to Davis's experience of the lifestyle of being part of 'a radical counter-public, namely the politicised, alternative-arts community centre in SoHo'.[384]

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categories. I do not want to participate in international exhibitions which do not consult with me as to which work I might want to show', quoted in Lawrence Alloway, '"Reality": Ideology at D5', *Artforum,* vol. 11, no. 2, October 1972, p. 31. Morris's political method would have some bearing on Davis's participation at the 1973 Mildura Sculpturscape.

[382] Davis would have seen Sol LeWitt's *Page Drawings*, which appeared in the spring edition of *Avalanche* 1972. They consisted of a set of instructions for readers to draw directly onto the magazine page. Gwen Allen, 'In on the ground floor: Avalanche and the SoHo art scene, 1970 – 1976', *Artforum*, vol. 44, no. 3, 2005, pp. 215–22. http://www.thefreelibrary.com/In+on+the+ground+floor:+Avalanche+and+the+SoHo+art+scene,+1970-1976-a0138862158, viewed 30 September 2008.

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

[384] Gwen Allen, 'Against criticism: The artist interview in Avalanche magazine, 1970–76', *Art Journal,* vol. 64, no. 3, autumn 2005, p. 51. Davis visited the following art schools in New York: Cooper Union, School of Visual Arts and Pratt Institute. Robert Jacks had catalogues of recent gallery and museum exhibitions, including curator Kynaston McShine's *Information* at MOMA, which investigated post-object and boundary transgressions in recent art practice. As the MOMA archives website indicated: 'In a memorandum to Arthur Drexler dated February 5 1970, Kynaston McShine described the exhibition: "As you know my exhibition 'Information' is primarily concerned with the strongest international art movement

SoHo's autonomous artistic enclave was not only a discursive and practical laboratory, it was in Bourdieu's observation a 'society of artists … [whose] major function … [was] to be its own market'.[385]

In this milieu, with little money and no studio, Davis felt enormous pressure to make work himself, using found 'poor' materials: 'I started using cardboard tubing that was just lying around in the streets, either setting it up in the street or in the tiny apartment.'[386] Davis also rediscovered drawing, which led to a series of notes on the structure of perspective (drawn from the long street views of tenements and warehouses in SoHo). A quote from Sol LeWitt's 'Sentences on conceptual art' (probably drawn from the *Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials* catalogue) in the notebook attests to Davis's intentions:

> If the artist carries through his idea and makes it into visible form, then all the stages in the process are of importance. The idea itself, even if made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product. All the intervening steps – scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed work, models, studies, thoughts, conversations – are of interest. Those that show the thought processes of the artist are sometimes more interesting than the final product.[387]

A paraphrased quote from Arthur Koestler's *The Act of Creation* written in Davis's notebook provides further insight into his thinking: 'There is a tribe which hunts horses and when they return from the hunting nobody asks them how many horses they have caught, but how much space they occupy.'[388] As Davis explained in an interview with Graeme Sturgeon, 'Now as a sculptor that excited me considerably because it was another way of looking at numbers and systems … to put the emphasis on the space was a very interesting way of approaching the problem of containing the horses.'[389] His drawings elucidated incremental grid progressions based on sets of three, incorporating

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or 'style' of the moment which is 'conceptual art,' 'art povera,' 'earthworks,' 'systems,' 'process art,' etc. in its broadest definition. The exhibition will demonstrate the non-object quality of this work and the fact that it transcends the traditional categories of painting, sculpture, photography, film, drawing, prints, etc."' http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/InfoExhibitionRecordsf, viewed 12 February 2009.

[385] Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, op. cit., p. 58.

[386] Alycia Watson, 'Monash sculptor experiments with latex and fibreglass', *Monash Reporter*, Monash University, Melbourne, 7 July 1976 cited in Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit., p. 38.

[387] Le Witt, cited in Davis notebook, 1972, Davis Estate.

[388] Koestler, cited in Davis notebook, 1972, Davis Estate

[389] John Davis, interview with Graeme Sturgeon, 1975, Graeme Sturgeon papers Box 7, NGV Research Library.

tonal variations of the graphite, as well as a series of drawings of cardboard tubes in a linear perspective ratio which he termed 'reductive system'. Another set of drawings extended this particular spatial sequence and incorporated tonal gradations from black (completely covered tube drawing) to its opposite, a tube shape defined by its negative space. The spatial dialectic incorporating presence and absence was a contemporary concern of artists such as Robert Smithson, and his concept of site and non-site, rendering the awareness of space itself a potential subject of sculpture.

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

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

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

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

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[390] Jennifer Licht, *Spaces*, exhibition catalogue, MOMA, New York, 30 December 1969 – 1 March 1970, cited in Julie H. Reiss, *From margin to centre*, ibid., p. 96.

apartment in London for two months, from mid October, until their departure just before Christmas 1972. In June they spent over two days at Harald Szeeman's Documenta 5 in Kassel, Germany, where they met Graeme Sturgeon (exhibition manager at the NGV), who as part of his Gulbenkian Fellowship, had assisted in the installation of the exhibition and assisted the Californian conceptual artist John Baldessari.[391] Although Davis lamented in a letter back to Noel Hutchison in Sydney: 'Where does all this place Australian artists? Kassel 5 points up the great diversity of work being done and the lack of information available in Australia about what's going on', his assessment of his own work in relation to the diversity presented at Documenta was more resolved:

> After all this viewing I feel much better about my own thoughts I'd evolved over the past year and it only remains to toughen up and attack problems more intensely and [sic] exhaustingly.[392]

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

Davis saw a major Barnett Newman retrospective at the Tate Gallery and, possibly more importantly, although he missed the Nigel Greenwood Gallery exhibition *The Book as Art: 1960–1972*, he was shown the exhibits in the gallery stockroom. It was Sol Le Witt's *Four Basic Kinds of Straight Lines*, published in 1969, that elicited diagrammatic instructions in his notebook for a set of 12 x 12 inch drawn graphite squares, filled with combinations of straight lines: a methodical and somewhat obsessive process.[393].

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[391] Davis had met and talked with John Baldessari at CAL Arts in Los Angeles earlier in 1972.
[392] John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, 9 November 1972, Noel Hutchison archive (first quote); John Davis, letter to Robert Jacks, 16 July 1972, Robert Jacks archive.
[393] Davis was clearly working through calculations to see what actual space a completed series of drawings would occupy. Based on his notes, he calculated that in order to cover all possible permutations of 6 x 6 inch graphite square with 1/8 inch spacing between the straight lines, that 48 squares were required to complete the series and this would total '24 feet plus spacing in length', artist notebook, Davis Estate.

LeWitt's obsessive drawing of every permutation of straight lines within sets of squares seemed to reinforce Davis's need for 'repetitive gestures aimed at overcoming the alienation of all conceptual, abstract space' as a way of working through his ideas, while he was travelling.[394] Robert Smithson often used geological and mapping terminology to describe his process. For Davis, the integration of space, duration and process as components of his working method, created a kind of isomorphic mapping between his experience and the representation of that experience in his work.

Background to 1973–1974

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

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[394] Neil Leach, 'Belonging: Towards a theory of identification with space, in Hillier & Rooksby (eds), *Habitus: A Sense of Place*, op. cit., p. 300.

[395] The political and economic scene in Australia between 1971 and 1974 was overshadowed by a series of international crises: the devaluation of most major currencies with the demise of the Bretton Woods Accord, rising inflation and unemployment which led to a global stock market crash from January 1973 to December 1974, itself exacerbated by the OPEC oil shock of late 1973. By 1972, Australia was experiencing rising inflation and high unemployment levels, the highly speculative mining boom had faded, the devaluation of the dollar was causing balance of trade issues leading to claims that Australia was experiencing one of the lowest growth rates in the developed world. Transcript of Leader of Labor Party, the Hon. E. G. Whitlam's policy speech, 'It's time for leadership', 13 November 1972, n.p. http://australianpolitics.com/elections/1972/72-11-13_it%27s-time.shtml, viewed 15 March 2009.

[396] By 1972 during the lead-up to the federal election later in the year, the concurrence of the McMahon Liberal-Country Party government's infighting, indecision and paternalism with Labor's televisual election advertisement 'It's time', featuring an upbeat and catchy soundtrack, sung by a young woman who was backed by a chorus of well known actors, musicians and celebrities, all wearing 'It's time' badges, provided stark evidence of a major generational shift underway.

promise to provide aboriginal land rights, environmental conservation, urban and regional infrastructure development and the arts. Of much symbolic importance to this young generation of new voters and their parents was the promise to immediately abolish conscription. There was a definite sense of empowerment of a new urban, educated and younger generation of Australians, who had shaken off the post-war shackles and were eager to participate in determining Australia's future.

By August 1972 the long reigning, autocratic Victorian premier Henry Bolte retired, handing the leadership of the governing Liberal-Country Party to his more urbane successor, Rupert Hamer. Hamer's tenure as the Victorian premier was founded on environmental and cultural concerns. Hamer established a Ministry for the Arts under his portfolio and in 1973 appointed Eric Westbrook as its inaugural director.[397] Westbrook's new position and his department was symptomatic of an expanding professional and bureaucratised managerial class within the cultural sector, driven by the rapidly developing and complex network of services and organisations that would characterise the next decade in Australia and provide employment to the increased number of tertiary trained arts graduates.

On Australia Day 1973, prime minister Whitlam announced a new interim Australian Council for the Arts made up of twenty-four members, a number of whom were prominent artists. Apart from announcing the new Council's principal objectives as the pursuit of excellence and broader participation in the arts, he indicated that it would exhibit a clear preference for a 'balanced but strong programme of encouragement for experiment and development' based upon 'rapid expansion in the arts over the last few years'. [398] The Council would be served by seven artform boards – theatre, visual and plastic arts, music, literature, crafts, film and television and Aboriginal arts – with control of their own budget allocations, policy development and staffing requirements. Whitlams's commitment to the Council's independence of government, 'arms-length' in

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[397] Westbrook was one of the principal instigators of Victoria's cultural infrastructure expansion under Bolte.
[398] New government arrangements for the arts, see press statement no. 47, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, 26 January 1973. http://www.whitlam/index.php?option=cin_wrapper&Itemid=39 , viewed 2 May 2009.

its decision-making, his commitment to 'experiment and development' and to relatively autonomous artform boards, was founded on the basis of peer-review mechanisms for consultation, selection and policy development.[399] The establishment of the Visual Arts Board (VAB) in effect created a nation-wide 'need' and network for a peer-review process to distribute money and status.

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

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

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[399] ibid.

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

Sculpturscape '73

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

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

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

[400] The reasons for the threatened boycott will be explored in detail in the studies of the director Tom McCullough and sculptor John Davis in this chapter.
[401] Margaret Huxley, ‘Trends in Australian sculpture as revealed by the Mildura Triennial’, op. cit., p. .2.

Victoria from their publicly appointed, volunteer boards of trustees.[402] The control sought by the sculptors during the threatened boycott prior to the opening of Sculpturscape '73 was a further example of the exercise of artistic autonomy. Enshrining cultural policy as a central plank of the government's legislative reform ensured a level of autonomy from the market. Cultural policy was elevated both in terms of money and power through the new arts council and its alignment with new education policies. A complex institutional network had emerged, with greatly enhanced symbolic and economic power. Sculpturscape '73 saw individuals, groups and institutional representatives (public and private), negotiating and competing (in fact, trading their various forms of capital) for preferential positions within this dynamic field of artistic production.

Selection process and the contest for control

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

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

[402] At the 1972 Regional Galleries Association of Victoria (the renamed PGAV) annual meeting held in Geelong, the gallery directors established a sub-committee (of which Tom McCullough was appointed secretary), of directors and managers in order to discuss professional matters, such as touring exhibitions, separate from the formal trustee meeting. McCullough, written correspondence with author, 11 December 2007.

participants born after 1945 (who qualify as baby boomers), half were from Victoria. The baby-boomer generation was a particularly significant cluster as this group would have graduated from university or technical college during the period that great changes were beginning to be initiated in the tertiary education systems, when the issue of improving education and training as well as raising the status and salaries of art teachers and artists was in its ascendency, and when the matter of government support for the arts was gaining traction. The specificity of the high rate of Victorian participation within this age group is of real interest. It cannot just be accounted for because of the relative proximity of Melbourne to Mildura. What is more revealing is that by 1973, of the twenty-six institutions charged with teaching art at a tertiary level nationally, twelve were in Victoria, and the majority of those were in Melbourne.[403] This represented a major investment by both state and federal governments concentrated in one state – the state that by 1973 had fully implemented the transfer of approved technical art colleges to the college of advanced education system of the VIC. The largest state, by population, NSW, had only six colleges by comparison and had not begun the transfer of art schools from technical colleges to the new parallel CAE system. Victorian participation was skewed towards young recent graduates where, for many, representation at Sculpturscape '73 was their first professional exhibition. If some of these young graduates were already teachers or wanting to pursue teaching, exhibitions were a necessary part of what constituted professional practice. What was more significant, participation at Sculpturscape '73 was based on an informal, though nonetheless recognised peer-review process because of McCullough's advisors' recommendations.

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

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

[404] Participation by state: Victoria: pre-1945, 9; post-1945, 20; NSW: pre-1945, 17; post-1945, 9; South Australia: pre-1945, 6; post-1945, 6; NZ: pre-1945 10; post-1945, 4.

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

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

The Labor Government's new cultural policy, which was linked to and underpinned by a financial and policy commitment to expanding educational opportunities, particularly in the tertiary sector, was possibly an unrecognised influence in the selections. Clearly, the educated and informed emerging generation were producing the 'new art'. The emphasis on student participation – whether from art schools, high schools and universities – as assistants and visitors lent further weight to this claim, creating a new audience who would be trained to recognise these new artistic manifestations.

Many of the selectors were also participants. These included, from SASA, Bill Clements, Bill Gregory, Owen Broughton and Tony Bishop; from Sydney, those grouped around Ron Robertson Swann and Ian McKay at the East Sydney Technical College (National Art School) and those in Glebe centred on the University of Sydney, including Noel Hutchison, Noel Sheridan and Donald Brook and, from the University's Department of Architecture, Mike Nicholson and Marr Grounds. In Melbourne, some of the participating selectors were based around the Hampton area: Clive Murray-White, Ken Scarlett, John Davis; all were teaching. McCullough still relied on recommendations from Daniel Thomas, Patrick McCaughey and Lenton Parr.

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

Selected works

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

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

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

[405] Donald Brook, 'Power of the traditional fool', *National Times*, 11 May 1973.

comparison to the sculpture works: 'size was not much of an aid in countering the effects of the harshness and scale of the site'.[406] Sculpturscape '73 posed a formidable challenge to the mainly urban-based artists and students.

The year 1973 saw films being included as artworks for the first time, exploring processes of duration rather than scale. They were scheduled in the small theatre at the Centre. Daniel Thomas had observed in 1970 that some of the most interesting, experimental artwork was being produced, not by artists and students at art school but by architecture students. Five members of the Department of Architecture at the University Sydney participated in 1973: Marr Grounds, senior lecturer; Imants Tillers, part-time tutor in Design; Aleks Danko, part-time tutor in the Department; Alex Tzannes was completing his honours year and Michael Nicholson (junior) was in his third year of architecture. Nicholson senior, who had previously shown in the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize, was also a part-time lecturer at the Department of Building and Architecture at the University of New South Wales and would later, in 1974, take up a temporary lectureship in the history of architecture at the Power Institute. Domenico de Clario had also studied architecture for two years at Melbourne University between 1966 and 1967 and had won an Italian Government Scholarship, allowing him to study painting and printmaking in Milan and Urbino. He returned to Melbourne in 1969, having been directly exposed to the arte povera movement; by the time of Sculpturscape '73, he was a lecturer at the School of Art, Preston Institute of Technology. What these artists brought with them was their exposure to systems theory based upon recursive processes that enabled them to define their relationship with their environment. [407] Hans Haacke's comment that 'a sculpture that physically reacts to its environment *is no longer to be regarded as an*

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

object … It thus merges with the environment in a relationship that is better understood as a 'system' of interdependent processes', embraced the response of these artists to the challenge offered by the environment at Sculpturscape.[408]

Donald Brook and Marr Grounds had trained as artists through the university systems in Britain and the United States respectively; their arrival in NSW coincided with an increasing pressure for the professional training of artists to be taken out of the technical college system with its emphasis on practical skill sets and placed within an autonomous tertiary system. The establishment of the Sydney University Art Workshops (colloquially referred to as the Tin Sheds) was a joint initiative of Brook and Grounds to try and incorporate an experimental kind of art research enterprise within the Power Institute, in sly defiance of Bernard Smith.[409] Although in principle open to any member or student from any faculty, with respect to Sculpturscape '73, it was the link with architecture students and lecturers that was significant. Thus, the links between the Tin Sheds and Mildura and between the University of Sydney and Adelaide institutions were established as early as 1970.[410]

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[408] Hans Haake quoted in Jack Burnham, 'System Esthetics', in Burnham, *Great Western Saltworks – Essays on the Meaning of Post-Formalist Art*, George Braziller, New York, 1974, p. 20.

[409] The Tin Sheds evolved under the combined auspices of Donald Brook and Marr Grounds from 1969. A more detailed history can be found in Therese Kenyon, *Under a hot tin roof: art, passion and politics at the Tin Sheds Art Workshop*, State Library of New South Wales Press in association with Power Publications, Sydney, 1995.

[410] The expanding universities became important employers for artists. Aleks Danko, on completion of his Diploma of Fine Arts in Sculpture in 1971 at SASA, came to Sydney. Danko was offered a part-time tutoring position in the Department of Architecture at the University of Sydney between 1972 and 1973, working alongside Imants Tillers and Marr Grounds; at the Tin Sheds with Joan Grounds, Bert Flugelman, Noel Sheridan and Tim Burns; and associating with Donald Brooks and David Saunders from the Power Institute of Fine Arts; many of these people participated in Sculpturscape '73 at Mildura. The drift south to Adelaide began with Bert Flugelman in early 1973 when he accepted a position to teach sculpture at SASA. By 1974, Donald Brook and David Saunders had been offered professorships in their respective fields, Brooks being offered the Foundation Chair of Visual Arts at Flinders University in Adelaide. Based on his experience of the difficulties of setting up an experimental 'laboratory' within a University system, Brook formed a group of like-minded individuals in the Adelaide art scene and established an independent space, the Experimental Art Foundation, which came into existence at the end of 1974. Noel Sheridan, then teaching at the Tin Sheds and also at the National Art School (East Sydney Technical College) was invited to become the foundation's director in early 1975. In their new configurations, they gathered at the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial in March 1975.

As noted above, theoretical incursions from disciplines outside art history were evident in 1973. Marr Grounds's interest in environmental theory, flowcharts and modelling systems, part of the curriculum he taught at the Department of Architecture, was evident in the diagrams for his artworks and in the work of his associates who attended Sculpturscape '73. Donald Brook began to develop his concept of 'post-object art' in 1969 with 'Flight from the object', the second Power Institute public lecture. 'Post-object' as a term appeared in Jack Burnham's writings in the late 1960s; it was also used by Donald Kashan in his article, 'The seventies: post-object art'.[411] This followed an article by Donald Brook, also in the September 1970 issue of *Studio International*, referencing the impact of Christo and *Wrapped Coast* on the Australian art scene in 1969: 'The post-object era was both initiated and internationally sponsored by around 1970 – already locally anticipated, but not yet locally identified or understood.'[412] In writing the catalogue essay for a post-object art exhibition at the Experimental Art Foundation in 1976, he described his position as starting from a 'point from which many Australian post-object artists have started: a point of deep disenchantment with the art they have inherited – with its forms, its techniques, its attitudes, its surrounding institutions and its meaning. The disenchantment was not with its *style*.'[413] His concluding paragraph began manifesto-like: 'We take it to be the proper role of art – a role that Post-object art already begins to adopt – to provide experimental models or metaphors of possible forms of life

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[411] Donald Karshan, 'The seventies: post-object art', *Studio International*, vol. 180, no. 925, September 1970, pp. 69–70. The essay had originally appeared in the catalogue for the exhibition, *Conceptual art and conceptual aspects*, curated by Karshan for the New York Culture Centre, 10 April – 25 August 1970. The exhibition included works by Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden.

[412] Brook's lecture was partly a challenge to Clement Greenberg, who gave the first Power lecture in 1968 (he was in Australia from16 May to 25 June 1968 having visited Brisbane, Perth, Canberra, Hobart, Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney): the lecture was titled 'Avant-garde attitudes'. Familiar with Greenberg's 'Recentness of sculpture' in *Art International* and Michael Fried's polemic 'Art and Objecthood', published in *Artforum*, also in 1967, Brook took issue with Greenberg's emphasis on 'the truth of artistic quality' and his dismissal of much recent art – assemblage, pop, environment, minimalism – as 'novelty art'. Donald Brook, 'The local context', *Post-object art, Australia and New Zealand: A survey*, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, 1976, n.p.; and Elwyn Lynn, 'Clement Greenberg sees Australia', *Art and Australia*, vol. 6, no. 2, spring 1968, p. 151.

[413] Donald Brook, 'Post-object art in Australia and New Zealand', *Art, Representation, Education: A selection of writing on related themes*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth, 1992, p. 6; originally a catalogue essay for *The Post-Object Show*, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, 1976.

that are public in principle and subject to ongoing criticism.'[414] For many artists, Sculpturscape '73 offered an experimental field to test these possibilities.

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

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

However, a number of works suffered from the harsh environmental thematic of the 'post-Christo landscape' that was Sculpturscape.[417] The display of small object-based

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[414] ibid, p.14
[415] Donald Brook, 'Post-object art', *Current Affairs Bulletin*, no. 49, 1973, pp. 275–82.
[416] Quotes from John Armstrong and Ken Unsworth respectively in Huxley, 'Trends in Australian Sculpture as revealed by the Mildura Sculpture Triennial', op.cit., appendix I.
[417] Tom McCullough, letter to Donald Brook, 22 September 1972, Donald Brook archive.

works in flapping orange marquees destroyed the integrity of a number of works. Neither the gallery nor its lawns, the consecrated art precinct as far as some artists and many locals were concerned, were offered for display. This 'experiment … to move a serious, selective exhibition completely away from a museum-bound atmosphere', to create a new context for sculpture, had been McCullough's intention.[418]

Audience: public or professional

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

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

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[418] Tom McCullough, 'Introduction to a catalogue of exhibits in Sculpturscape '73', *Sculpturscape '73: The 5th Mildura Sculpture Triennial*, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, 1973, n.p.
[419] Bernard Boles, *Nation Review*, 4–10 May 1973, quoted in Noel Hutchison, 'Sculpturscape '73', *Art and Australia,* op. cit., p. 76.
[420] Tom McCullough, Introduction, *Sculpturscape '73: TheMildura Sculpture Triennial*, exhibition catalogue, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, 1973, n.p. This simple black and white catalogue came out at the time of the opening of the 5th Triennial. It differs from the part-colour catalogue, *Sculpturscape '73: An Exhibition in Mildura*, *Australia*, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, Vic., 1975, produced with Australia Council funds, which was launched at the 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial.

the ordinary, dispersed and discarded. A lot of money had been spent developing the Mildura Arts Centre with paid professional staff. They wanted to be elevated with durable, discrete sculptures of quality and felt palpably excluded, 'conned' even, by these incomprehensible works.[421]

Clearly the audience was not the disenfranchised regional public. Specifically, the artists were responding to the conceptual and physical challenge of Sculpturscape with works aimed at a metropolitan, art-informed audience. With the election of the Whitlam Labor Government just four months earlier, and the consequent boost of confidence to the art world and the Australian Council for the Arts, combined with the national interest generated by the threatened boycott against the French nuclear tests, the Triennial provided a celebratory gathering point for the Australian visual arts world. Functioning like a 'salon', Sculpturscape '73 enabled 'genuine articulations between the fields' of political power, education and art that would 'help to determine the direction of the generosities of state patronage' that became fully manifest in 1973.[422]

Much had happened since the 1970 Triennial. The AGNSW reopened at the end of 1972 after a major refurbishment and the Sydney Opera House was scheduled for opening later in 1973 with the first Biennale of Sydney to open with it. Both the NGV and AGNSW senior curators were planning contemporary exhibitions and the VAB was preparing to

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[421]There was much coverage and exchange of opinions in several issues of *Studio International* magazine in 1972 as a result of the Peter Stuyvesant Foundation support for 16 British object sculptors to produce and install works in public spaces throughout Britain, to mixed receptions by the public. Two works both located in Cambridge were subject to particular public outrage and vandalism. Although the project's intention, and thus the intended brief to sculptors, was 'to explore the potential of relating sculpture to what has become a largely ignored context – i.e. an urban situation and its *public*', the disparity between public and sculptor was evident. See Jeremy Rees & Tony Stokes, 'Public Sculpture?', *Studio International* vol. 185, no. 952, February 1973, p. 47. The attitudes expressed by some sculptors indicated that the public were either not considered as part of a dialogue or they were the problem: 'The problem of public sculpture is largely with the public – not with sculpture' and 'I didn't really consider the nature of the opportunity as being other than a chance to extend my own experience of sculpture.' Lawrence Alloway's response: 'In all these statements very simple views of autonomy of the artist and the work are maintained which, so far as public sculpture is concerned, is like talking Welsh on prime time.' See Lawrence Alloway, 'The public sculpture problem', *Studio International,* vol. 184, no. 948, October 1972, pp. 123–124; also Jeremy Rees, 'Public Sculpture', *Studio International*, vol. 184, no. 946, July–August 1972, pp. 10–40. The British public response mirrored similar feelings of alienation in Mildura.

[422] Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, op. cit., pp. 51, 48.

select artists to represent Australia at the Sao Paulo Biennale, also later in 1973.[423] For the participating sculptors, this audience, this professional grouping, presented an important opportunity for professional development and networking at the gathering at Sculpturscape.

Acquisitions and Grants to artists

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

Continuing the largesse with four $500 grants, McCullough reported, 'Non-permanent works awarded VAB grants by the Purchase Panel' were awarded to Peter Cole, *Pool*; Domenico de Clario, *Untitled*; Ross Grounds, *Environmental Shaft*; and Michael W. Nicholson, *Saxhorn Variations*, a participatory event (Figures 51 & 54).[424] The significant and generous funding allocations from the Australia Council were in stark contrast to previous triennials where funds for prizes and acquisitions were raised through local donations and some corporate sponsorship. Fund allocations for acquisitions were further highlighted during Sculpturscape '73, when the Mildura Arts Centre became 'the recipient of a $120,000 memorial bequest … to be spent on purchasing painting and

[423] Daniel Thomas and Frances McCarthy curated *Recent Australian Art*, 18 October to 18 November 1973, at AGNSW; and Brian Finemore and Graeme Sturgeon curated *Object and Idea: new work by [six] Australian artists* at the NGV.
[424] *Sculpturscape '73: an exhibition in Mildura, Australia*, op. cit., n.p.

sculpture'. Five works from the triennial were purchased, bringing the total amount of funds provided to purchase works that year to $15,000.[425]

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

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[425] The five works purchased from the bequest funds were by Owen Broughton, Marc Clark, John Gardner, Vlase Nikoleski and Bernard Sahm. See Huxley, 'Trends in Australian sculpture as revealed by the Mildura Sculpture Triennial', op. cit., p. 20. The total expenditure on acquisitions of $15,000 at current value is equivalent to $107,300. This represented a considerable expenditure on contemporary Australian art, let alone sculpture, for any publicly funded institution at that time.
[426] Maureen Gilchrist, 'Art basks uneasily in Mildura's sunshine', *National Times*, 16–21 April 1973, p. 26.
[427] ibid. However for Burns, the destruction of the minefield by Council workers was not a failure. He had proved his point: any physical engagement with the work would result in its eventual destruction.
[428] Paraphrase of Daniel Thomas, 'Mildura, McCullough and performance', *Artlink*, vol. 13, no. 2, p. 28.

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From previous page:
Figure 44: top, John Armstrong*, Big Rack* 1972, creosoted hardwood, varnished toilet seats, hardware, 213.5 x 457.5 x 122 cms.
Figure 45: middle, Tony Bishop, *Arcadia* 1972, aluminium and steel, 3 units of 183, 91.5 x 91.5 cms. Collection Mildura Arts Centre. In the background, Chris Carney, *4 plus 4, Time Piece* 1973, ciment fondue and welded steel, 396.5 x 91.5 x 91.5 cms each unit.
Figure 46: bottom, Marc Clark, *Portal* 1973, painted steel, 327.86 x 274.5 x 183 cms. Visible in the background is Eva Pachuka's*, Horn* 1973, fibreglass, 335.5 x 213.5 (diameter) cms.

This page:
Figure 47: Kaye Dineen, *Untitled* 1973, fibreglass, flock, tulle and sequins, 305 x 151.5 cms main sculpture with scattered pieces of variable dimensions.
Figure 48: Marlene Creaser, *Transparent Plastic* 1973, plastic tubing and rope, 244 x 228.2 (diameter) cms.

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Figure 49: top, Bert Flugelman*, Australian Cottage* 1973, reinforcing mesh, 152 x 915 x 915 cms.
Figure 50: middle, Noelene Lucas, *Untitled* 1973, angle iron, plastic, satin and mixed media, 305 x 305 x 183 cms.
Figure 51: bottom, Ross Grounds, installation shot, *Untitled* [later accounts refer to this as *Environmental Well*] 1973, wood, galvanised iron, hessian bags filled with sand, wire, rope, mesh and creatures [doves], Depth: 610 cms , diameter: 244 cms. Photo: Ken Scarlett.

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Figures 52a and 52b: top, David Morrisey, '*1962'* 1973, galvanised iron and wood. Dimensions according to the catalogue entry: "8 to 16 cubic metres".

Figure 53: bottom, Ken Unsworth, installation shot, *Concrete Slab Construction* 1973, compacted earth, reinforced concrete, 350.29 x 701.5 x 289.29 cms.

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Figure 54: top, Peter Cole, *Pool* 1973, light blue tiles, stainless steel tubing, water, water filter system, chlorine tablets, grass, cyclone wire fencing and sprinklers, 200,78 x 366 x391.40 cms.

Figure 55: bottom, Ian McKay, *Cascade* 1973, painted steel, 315.16 x 112.64 x 315.16 cms. Collection Mildura Arts Centre.

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Figure 56: top, John Davis, *Tree Piece* 1973, installation using a group of six trees on site, papier mache, green baling twine, polythene sheeting with pockets filled with grass clippings, latex sheet, small sticks, canvas, dimensions variable.
Figure 57: bottom, John Davis setting up *Unrolled Piece* at Sculpturscape '73.

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Figure 58: left, John Davis, *Unrolled* 1973, canvas with pockets, 49 ceramic rods partly glazed with opaque white. Canvas: 1525 cm (l), each ceramic rod 40 cm (l). Collection Mildura Arts Centre.

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

Funding in 1973

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

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

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

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

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[429] 'While it did not fund artists directly, the Bolte government [had] assembled a public structure which would support the experimental and avant-garde activity of the years that followed.' Christopher Heathcote, *A Quiet Revolution: The rise of Australian Art 1946–1968*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1995, p. 50.
[430] Patrick McCaughey, 'Natural setting for exciting sculpture', undated and unattributed news clipping, c. 1973, sent to the author by Tom McCullough.
[431] Maureen Gilchrist, 'Art basks uneasily in Mildura's sunshine', op. cit., p. 26.

an enormous full moon that encouraged talk of a renaissance in sculpture under the new Australia Council's patronage.'[432]

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

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

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

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[432] Tom McCullough, 'Mildura's sculptural heritage: An enchanted garden', *Artlink,* vol. 13, no. 2, June–August 1993, p. 25.
[433]'What not to have', *Sunraysia Daily*, 14 April 1973 reproduced in Huxley, 'Trends in Australian sculpture as revealed by the Mildura Sculpture Triennial', op. cit., Appendix IX.
[434] Gilchrist, 'Art basks uneasily in Mildura's sunshine', op. cit., p. 26, and Noel Hutchison, 'Sculpturscape'73', *Art and Australia*, op. cit., p. 76.
[435] Gilchrist, ibid.

triennials away from the local city council and local businesses to state and federal government agencies. In earlier triennials, prize money and backing was usually sourced from local companies, such as Mildara Wines in 1961 to 1967 and in 1967 BP Australia provided significant sponsorship for acquisitions. Although freight forwarding continued to be supported by a number of companies, the emphasis from 1973 onwards on site-specific works and the creation of a section of the site devoted to student and spontaneous installation responses, in effect devalued the freight contribution. Thus the funding renaissance contributed to the decline of local ownership of and investment in the triennial.

John Davis 1973–1974

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

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

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[436] Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government 1972–1975*, op.cit., p. 553.
[437] ibid., p. 555.
[438] These included chairman of the Visual and Plastic Arts Board, John Bailey, director of the AGSA; chairman of the Crafts Board, Marea Gazzard (participated in 1967 and 1970 Mildura sculpture events) and also president of the Crafts Council of Australia. Members of the Visual and Plastic Arts Board included Nigel Lendon, Patrick McCaughey, Ron Robertson Swann, Lenton Parr, Udo Sellbach, James Mollison, acting director of the Australian National Gallery, David Thomas, director of Newcastle Region Art Gallery and chair of the newly formed Regional Galleries Association of NSW and respected artists Fred Williams, Leonard French and James Gleeson.

led by the flagship Australian Council for the Arts, were developed to nurture artists with the added goal of creating a new kind of educated and informed society, imbued with the appropriate cultural capital to appreciate the arts. As Whitlam acknowledged, 'even with the most generous and imaginative schemes the arts could not be grafted onto a society that was barren and hostile to them'.[439]

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

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

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

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[439] Whitlam, op. cit., pp. 553–4.
[440] Whitlam, op. cit., p. 561
[441] John Davis, in a letter to Robert Jacks, dated 13 March 1973, commented: 'we are also looking for a house to buy as money is easy to borrow now', Robert Jacks archive.

with new ideas and a refreshing liberalism.'[442] For Davis, the beginning of 1973 was indicative of the extent of the changes that had taken place since he left Melbourne at the end of 1971. His one-year sabbatical – a major investment in his own professional development – had resulted in improved status; he had been invited by his peers to take up a new position with a better salary in a recognised college of advanced education. Davis had also returned with a stronger sense of purpose towards his own practice – 'the environment of New York taught me to improvise … my concept then became about the process of making art …and made me reassess the importance of materials' – and a strong sense of the potential of artists in negotiating control over their artistic environment. The Labor Government's commitment to the Australian Council for the Arts provided added endorsement of his professional confidence.

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

> John Davis and I returned from a trip to Mildura on Sunday 14 January 1973 annoyed at the prospect of having a motley collection of French sculpture sharing what we considered to be *our own Australian show* [my italics]. John thought of the nuclear protest but it was as much a nationalism concern as far as we were concerned ... It was this act that established Mildura as a unique artist oriented exhibition … The Mildura spirit was probably born accidentally in January 1973.[443]

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[442] John Davis, handwritten notes, 'Time and place – some thoughts on three art schools', n.p., Davis Estate. Davis's resignation letter to Harold Farey at Caulfield Technical College was written on 16 January, two days after he had returned from a reconnaissance trip to Mildura, in preparation for Sculpturscape '73, with Clive Murray-White.

[443] Clive Murray-White, letter to Graeme Sturgeon, undated, Graeme Sturgeon archive, NGV Research Library, Box 9. *Modern French Sculpture* was hardly a 'motley collection' of works. Murray-White's letter was probably written c. 1983–4, in response to Sturgeon's research for his publication, *Sculpture at Mildura: the story of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, 1961–1982*, published in 1985 and funded by the Mildura City Council. The French exhibition comprised 46 small works. It was a conservative selection and apart from Cesar's *Thumb*, did not include any of the artists who were part of the early 1960s New Realism group. It is quite possible that an earlier exhibition, *Scultura Italiana*, toured by the Peter Stuyvesant Trust for the Development of the Arts through nine state and regional galleries between 1971–72 and which had

Davis was committed to Labor's election policy including the government's anti-nuclear proliferation policy and its threat to take action against the French Government to the International Court of Justice if further nuclear tests were planned in the Pacific area. Although this alignment with government policy became the dominant reason for what would amount to a threatened boycott of the triennial by a number of sculptors, many of whom were part of McCullough's core selectors, the fundamental issue at stake was control of the context in which artists' works were exhibited. Davis was certainly drawing on his knowledge of the militancy of New York artists in regard to controlling the context of how their work was exhibited and also controlling access to works.

In a letter to Tom McCullough about the boycott, Davis clarified his position.[444] He maintained that his primary objection was political, reiterating that he would not be associated with any project initiated by the French Government. However, his concern that the exhibition of French sculpture was not an integral part of the Sculpturscape initiative, that it was a separate exhibition which changed the whole basis upon which artists had originally agreed to participate in Sculpturscape '73, offered a more complex reading. He was not opposed to international participation, as he stated: 'an integrated international show planned as such would have been a great thing, particularly if planned

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

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

around philosophical or concept areas'.[445] His closing recommendation to McCullough revealed the real issue at stake:

> I think that Australian and New Zealand sculptors, critics etc should have been approached for attitudes and ideas to assist in the planning and direction of the Triennale.[446]

For Davis and his peer group of sculptors, it was not only that they identified the Mildura Sculpture Triennials as 'our own Australian show', more significantly, having gained the right as selectors to contribute to a peer-review process of the participants, they now wanted the right to determine the context and manner in which their works, and hence their professional reputations, were presented. The consultative approach that Davis advocated between McCullough and his core group of sculptors would become an important signature of future triennials. Further, his suggestion that exhibitions be planned around 'attitudes and ideas' revealed the change, already instigated with Sculpturscape '73, to move away from survey-type exhibitions of works and styles already in existence, to thematic approaches that required innovative responses from participants. In a letter to the Regional Galleries Association of Victoria meeting in June, Davis requested that all regional galleries should consider more collaborative approaches with artists in developing exhibitions.[447] Davis's demand was symptomatic of a bid by artists to exert greater control in an increasingly autonomous art system and indicative of Bourdieu's observation that only in a field that was already autonomous would participants assert that autonomy was important.[448]

Davis at Sculpturscape

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

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[445] John Davis, letter to Tom McCullough, ibid. This was borne out in the participation of three English sculptors, whom Tom McCullough had met in England during his 1970 trip, and whose works were organised by the British Council. Their works were created in response to the Sculpturscape brief that had been sent out to Australian artists.
[446] John Davis, letter to Tom McCullough, ibid.
[447] John Davis, letter to The Chairman, Regional Galleries Conference, n.d. circa June 1973, Davis archive, Box A, Correspondence: Galleries/Regional.
[448] Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, op. cit., p. 61.

forged and given some theoretical underpinning by his New York experience (Figures 56, 57, 58). *Tree Piece* extended the investigations attempted with his *Grass Process Works* series at Heidi in November 1971 and *Unrolled* adapted the use of the ceramic rods from *Tubes and Boxes*, 1971: both works eschewed 'finish' preferring the use of low technology and easily manipulated and available materials (Figure 59).

Davis's concern with systems had moved from his earlier series replication to a more nuanced enquiry into perceptual systems. Through a methodical process, Davis explored the use of what he termed 'a constant factor' in each of his processes in order 'to emphasise the readjustment of the variable [factors] to it'.[449] Variables could include duration and the changes implicated in this factor as well as chance or indeterminacy. He was searching for new metaphors for conceiving of space.

In *Tree Piece*, Davis selected six tree trunks of similar age and girth, closely located on the flood plain area. In his drawings, the constant factor was the trunk girth. Around each of these trunks he wrapped various 'non aesthetic' materials – as he described, 'some introduced to the site, some found on the site and utilised' – such as strips of latex, laced canvas, sisal twine, papier mâché newsprint, cut tree branches and grass clippings from the nearby lawn tennis courts stuffed into polythene casings.[450]

> … I wanted to present a new set of criteria rather than acceptable aesthetic objects … to be non-commercial, non-limiting, a kind of free wheeling that was adaptable to almost any site …[451]

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

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[449] John Davis, handwritten notes, Mildura Piece April '73. Davis archive, Box B, Private Notes: Sculpture/Art.
[450] ibid.
[451] John Davis, interview with Graeme Sturgeon, c. 1975, Graeme Sturgeon archive, Box 7, NGV Research Library.

intended.[452] The weathering and decay activated awareness of a larger constant, that of the specific place itself, both contemporarily and historically located, a flood plain of the life-giving Murray River. Several weeks after the initial installation of *Tree Piece*, Davis took a series of photographs detailing the disintegration and changes of the various materials wrapped around the tree trunks. Unlike many other participants, for Davis, Mildura was a return to a familiar landscape. The ease was evident: 'I enjoyed putting up the work enormously, working outside and not concerned with breakages and surface for a change, with plenty of flexibility.'[453]

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

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[452] In a verbatim transcription of Graeme Sturgeon's interview with John Davis, 1975, Davis stated: 'I hadn't intended it but I seemed to get a feeling for fetish elements in the landscape and perhaps, because the landscape was so ancient, probably had so much Aboriginal tradition, the kind of pressures on that landscape have come to bear on the work and therefore it took on more than what I intended – a very objective work but rather it became almost a mystical piece of work.' Sturgeon archive, ibid.
[453] John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, 10 May 1973, Hutchison archive.

For him horizontal extension, literally 'rolled out', invoked a 'landscape mode' rather than a 'specific object' order of sculpture.[454]

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

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

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[454] Robert Morris, 'Notes on sculpture 4: Beyond objects', *Artforum,* vol. 7, no. 8, April 1969, pp. 50–4.
[455] 'Visual and Plastic Arts Board, 9 March Agenda Papers [circa 1970]', op. cit.
[456] 'The Boards, hastily brought together for a series of policy and finance meetings, managed with difficulty to prepare budgetary proposals for incorporation in departmental estimates by the April deadline. The Council moved rapidly to assemble a draft report which was tabled in Parliament by the Prime Minister on 24 May [1973] …' Chairman's Report, Australian Council for the Arts, *First Annual Report,* January–December 1973, Canberra, pp. 9–10.

However, for Davis, 'non-commercial' also signified that he was no longer concerned with producing discrete objects. He was following Robert Morris's dictum that art was no longer 'a form of work that results in a finished product'.[457] The writings and works of Robert Morris and Sol LeWitt offered Davis a kind of theoretical rationale upon which to launch his newfound freedom with sculpture that explored metaphors for space; low technology, non-discrete and responsive to place. Davis displayed a conscious and complex balancing of competing artistic and professional dispositions in response to the articulate gathering of a new autonomous field at Mildura's Sculpturscape in April 1973. This autonomous field of artistic production, a parallel government-supported market, for sculpture, had its genesis in the expanding field of autonomous tertiary education of which he was an integral part.

Assessment of Davis: 1973–1974

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

His involvement with the selection of participants and the manner of exhibition at the Mildura Sculpturscape was indicative of a pattern of greater artist control, not only within the Mildura Sculpture Triennials. Visual artists were vocal in their concerns that the VAB maintained its autonomy within the Australia Council and that artists' representation on the board and in policy development was seen to be driving the agenda.[458] With VAB funding available for curatorial program development at the Ewing Gallery at the University of Melbourne, the directors established an advisory collective body that included 'Fine Arts academics and students; staff and students from tertiary art schools; and independent artists, art historians, critics and curators … to forge initial contacts with potential audiences and contributors while channelling diverse views and theoretical

[457] Morris, 'Notes on sculpture 4', op. cit., p. 54.
[458] Chairman's Report, Australian Council for the Arts, *First Annual Report*, op. cit., p. 9.

insights into the exhibition program.'[459] Davis was appointed for the two years of the collective's existence (1974–75).[460] His concern, as he outlined in his letter to the Regional Galleries Association of Victoria, that curators and gallery directors needed to be more conceptually thematic in their exhibition planning, addressing the current 'attitudes' inherent in artists' work, and also more consultative with artists, was evidently incorporated in spirit in the series of 'Ideas' exhibitions that spanned the Ewing Gallery's program between 1974–75.[461] The inclusion of staff and students from tertiary art schools with those responsible for generating the discourse for this radical 'new art' – many of them academically associated with the university – was indicative of an internal logic of autonomous field behaviour. The Ewing Gallery program, like the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, offered a site in which the production, verification, exhibition, interpretation and reception of this 'new art' and artists could be seen in operation and, importantly, where the audience and the participants were most often interchangeable. The new system of federal government patronage reinforced the inherent disposition towards 'non-commercial' of Davis and his sculptor-educator colleagues, through its support of 'avant-garde' and innovative art practices by professionally practicing artists. This support acknowledged that there was little or no external market for such work and that, in itself, this was a necessary process of differentiation from the commercial market.

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

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[459] Carolyn Barnes, 'Art world changes in the 1970s', in Helen Vivian (ed), *When you think of art: the Ewing and George Paton Gallery, 1971-2008*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 2008, p. 150.
[460] In 1974 the Ewing Gallery collective members included Janine Burke, Fred Cress, John Davis, Suzanne Davies, Mary Eagle, Elizabeth Gertzakis, Maureen Gilchrist, Grazia Gunn, Memory Holloway, Alun Leach-Jones, Norbert Loeffler, Charles Merewether, Clive Murray-White, Meredith Rogers and Kiffy Rubbo. In 1975, members included Laurie Bendle, Kiffy Rubbo, Lynne Cooke, Suzanne Davies, John Davis, Dom de Clario, Alun Leach Jones, Norbert Loeffler, Rick McCracken, Charles Merewether, Clive Murray-White, Rosie O'Shea, Meredith Rogers, Ann Stephen and David Wilson.Ibid., p. 162.
[461] The 'Ideas' series of exhibitions at the Ewing Gallery included *The Letter Show: An Ideas Show* and *Boxes: An Ideas Show*, both 1974; and *Grids: An Ideas Show*, 1975. As Clive Murray-White adduced, '[we never] really considered our entries to be ART. They were just evidence of how our thinking process worked'. Email exchange between Carolyn Barnes and Clive Murray-White, 6 June 2006, ibid., p. 152.

which formed part of the opening ceremonies of the Sydney Opera House in late 1973. However, of more direct significance to Davis was the VAB grant of $1300 as 'assistance to purchase equipment for sculptures', which contributed towards the cost of building and equipping a backyard studio in his new house.[462]

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

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[462] The Visual Arts Board approved $258,000 to 86 visual artists. 'Grants to artists', press statement no.150, 23 November 1973, http://www.whitlam.org/collection/1973/19731123_art_grants/index.html, viewed 2 November 2006. The 1973 grant of $1300 is equivalent to $9900 in 2008.

[463] John Davis, in a letter to Robert Jacks in New York: 'Big event this month – *Recent American Art* – conversations with Carl Andre, Bob Irwin and Yvonne Rainer. Seems funny to meet them here, probably more difficult in the US', 11 March 1974, Robert Jacks archive.

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

for a particular experience and could be said to have an isomorphic relationship to both the representation and the experience.

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

Davis was conscious of an audience in the making and presentation of his exhibition at Pinacotheca. In interview he spoke of wanting the audience to engage with his work through posing dilemmas; should the work be rolled out or tied up, whether material should be taken out of boxes or pockets and looked at, handled even.[466] However 'free-wheeling', educative and democratic this proposition sounded, it presumed a particular kind of familiarity with current conventions in art practice. The highly differentiated, contemporary audience that frequented Pinacotheca could not have been more different from the 'local guerillas' of Mildura who had destroyed Ti Park's *Egg-one* and broken the ceramic rods in Davis's *Unrolled Piece* at Sculpturscape '73.[467] Although the exhibition received a good critical response in the Melbourne press, sales were not the

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[465] Singerman, *Art Subjects*, op. cit., p. 200. McCullough's sculptor-advisors rejected McCullough's proposal for an exhibition entitled 'Artist/Artisan' that explored the porous boundaries between the making of art and craft. They did not want their hard won professional and intellectual status tainted by association with the idea of craft skills.
[466] John Davis, interviewed by Graeme Sturgeon, c. 1975, Graeme Sturgeon archives, Box 7, NGV Research Library.
[467] John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, 10 May 1973, Noel Hutchison archive.

objective.[468]. In preliminary notes, Davis proposed to 'place any given number of ceramic rods … in a random or systematised arrangement in a "monumental position" in … sites of accepted prestige.' *The Artist's Dream*, 1974, was a series of fifteen photographs documenting the journey of a ceramic rod placed outside the entrances to fourteen galleries in Melbourne (as the fifteenth gallery was the NGV, a bronze rod was placed at its entrance). It was an ironic comment on the competitive and highly selective criteria that determined an artist's professional curriculum vitae and symbolic status.

Tom McCullough 1973–1974

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

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

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[468] Donald Brook, the recently appointed Professor of Visual Arts at Flinders University in Adelaide, purchased *Inching* and an earlier photographic series of works, *Grass Process at Heidi*, 1971 for Flinders University collection of Australian post-object art; and Daniel Thomas included a showing of *A Tearing Work* in his session on Artist Filmmakers at AGNSW in November 1974.
[469] Tom McCullough, 'Mildura's sculptural heritage: an enchanted garden', *Artlink,* op. cit., p. 22.

Government, 'three days before last Christmas [1972]'. [470] The opening of the triennial (and therefore the French sculpture exhibition) was scheduled for 7 April 1973, just over three months away. Although he briefly notified selected artists of this development, most were on holidays. It was not until February 1973, in a more detailed newsletter to all participating artists, that McCullough actually spelled out what his plans were:

> These works are particularly welcome as they are the first major international contribution to Mildura's triennial exhibitions, but they will be displayed in the Arts Centre galleries instead of the sculpturscape site for organisational reasons.[471]

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

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

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[470] Laurie Thomas, 'In the shadow of a mushroom cloud', *The Australian*, 3 March 1973.
[471] ibid.

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

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

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

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[472] Noel Hutchison, letter to Tom McCullough, 24 March 1973, McCullough archive PA97/33, Box 9, SLV.
[473] McCullough, Introduction, *Sculpturscape'73: the Mildura Sculpture Triennial*, op. cit.

Local support

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

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

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

The acquisition of twelve contemporary Australian works for $15,000 was a remarkable achievement for a regional gallery and represented a considerable contribution to Mildura's growing sculpture collection. The combination of increased funding for acquisitions and evident state and federal support for the event confirmed government

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[474] When the time came to interpret installation instructions on behalf of a number of artists: 'Cooperation between people working on the site was remarkable and different sculptors, art students and workmen often patiently helped install ambitious projects according to the directions of the exhibitor himself, or his written instructions as interpreted by an Arts Centre staff.' And further on, 'The value of the participatory aspect of Sculpturscape '73 cannot be over-estimated. Exchange of ideas, experience and social broadening at various levels occurred within the ordinary Mildura community.' See *Sculpturscape '73: an exhibition in Mildura, Australia*, op. cit.

patronage as a major new client for Australian sculptors and their work. The unprecedented level of government funding for Sculpturscape '73, both state and federal, vindicated McCullough's experimental gamble. However, although perceived as a symbol of the renaissance in the arts, government funding shifted the responsibility for and ownership of the triennials away from the local council and local community.

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

Sculpture Park Development Committee

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

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[475] Tom McCullough, 'Introductory notes about Sculpturscape '73', *Sculpturscape '73: an exhibition in Mildura*, op.cit., np.

[476] In 1971–1972, the Peter Stuyvesant Foundation in Britain had funded a program of sculptural installations in a number of British cities. The works were to remain in place for six months, after which, if there was public acceptance, they could be purchased. In Cambridge, a work by Barry Flanagan incited particular local censure, and was destroyed by vandalism. See *Studio International*, vol. 184, no. 946, July–August 1972, pp. 33–5.

park plan. The meeting resolved to establish a development committee comprising nominees from the three tiers of government: local, state and federal and the VAB agreed to contribute $10,000 to assist with the costs of plans and designs.

McCullough's political mentor, Reg Etherington, in his capacity as a member of MACAC and deputy chair of the Regional Galleries Association of Victoria, invited Sir Roy Grounds, the architect of the NGV and Victorian Cultural Centre precinct, to be honorary consulting architect on the Development Committee for Mildura's Cultural Park.[477] The first meeting of the Development Committee was convened on 3 August 1974 with eleven members including Ron Robertson Swann as the nominee of the VAB and Cr Roy Burr, a Mildura City Councillor and chairman of the MACAC. Ex-officio members included Mildura's town clerk, McCullough, and the city engineer. Clive Murray-White was a coopted member.

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

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

Conclusion

Chapter Three discussed the introduction of new sets of cultural dispositions which marked the beginning of 'the critical phase of the constitution of an autonomous field claiming the right to define for itself the principles of its legitimacy', which were immanent in the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize.[478] In this chapter which covers the period from 1970 to 1974, 'changes in the social structures, both within and outside the field of cultural production', principally from the fields of political power and education, 'produced the forces necessary for change'.[479]

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

The election of the Whitlam Labor Government with its commitment to access and equity in education, its linking of education to the production of an 'informed' audience for 'new art', and its acknowledgement of the 'rapid expansion in the arts over the last few years', primarily driven by the expansion in education, underpinned its rationale to radically expand the functions of, and fund, the new Australian Council for the Arts.[480] Sculpturscape '73 provided a platform that brought together an existing network of emerging professional protagonists and institutions with a new national accreditation process by peers for the transfer of symbolic power and money to forms of art practice that in the external market were marginal.

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[478] Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, op. cit., p. 61.
[479] Grenfell & Hardy, *Art Rules*, op.cit., p. 113.
[480] 'New Government arrangements for the arts', press statement no. 47, http://www.whitlam/index.php?option=cin_wrapper&Itemid=39, viewed 2 May 2009, op. cit.

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

Chapter Five

The Heroic Years of Mildura

Part II: 1975 – 1978

Introduction

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

and 1977 elections with overwhelming majorities, there was a remnant taint of illegitimacy surrounding the Fraser's right to govern.[481]

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

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

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[481]On 13 December 1975, the Liberal-National Party coalition won government with one of the largest majorities in Australian electoral history http://whitlamdismissal.com, viewed 15 March 2009.
[482] Australia's Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser 'In office', http://primeministers.naa.gov.au/primeministers/fraser/in-office.aspx, viewed 15 March 2009.
[483]Australia Council, *Annual Report 1975–76*, AGPS, Canberra, 1976, p. 1.
[484] John Gardiner-Garden, *Commonwealth Arts Policy and Administration*, Social Policy Section, Department of Parliamentary Library, online 7 May 2009: http://www.aph.gov.au/Library/pubs/BN/2008-09/ArtsPolicy.htm, viewed 10 May 2009.

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

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

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[485] Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government 1972–1975*, op. cit., p. 561.
[486] 'The advanced education sector grew rapidly over the 1970s – over *the three years to 1975 enrolments increased by 52%* [my emphasis]', Department of Education, Science and Training 2004, *Issues Paper: Rationalising Responsibility for Higher Education in Australia*, DEST, Canberra, p. 5: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/rationalising_responsibility.htm, viewed 12 June 2008
[487] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, op.cit., p. 481.
[488] Gardiner-Garden, *Commonwealth Arts Policy and Administration*, op. cit. According to 'Table of Acts, Notes to the *Australia Council Act 1975*', Australia Council Act 1975: http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/consol_act/aca1975184/index.html, viewed 13 June 2008, the date of assent and date of commencement of the Act was 13 March 1975. However, in Dr Gardiner-Garden's account in *Commonwealth Arts Policy and Administration*, he states that 'On June 30 1975 the Australia

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

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

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

Council Act 1975 was proclaimed and the Council became a statutory authority under the Ministerial responsibility of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.'

> The conference should include representation from all Australian public galleries and be Australia-wide in fact as well as in name … [and] the Board should allow the Conference to devise its own constitution before assuming that it would have to fund a similar body representing regional public galleries.[489]

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

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

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

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

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[489] Australia Council, *Australian Galleries Directors' Council/Visual Arts Board*, Arts Information Program, Australia Council, Sydney, 1980, p. 4.
[490] McCulloch, *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art* (1994), op. cit., p. 63.
[491] 'Chairman's report to the Annual General Meeting of the Mildura Arts Centre Advisory Council', Mildura Arts Centre, *Annual Report 1974–1975*, op. cit. From the data in the Annual Reports I am unable to quantify whether this claim is precisely true; however, it would be fair to suggest that the scheme's impact had been substantial.

appointed as foundation Professor of Visual Arts at Flinders University, Adelaide and Patrick McCaughey as foundation Professor of Visual Arts at Monash University, Melbourne. Both of these appointees were members of the recently established Art Association of Australia (1973) which aimed 'to promote study and research in art…bringing together…people who are engaged in the study, research and teaching of art and art history throughout Australia', a new professional network of academics and curators.[492]

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

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

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[492] McCulloch, *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art* (1994), op. cit., p. 40.
[493] Of the four universities involved with first funded artist-in-residence programs in 1975, Monash University invited Peter Tyndall and Flinders University, Tim Burns; both participants in the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial.

new policy of mounting the special Project show, regardless of whether or not they are aimed for a direct hit at the establishment itself".[494]

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

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

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[494] Nancy Borlase, 'Sydney scene', *Art and Australia*, vol. 12, no. 4, April–June 1975, p. 341. Both AGSA and AGNSW ran these programs for several years. The NGV's *Artists' Artists* series of exhibitions ran only during 1975, as part of the Arts Victoria '75 promotion by the new Ministry for the Arts in Victoria.

6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial – Post-object show

The Victorian premier and Minister for the Arts, Rupert Hamer, officially opened the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial on Easter Saturday, 29 March 1975, acknowledging that Mildura was a 'spiritual home' for sculptors.[495] Official guests included various state and federal elected representatives from the region, Eric Westbrook, director, Ministry for the Arts and members of the Park Development Committee (although Sir Roy Grounds sent his apologies). The VAB representative was sculptor and participant Ron Robertson Swann (who was also there in his capacity as a member of the Park Development Committee). Directors of state and regional galleries, curators, critics, artists and their families, art students, dealers and collectors were all present. For the local councillors, members of MACAC and the Mayor of Mildura Cr Beasy, the presence of Rupert Hamer and Eric Westbrook, both of whom were intimately linked to the history and development of the Mildura Arts Centre and the Mildura Sculpture Triennials, lent legitimacy to the 1975 triennial. Cr Beasy and the Mildura City Council were also very aware of the symbolic benefit of the presence of a number of state and federal parliamentarians at the opening, for the town and district of Mildura.

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

McCullough was pleased with the extensive national coverage the triennial received as a result of the Australia 75 festival in Canberra and the fact that the triennial headlined the Arts Victoria 75 festival as well.[496] A number of these reviewers also wrote for

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[495] 'Mildura "spiritual home" for sculptors', *Sunraysia Daily*, 31 March 1975.
[496] A further challenge to Mildura's position was the burgeoning regional gallery network in Victoria. By 1975, there were 16 Victorian regional galleries, all members of the professionally staffed Regional Galleries Association of Victoria (RGAV) that reported to the Ministry for the Arts which was established in 1973 with Eric Westbrook as director. The RGAV grew out of the Victorian Public Galleries Group, which was established in 1957 with a membership of six regional galleries. By 1968 membership had

international art magazines, thus extending the coverage and potential reach of the event. However, there the local paper gave voice to disgruntled locals.

Selection Process

Following the successful assertion of artists control by the threatened boycott prior to the last triennial, McCullough travelled to the key centres – Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide – to discuss the direction of the forthcoming event, to seek recommendations for invitation from his core advisors and to encourage them to bring their students. Apart from McCullough's usual core group of Adelaide advisors from the SASA, the South Australian contingent for the1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial also included newcomers Donald Brook, who brought one hundred of his fine art students from Flinders University; Noel Sheridan from the EAF (as an acquisitions selector for the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial); and Bert Flugelman, from the SASA. These three had previously been associated with the University of Sydney and its art workshops (Tin Sheds) and had been part of McCullough's core group of selectors from Sydney. The implied post-object theme of the event, evident in the selection of works which included a greater percentage of performances, some quite confrontational, drew its inspiration from Donald Brook as the principal theorist. The New Zealand selection was made by Jim Allen, associate professor of Fine Art and one of the leading proponents of post-object art in New Zealand, and Ti Parks (previously from Melbourne and part of the 'Hampton Mafia') who was a visiting lecturer in sculpture at the School of Fine Arts, both at the University of Auckland.

Although the final selection was not exclusively 'post-object', the dominance of the tertiary art institutions – art schools and university fine art departments – was

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grown to eight. Thus within seven years, membership doubled to 16 and included: Ararat Gallery, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, Bendigo Art Gallery, Benalla Art Gallery, Castlemaine Art Gallery and Historical Museum, Geelong Art Gallery, Hamilton Art Gallery, Horsham Art Gallery, Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Mildura Arts Centre, Mornington Peninsula Arts Centre, McClelland Gallery, Sale Regional Arts Centre, Shepparton Art Gallery, Swan Hill Art Gallery and Warrnambool Art Gallery. See Eric Westbrook, Foreword, *Art and Australia*, Arts Victoria 75 Special Number, vol. 12, no. 3, autumn 1975, p. 242; Pamela Bell, 'Regional galleries in Australia: An abbreviated history', *Art and Australia*, vol. 39, no. 3, autumn 2002, p. 394; and Alan McCulloch, *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art* (1984), op. cit., p. 1021.

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

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

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

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

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

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[497] Bernard Smith, 'The way of the Sun King or Czarina?', *The Australian*, 1 March 1975.

emerging artists invited to participate: validation (through invitation), exhibition, consecration and in some instances, acquisition. For McCullough's core educator-sculptor selectors, the process validated their credentials as influential members of the field in the eyes of their students and recent graduates. For all participants it offered a unique opportunity to increase their cultural and social capital through extending their network of contacts.

Funding and sponsorship

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

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

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

[499] McCullough, Acknowledgements, *6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial*, op. cit.

Councillor Burr in his MACAC chairman's report, stated that 'the Visual Arts Board and the Community Arts Board [of the Australia Council for the Arts] have provided useful grants for Mildura Arts Centre's projects'.[500] With regard to funding the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial, the VAB contributed $24,000 for exhibition costs, catalogue publication and art purchases.[501] Apart from an annual state grant for the running of the Mildura Arts Centre, the Victorian Ministry for the Arts contributed funding and support from the Arts Victoria 75 project of $10,000 to the 6th Mildura Triennial, as part of the sesquicentenary celebrations of the founding of the state of Victoria. At McCullough's instigation a number of artists sought funding from the VAB to enable them to create work for the triennial, including John Davis's hire of video equipment for his work *Place* and Tony Coleing's *To do with Blue*.

The VAB's Australian Contemporary Art Acquisition Scheme, between 1974 and 1976, provided $13,545 in funding to Mildura Arts Centre towards acquisitions of work by living Australian artists.[502] Further assistance from the VAB included $10,000 in 1974 towards the production of plans for the Park Development committee. The investment in the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial by the VAB was multi-layered and extensive.

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

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

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[500] Chairman's Report, Mildura Arts Centre, *Annual Report 1974–1975*, op. cit.
[501] Australia Council for the Arts, *Annual Report*, AGPS, Canberra, 1975, pp. 140–1.
[502] As has been noted earlier, the chairman in the 1974–75 annual report noted that funding contributions from this scheme 'doubled the size of the art collection'.

metropolitan centres which catered for experimental and avant-garde activity as part of their regular programming. Many of McCullough's core group of artists in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide participated on the committees and boards of these new organisations and were involved in their policy and programme development and operational grant seeking.

Selected Works

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

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

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

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[503] Noel Sheridan, 'Notes on twelve exhibits by NOEL SHERIDAN, MA., Executive Officer of the Experimental Art Foundation of South Australia, and Honorary Advisor to Mildura Arts Centre on non-purchasable works to be considered for awards in the SIXTH MILDURA SCULPTURE EXHIBITION', *6th Mildura Sculpture Exhibition*, op. cit., p. 8.
[504] Scarlett, *Australian Sculptors*, op. cit., p. 458.

great precision and imagination … the transition between the real and the fabricated is kept in constant suspension while the whole thing, in its dying, asks life.'[505]

Fluxus inspiration, present in Dave Morrissey's *1962* shed in 1973, extended in 1975 in Mortensen's *Delicatessen* and further as the modus operandi of Terry Reid's (Fluxum) and Bob Kerr's (Fluxee) mail art project, *Open Drawers*, as well as Nick Spills's *Homage to the Lone Banana*.[506] Jim Cowley's *Smouldering Man Suicide Ltd*, a video recording people's responses to a be-suited man walking through the city with a lighted fuse dangling from his jacket, carrying a briefcase with information on suicide, and his collaboration with Bob Ramsay in *City Confrontation Piece*, were also informed by the same rationale that the 'work of art … had shifted to the position of a catalyst for an interactive relationship between art maker and art receiver'.[507]

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

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[505] Sheridan, 'Notes on twelve exhibits by NOEL SHERIDAN, M.A.', op. cit., p. 8.
[506] The *Open Drawers* project begun in 1974 to mark the 10th anniversary of Fluxus exchanges was an alternative communication network amongst artists in NZ and the 'Eternal network' of international mail artists. The project was based at the University of Auckland art school library. Setting up a 'newsroom' within the Ozone Theatre, where the touring exhibition, *12 New Zealand artists*, was located, Kerr and Reid worked on the production of *The Mildura Papers*, a composite newspaper format of broadsheet, the *Auckland* (sic) *Star* and two tabloids, the *Canberra Telegraph* and a miniaturised *Sunraysia Daily*. Contributions were sought from participating artists as well as mail artists throughout 'Australasia, Pacific Rim and global', as outlined in their proposal. The contributions were mixed with local news, reviews of the triennial and their own satirical editorialising, including a report on their performance of burning 2000 copies of their previously published mail art newspaper, *The Inch Art Issue*, which had been banned in NZ. *Open Drawers: The Mildura Papers* and the individual and collaborative works of Adelaide artists, Jim Cowley and Bob Ramsey were, like a number of other performance/artworks at the triennial, premised upon social critique and art as communication. According to Daniel Thomas in his review, 'Sculpture in the streets', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 April 1975, Cowley and Ramsey were responsible for a facsimile newspaper poster which appeared down Deakin Avenue in time for the triennial opening on Easter Saturday, which proclaimed 'MILDURA LOCAL CRUCIFIED BY ARTISTS?'. The artists reported that they would 'document the city's reaction to this provocation'.
[507] Estera Milman, 'Fluxus: A conceptual country', *Visible Language*, vol. 26, nos 1 & 2, Rhode Island School of Design, 1992, p. 12.

within it. The New Zealand participation, including the works by expatriate Kiwis in Britain, received praise from Daniel Thomas: 'the most professional avant-garde pieces', and Elwyn Lynn: 'more creative and intellectual … than their Australian counterparts'.[508]

For participants, artists and students alike, it was perhaps the only opportunity to meet one's interstate peers and establish productive networks.[509] Graeme Sturgeon in his review for *The Australian* noted that, 'The Mildura sculpture exhibition becomes a marketplace for ideas as much as an opportunity to see what new directions are being explored.'[510] He continued with an observation that clearly delineated McCullough's intention:

> It has become increasingly clear that Mildura plays a much wider role in contemporary art than originally envisaged and is giving a useful exposure to the more extreme forms of present-day art without worrying too much about neat categorisation.[511]

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[508] Daniel Thomas and Elwyn Lynn, cited in P. Gardiner, 'Godzone in Ozone', *New Zealand Listener*, 21 June 1975, cited in Pamela Zeplin, 'The ARX Experiment, Perth, 1987–1999: communities, controversy and regionality', footnote 22, p. 12 in www.acuads.com.au/conf2005/papers/zeplin.pdf, viewed 12 March 2007.

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

[510] Graeme Sturgeon, 'Beautiful, delicate and divinely useless', *The Australian*, 19 April 1975.

[511] ibid. Sturgeon in his retrospective assessment of the 1975 triennial retreated from this more expansive 'snapshot' view to a concern with sculptural styles: 'This diversity of styles in contemporary sculpture demonstrated … not an open-minded pluralism but a lack of purpose and a confusion of direction.' See his *Sculpture at Mildura: The story of the Mildura Sculpture Triennial 1961–1982*, op. cit., p. 78. Sturgeon's later comments about Mildura indicated an ambivalent attitude towards its 'door opening catholicity'; perhaps too broad a selection by McCullough with no hierarchy of styles.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 60: Kevin Mortensen, *Delicatessen* 1975 (three views).

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 61: top, Alison Cousland and Margaret Bell, *Untitled* 1975, plants, 15 x 20 x 17 metres. Photo: Ken Scarlett.

Figure 62: bottom, Jillian Orr, *Strung out* 1975,timber and rope, 1.83 x 6.10 x1.83 metres.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 63: top, Domenico de Clario, *Untitled* 1975, mixed media, dimensions variable.

Figure 64: bottom, Bill Gregory, *A record of the largest mono-foetal structure on this planet* 1974, 40 sheets of etched glass, 0.51 x 2.44 x 0.51 cms each.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 65: top left, Tim Burns*, I couldn't think of anything else to do – see* 1975, polaroid photograph. Photo: Tim Burns.
Figure 66: top right, Andrew McEwan Coplans, *Capability Recycled* 1975, red gum, 4.57 x 4.57 x 3.4 m.
Figure 67: bottom, Members of the Australia Council's first Visual Arts Board and staff on tour in Mildura 1975. From left standing: Noella Yuill, James Gleeson, Mary Shaw, Elizabeth Churcher, John Baily, Bruce Le Compte, Ann Lewis, Rie Heymans, Ron Robertson Swann; front: Klaus Kuziow, Katrina Rumley and Richard Lund. Leon Paroissien archive.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 68: top left, Bert Flugelman, *Untitled* 1975, six polished aluminium tetrahedrons buried in trench 450 cm deep at Commonwealth Park on the hill beside Coranderrk Street roundabout, Canberra. This work was included as an earthwork in the exhibition Young Australian Sculptors, curated and organised by Tom McCullough and part of the Australia 75 festival in Canberra. The photographs of the process of excavation and burial were exhibited at the 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial.
Figure 69: top right, Tony Coleing, *To do with Blue* 1975, painted mild steel, 7.32 x 6.10 x 6.10 cms. Collection Australian National Gallery (now NGA).
Figure 70: bottom left, Inge King, *Black Sun*, painted steel, 239 x 2-8 x 72 cms. Collection Mildura Arts Centre. (*Black Sun II* was commissioned by the Australian National University in 1975).
Figure 71: bottom right, Ron Robertson Swann, *Quietly Wild* 1974, painted steel plate, 153 x 399 x 305 cms. Acquired in 1975 by the NCDC, Canberra.
All these works were included in the Young Australian Sculptors exhibition, held in the Commonwealth Gardens in Canberra as part of the Australia 75 festival. They were then transferred to Mildura and exhibited in the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial 1975.

Acquisitions and grants to artists

The selection panel of McCullough, Sheridan and Sturgeon announced the allocation of $8000 for acquisitions to the Mildura Art Centre collection.[512] The five works purchased were *Black Sun* by Inge King, *Untitled 2/75* by Reg Parker, *Sunsize* by Ti Parks, *The Gigantic Xmas Sale* by Don Walters and *Gatehouse* by David Wilson (Figure 70). Noel Sheridan as 'honorary advisor to Mildura Arts Centre' adjudicated the $2000 prize for ephemeral work. On his recommendation that the criteria applied to formal sculpture experiments would not be appropriate to post-object works, the money was split equally between all seventeen participants in this category.[513] A number of other works that had been on display at the *Young Australian Sculptors* exhibition – curated and organised by McCullough at the Australia 75 festival in Canberra and then transported to Mildura – were also purchased by the ANG, the ANU and the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) (Figures 68-71).[514]

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

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

[513] As recorded in Sturgeon's *Sculpture at Mildura*, p. 104: 'There were seventeen non-purchasable exhibit awards selected by Noel Sheridan: Bruce Barber, *A friend in need*; Glen Clarke, *Collision with a rainbow*; Margaret Bell and Alison Cousland, *Untitled*; Jim Cowley and Bob Ramsey, *City confrontation piece*; Graeme Davis, *Untitled*; John Davis, *Place*; Domenico de Clario, *Untitled*; Philip Gerner, *Video*; Noel Hutchison, *Transformations*; Mitch Johnson, *Environment*; Stephen Leishman, *Cybernetic Land Piece*; Life Modelling and Casting News [Paul Worstead, Marie McMahon and Michael Callaghan], *Cat.64a*; Kevin Mortensen, *Delicatessen*; Mike Nicholson, *Rational Hyphen*; Ian Parry, *Untitled*; Terry Reid and Bob Kerr, *Newsprint;* Michael Young, *Sub-Division*.'

[513] Sheridan, "Notes on twelve exhibits by NOEL SHERIDAN, M.A., op. cit., p. 8.

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

triennials and the increasingly autonomous artistic field which appeared in town once every three years.

Audience

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

The VAB and its support staff convened a meeting in April in Mildura 'so that members would have the opportunity to view the Sixth Sculpture Triennial' (Figure 67).[515] Apart from the official civic reception, McCullough entertained the VAB group at his weekend retreat at Kings Billabong, which provided him with further opportunity to discuss policy directions and also promote Mildura's sculptural project. As he noted in his report to the MACAC, the attendance of the VAB in Mildura indicated the level of national esteem with which the sculpture triennials were held. Mildura still had a role to play, but now occupied a place in an increasingly crowded field, where competition for funds and attention, required an adept ability to clearly define a unique niche within the field.

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

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[515] 'Visual Arts Board meeting in Mildura', *Sunraysia Daily*, 22 April 1975. The members of the Australia Council's first VAB tour in Mildura were Leon Paroissien (director), Noela Yuill (project officer), James Gleeson (board member and artist), Mary Shaw (project officer), Elizabeth Churcher (consultant), John Baily (chairman and AGSA director), Bruce Le Compte (project officer), Ann Lewis (board member and Gallery A director), Rie Heymans (consultant), Ron Robertson Swann (board member and sculptor-participant), Klaus Kuziow (VAB project officer), Katrina Rumley (previously director, Geelong Art Gallery, VAB project officer) and Richard Lund (project officer).

later, disputed McCullough's claim to engage 'directly a larger percentage of the general public than any other artistic event yet designed in Australia'.[516] As Thomas saw it, 'The Mildura sculpture exhibitions, though containing many of the key works of Australia art in the 1970s, are seen by few except critics and artists, for that small city is rather remote … By 1975 in Australia the new art had achieved its own big-city institutional support, more accessible than Mildura, more frequent than state art museums.'[517] Thomas was referring to the VAB's funding of alternative exhibiting spaces such as the EAF in Adelaide, The Ewing Gallery at Melbourne University, One Central Street and the Sculpture Centre in Sydney, and the IMA in Brisbane.

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

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

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[516] Daniel Thomas, ' Sculpture in the streets', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 April 1975; McCullough, quoted in 'Premier to open sculpture show', *Sunraysia Daily*, 18 March 1975, p. 3.
[517] Daniel Thomas, 'ART & LIFE: The actuality of sculpture', *Architecture Australia*, December 1976, reprinted in Paul Taylor (ed.), *Anything Goes: Art in Australia 1970–1980*, Art & Text, Melbourne, 1984, p. 100.

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

Mildura in 1975, as an experimental field offering opportunities to students, recent graduates and a burgeoning group of younger artists interested in inter-disciplinary exchanges, still had a role to play. Furthermore, the triennials provided a broad selection of current work from which curators could draw upon for their own projects.[518] However, the regular access and exposure that the metropolitan alternative exhibition spaces could provide to emerging artists and students, combined with the VAB's view of the triennial as an adaptive model, was the next challenge to the uniqueness of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials.[519].

Tom McCullough: 1975–1976

> I always had this aim for Mildura of keeping one step ahead of other regional galleries.[520]

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

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

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[518] As Noel Sheridan observed: 'Many of the categories that were nascent at Mildura were later refined and processed as discrete practices. Much of the energy that was evident at Mildura came to the EAF in Adelaide to fuel activity there and write the history of that space.' See Noel Sheridan, 'How the old canons were destabilised in Mildura in 1975', *Artlink*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1993, p. 19.
[519] An important effect of the significant increase in funds available and distributed to the expanding institutional field of the visual arts was 'a more articulated structure at the field level', resulting in a mimetic isomorphism, where 'organisations copy each other's structures and procedures'. See Victoria Alexander, *Museums and Money: The Impact of Funding on Exhibitions, Scholarship and Management*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1996, pp. 112–13.
[520] Tom McCullough, interview with the author, 30 March 2006.

conscious awareness of a major shift that had taken place, nationally, in little more than two years.[521] For McCullough and Mildura, the focus had shifted from a local, regional funding basis with few competitors to a complex, national and interconnected field of professional practice, defined by extensive funding tied to new and rapidly evolving policy and program criteria. The impact of centralised, institutional funding in the form of the Australia Council for the Arts increased inter-organisational links and 'fostered a more articulated structure' in recognition of the evolution of an organisational field.[522] The Mildura Sculpture Triennials were therefore central to the development of new art making and presentation in Australia and this new model had to be defended by continuing to be innovative.

McCullough and the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial

Westbrook invited McCullough to participate in the organising committee for Arts Victoria 75, a new ministry initiative with a budget of around $250,000, to raise awareness of the diversity of the arts in Victoria.[523] It was agreed that the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial would be moved back one year to be the inaugural event to launch this initiative with Mildura wearing the mantle of 'A City for Sculpture'. As Director, Ministry for the Arts Victoria, Westbrook's brief introduction on the opening page of the 1975 Mildura Triennial catalogue acknowledged the funding body's perception of the triennial event's prestige:

> The Victorian Ministry for the Arts is happy to be associated with Mildura's Sixth National Sculpture Exhibition. This will be the first of sixteen festival exhibitions which will take place in country centres throughout the State. It is good to know that these sculpture exhibitions have become important events in the art calendar of Australia and are now visited by overseas critics and reported in international journals.[524]

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[521] ibid.
[522] Paraphrase and quote from Alexander, *Museums and Money*, op. cit., pp. 112–14.
[523] Tom McCullough, quoted in an unpublished interview with Geoffrey de Groen, 1 October, 1976. Copy of transcript of interview located in McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 6, SLV, p. 6.
[524] Westbrook, 'Arts Victoria 75'in *6th Mildura Sculpture Exhibition: An opening feature of Arts Victoria 75*, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, Vic., n.p.

McCullough was aware that Graeme Sturgeon, temporary exhibitions manager at the NGV, had commissioned a survey among artists in Victoria from which he intended to draw up an exhibition list of *Artists' Artists*. He had planned a series of small project shows at the NGV to run throughout the year, as part of the gallery's contribution to Arts Victoria 75. Among the artists selected, most of the sculptors were part of McCullough's core group of Victorian artist-advisors. Sturgeon was drawing upon McCullough's successful consultative model of peer assessment.

Concurrent with the Arts Victoria 75 arrangements, McCullough had been approached to organise an outdoor sculpture exhibition on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra as part of a cultural festival entitled Australia 75, and received Australia Council funding towards freight costs.[525] The works selected were object-based and the majority of participating artists were drawn from McCullough's Mildura contacts. Canberra, as the capital city of the Commonwealth, the administrative heart of the nation and the centre for burgeoning national cultural institutions, was also a major commissioning centre. Representatives from the NCDC had attended past Mildura Triennials to source works and artists for commissions. McCullough's focus for this exhibition was to create a dramatic presentation for commissioning bureaucrats, whether architects, curators or other agents based in the nation's capital, as well as to maximise available pre-publicity for the forthcoming triennial, later that month. In many respects, this one-week outdoor sculpture exhibition echoed the early Mildura Triennials of the 1960s with their emphasis on sales and commissions of object-based work.[526]

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

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

[526] Refer this Chapter, footnote 512, for a list of NCDC purchases.

taking up residence in the abandoned Ozone Theatre (where the NZ participants exhibited with film and video works as well as a travelling exhibition entitled *Six New Zealand Artists*); a disused delicatessen, the site of Kevin Mortensen's memorable performance work; an abandoned service station and information centre next door and along the main thoroughfare Deakin Avenue, the location of a number of major works that had been commissioned for the Australia 75 exhibition.[527] In total 105 artists participated with a total of 149 works; of the invited artists 51 per cent were participating for the first time, a significant number having previously attended triennials as students.[528] As McCullough related: 'artists themselves were the fountainhead … I've based a lot of my decisions in Mildura on the up-and-coming young artists, as suggested by the more established artist, or people whose work I consider is experimental.'[529]

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

There had always been a New Zealand presence at the Mildura Sculpture events since their 1961 inception; however, although the 1975 participation was statistically comparable to attendances in 1970 and 1973, the intellectual impact of the works from New Zealand was noted by a number of critics.[530]

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

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

[529] McCullough, unpublished interview with Geoffrey de Groen, op. cit., p. 6.

[530] 'They had absorbed a professional approach to making sculpture … As a group their sculpture was outstanding and showed up much of the work of their Australian peers as out of date and worse still,

As Daniel Thomas pointed out in his review of the triennial, it was 'perhaps the most important survey of what's happening in Australian art' because of sculpture's embrace of performance and participatory work as well as film and video art.[531] Alan McCulloch in the *Melbourne Herald* extolled the triennial's 'door-opening catholicity' in terms of the sheer diversity of the works and the scale of the event.[532]

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

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uninteresting.' See Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura*, op. cit., p. 71. Sturgeon had been one of the acquisition selectors for the 1975 Triennial. However, he regarded the inclusion of video, film, photography and other conceptual practices as having slipped 'under the wire'. NZ critic Pauline Gardiner quoted Elwyn Lynn as stating that the NZ artworks were 'more creative and intellectual … than their Australian counterparts'. Gardiner, 'Godzone in Ozone', quoted in Zeplin, *The 'neglected middle distance'*, op. cit., p. 146. One of the participants was Canadian Terry Reid, who had come to NZ via Japan with his fluxus mail art contacts. He became an important network contact for McCullough – 'striving to globalise art at the Mildura Triennials' through his international contacts – when he took up residence in Mildura following the triennial and then later moved to Sydney. See McCullough in I. Nelson, 'The tongues of arts faith', *artwrite*, 2002, p. 2, quoted Zeplin, ibid.

[531] Thomas, 'Sculpture in the streets', *Sydney Morning Herald*, op. cit.

[532] Alan McCulloch, 'A kaleidoscope of art machines', *Melbourne Herald*, 2 April, 1975.

[533] McCullough, quoted in 'Premier to open sculpture show', *Sunraysia Daily*, op. cit.

Sculpture Park Development Committee

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

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

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

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

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

[535] Chairman's Report, *Mildura Arts Centre Annual Report 1974–1975*, op. cit. It is also interesting to note that the Mayor of Mildura (also a member of MACAC) Cr Lloyd Beasy accompanied McCullough to the official opening of Australia 75 in Canberra to view the sculpture exhibition in Commonwealth Gardens, by Lake Burley Griffin. Although impressed 'he believed Mildura's proposed Rio Vista Park would be in every way equal to, if not better than, the Canberra park'. The *Sunraysia Daily* continued that the prime minister, who officially opened the festival stated that 'the financing of festivals such as Australia 75 was a Federal and not a municipal responsibility', presumably fuelling the expectation of Mildura City Council of further federal funding for a national initiative such as the triennials. See 'Canberra visit for arts opening', *Sunraysia Daily*, March 11, 1975, p. 3.

was not orientated towards the local but to a distant field that was largely alien to them. At this point, the tensions between McCullough as a player within the national field and McCullough as an employee of regional city gallery begin to become evident. The gap between these two positions would by 1978 become unbridgeable.

Assessment of McCullough

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

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

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

[536] McCullough was appointed to the Crafts Board of the Australia Council in 1975 and for a time was the chairman of the board's exhibition committee.

is available for the building extensions.'[537] Given the reluctance indicated to finding the funding required for necessary maintenance, the budget forecasts of the costs involved in establishing the sculpture park would have raised real concerns about the future direction of the Arts Centre and its collection.

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

McCullough and the 2nd Biennale of Sydney

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

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

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[537] 'Director's Report on the need for increased storage space, work areas and office accommodation at Mildura Arts Centre – 6 August 75', p. 1, Mildura Arts Centre archives, folder 1975 MACAC correspondence. The report also noted that the 'Sculpture storage area has had to be supplemented by using a 55 x25 feet corrugated iron shed in a former power station site about 400 yards along Cureton Avenue.'
[538] Transcript of interview of Thomas McCullough by Hazel de Berg, 2nd December 1976, n.p., tape 973, National Library of Australia, Canberra.
[539] 'McCullough set a standard on which the Biennale of Sydney could build in subsequent years'. See Leon Paroissien, 'The Biennale of Sydney: a partisan view of three decades', *Art and Australia,* vol. 41, no. 1, spring 2003, p. 62.

contributions to the Mildura Sculpture Triennials of 1973 and 1975 as visible national successes. Here was a director who was promoting a range of artists and experimental practices that challenged the definitions of sculpture; who had developed a model that was closer to the 'kind of festivals that [international] biennials represented'.[540] The Mildura Triennial model would enable the national arts funding body to realise one of its objectives of promoting contemporary Australian art practice internationally through the network of international biennales. However, of much greater significance was McCullough's peer network of cultural contacts. What the VAB and the Australia Council's International Division regarded as 'innovative and experimental' about the 6th Mildura Triennial in 1975, and that they were seeking to replicate in the 2nd Biennale of Sydney, was not so much the final exhibition as McCullough's consultative networking approach to a peer-review selection process.

The instigator of the 1st Biennale of Sydney and primary funding source, Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, managing director of Transfield Pty Ltd, had a great interest in sculpture and also believed that a biennale in Sydney, based upon the Venice Biennale, would link Australia to the world.[541] Leon Paroissien, appointed director of the VAB in 1974, had visited the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial with the board members and staff (Figure 67). Paroissien realised the value of the triennial model to the VAB as a vehicle to promote its international objectives and brokered an agreement with Belgiorno-Nettis, which would satisfy his interest in sculpture and desire to continue to support an international biennale in Sydney.

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[540] Leon Paroissien, email to the author, 12 September 2007.

[541] Franco Belgiorno-Nettis established the Transfield Prize (at the time, the richest national prize for painting) in 1961. By 1967, the Transfield foundry, specialising in casting bronze sculpture, was established and the Prize for Sculpture was awarded that year to Norma Redpath. In 1971 Aleks Danko won the final Transfield Prize for Sculpture with his work, *Carnival*. By 1973, Belgiorno-Nettis was keen to 'inject that flavour of international extravaganza, originality and explosive vision' that he experienced at the Venice Biennale. 'Such an event was exactly what Australia needed, a link to the world … I felt it was important to do something about opening up Australia.' The first Biennale had not been very successful. A small exhibition of 37 participants organised mostly through government and diplomatic channels and coordinated by a Transfield employee, it was shown in the new Sydney Opera House and was part of the official opening. See Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, 'Founding Governor's Report', *Biennale of Sydney*, http://www.biennaleofsydney.com.au/history/1973, viewed 20 August 2007.

There were serious doubts about the future of the biennale in Sydney, given the ambivalence of some members of the VAB, following the criticism of the first Biennale in 1973, and the reluctance of the trustees and some professional staff at the AGNSW to the idea and purpose of a recurrent event, and consequent funding allocation.[542] The final hurdle that needed to be overcome was the acceptance by the AGNSW of an independent curator-director (employed jointly by the Australia Council and Transfield) operating within their institution. McCullough offered both the model and the expertise to realise this project.

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

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[542] A draft copy of Grazia Gunn's discussion paper submitted to the Visual Arts Board's meeting of 18 June 1974 entitled, 'Exhibitions and Related Activities', raised the issue of the future of the Biennale of Sydney and recommended the following matters for consideration: 'A smaller, less sensational type of exhibition is proposed and should be a developing situation always having a structure. It is planned that the next exhibition be held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales towards the end of 1975 … it may be desirable not to have Australian representatives and to see the programme as, one year international, the next Australian and so on … The Visual Arts Board should aim at a budget of at least $150,000 for the International programme.' The paper discussed the formation of three committees: fund raising, administration and art, the last of which would comprise three members - 'one from overseas, one from the Visual Arts Board, one from the Art Gallery of New South Wales' - and continued with the recommendation of the appointment of an executive officer on a part-time consultative basis 'with knowledge on visual arts and administration'. See McCullough archive PA 97/33 Box 6, SLV.

The 2nd Biennale of Sydney (scheduled from 13 November to 19 December 1976) was effectively organised within ten months. In January 1976, McCullough was granted one year's leave of absence from the Mildura Arts Centre and moved to Sydney with his family. As the director, he was required to coordinate the conflicting demands and requirements of an ensemble of organisations and individuals, without the backing of a professional secretariat. He worked with senior curator, Daniel Thomas and the curatorial and education staff at the AGNSW, and negotiated with the AGNSW trustees, the Biennale committee, the Australia Council (principally through their International Program and the VAB), and the Department of Foreign Affairs, as well as individual artists.[543] It was a challenging 'first'; a complex set of negotiations needed to be managed to achieve a successful outcome.

McCullough personally selected the 'Pacific Rim' participants from Japan, West Coast America, New Zealand and Australia.[544] He liaised with John Stringer in New York for American East Coast selections, Gerald Forty, director of the Fine Arts Department of the British Council for British selections and Tommaso Trini, editor of *Data Magazine*, for European selections. [545] As well as drawing on the expertise of these advisors, this arrangement was necessary due to a tight timeframe and financial constraints.

The $100,000 funding for the biennale from the Australia Council, Department of Foreign Affairs and Transfield Pty Ltd was a small sum compared with, for example, the

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[543] Committee for the 1976 Biennale of Sydney: Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, joint managing director, Transfield Pty. Ltd; Peter Laverty, director, AGNSW; Leon Paroissien, director, VAB and the International Program, Australia Council; Gil Docking, deputy director, AGNSW; Cdr. Anthony Winterbotham, executive assistant to the managing directors, Transfield Pty Ltd; Thomas G. McCullough, director of the Biennale of Sydney and Mildura Arts Centre. See *Recent International Forms in Art: The 1976 Biennale of Sydney at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 13 November – 19 December*, exhibition catalogue, AGNSW, Sydney, 1976.

[544] Stelarc had provided McCullough with many artist contacts in Japan.

[545] By 1976, John Stringer had left his position as associate director, International Programs at the Museum of Modern Art and was appointed as an international advisor to the Australia Council, based in New York. He and Leon Paroissien met Tom McCullough in Los Angeles and gave him assistance during his West Coast trip. McCullough had met Gerald Forty on his first Gulbenkian Fellowship tour to Britain in 1970 and Forty had been responsible for organising the selection of English artists and the despatch of their works at Sculpturscape '73. In interview, McCullough noted his indebtedness in Japan to the Australian artist Stelarc, who introduced him to artists and the critic James Love. He also acknowledged Japanese contacts provided by Terry Reid. Leon Paroissien approached Tommaso Trini in Milan on behalf of McCullough. See Paroissien, 'The Biennale of Sydney: a partisan view of three decades', op. cit., p. 62.

Victorian Government's contribution of $250,000 the previous year for the Arts Victoria 75 festival.[546] The NSW Government declined to contribute any funds towards the biennale 'in this period of financial stringency'.[547]

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

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

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[546] According to McCullough the full $100,000 was not forthcoming because of government cutbacks. In a briefing note to Franco Belgiorno-Nettis in October 1976, McCullough clarified that the total financial contribution was $95,000. See unpublished interview by Geoff de Groen with Tom McCullough, op. cit.
[547] Letter from NSW Government Minister for Culture, Sport and Recreation, Mr. L.J.F Barraclough to Mr Belgiorno-Nettis, Managing Director, Transfield Industries, undated (receipt date stamped 20 January 1976), McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 6, SLV.
[548] The Australian participants included John Armstrong, Tony Coleing, Marleen Creaser, John Davis, Marr Grounds, Noel Hutchison, Les Kossatz, Kevin Mortensen, Clive Murray-White, Michael Nicholson, Ti Parks, John Penny, Terry Reid, Ron Robertson Swann, Stelarc, Noel Sheridan, Ken Unsworth and David Wilson. The NZ contingent included Jim Allen, John Lethbrigde, Terry Powell and Greer Twiss. The trans-Tasman participation of 22 artists represented 27.5 per cent of the total exhibitors of 80.
[549] Margaret Plant, 'Quattrocento Melbourne: Aspects of finish 1973–77' in Taylor (ed.) *Anything Goes*, op. cit., pp. 85–6.
[550] ibid., p.82.
[551] Thomas McCullough, interview by Hazel de Berg, op. cit.

improvement on the previous Biennale (where works had been sourced through conservative diplomatic channels concerned with preserving national identities). A significant number of the selected overseas artists were under forty years of age and had been included in important international exhibitions of the late 1960s and early 1970s that institutionalised such avant-garde movements as minimalism, arte povera and mono-ha.

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

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

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[552] 'Strategy for Exhibit Selection (Summary)', rough exhibition notes by T. McCullough annotated, undated, n.p., McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 15, SLV.
[553] John Davis, letter to Tom McCullough, 19 July 1976. McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 6, SLV.
[554] Tom McCullough, 'Thoughts on the biennale', *Three Views on the 1976 Biennale: Recent International Forms in Art: Tom McCullough, Daniel Thomas and Harry Nicholson*, AGNSW, Sydney, 1976, n.p.; reprinted from *Architecture Australia*, December 1976.

explicit definition was attempted, the almost complete inclusion of Mildura participants as the Australian and NZ representatives endorsed the experimental and emerging philosophy that underpinned the Mildura Triennials and ensured that McCullough would be guided by the artists' interests.

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

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

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[555] Nancy Borlase, 'Biennale casts its net far and wide', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 October, 1976, p. 8.
[556] Interview of Thomas McCullough by Hazel de Berg, op. cit.
[557] The artists included Linda Benglis, Michael McMillan, Stuart Brisley and Fujiko Nakaya. The two art critics were Tommaso Trini (*Data*) and James Fitzsimmonds (*Art International*).

assistants to a number of artists and to teams working with curators and education staff of the AGNSW. For the selected art students, these responsibilities provided invaluable professional development opportunities and, more importantly, were credited towards their diplomas. [558]

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

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

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

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[558] Letter from the publication *Arts Melbourne & the Art Almanac* (signed by Kiffy Rubbo and Meredith Rogers for the Arts Collective Melbourne) to Tom McCullough, 16 December 1976, proposing an extended review of the biennale including: 'Analysis of the scheme using students to assist the artists. How successful was it? Isn't this a breakthrough in Australia where students were given credit for a "non conventional" activity?', McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 6, SLV.
[559] Tom McCullough, 'Notes for Mr Belgiorno-Nettis', 18 October 1976, p. 1, McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 6, SLV.
[560] Mervyn Horton, Editorial, *Art and Australia*, vol. 14, no. 2, December 1976, pp. 132–3.

larger world view rather than an in-depth regional focus.[561] The most trenchant criticism came from some of the older members of the Sculptors' Society and Associates and, more significantly for McCullough, from a number of sculptors associated with Ron Robertson Swann. Although Robertson Swann participated in the biennale, he supported Daniel Thomas's view of the lack of presence of respected object sculptors.[562] At issue, fundamentally, was the perceived hijacking of the definition of 'sculpture' and the consecration of a wide range of contemporary practices as 'art' under the rubric of 'sculpture'. What was tolerable, even acceptable in Mildura, a peripheral location, was a very different matter when granted the status and prestige of being included in Australia's first international biennale in a major metropolitan art gallery. The exclusion was perceived as a significant loss of power and prestige to this group, and the tension this created would reverberate in the 1978 Mildura Triennial. The evident shift of the power to confer status and recognition from the established route of prizes, sales and exhibitions to a peer-review system that favoured the emerging and experimental, would also have been perceived as a threat by those whose careers (such as curators) depended upon the established structure of recognition and promotion.

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

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[561] John Davis, letter to Tom McCullough, 13 December 1976, McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 6, SLV.
[562] Daniel Thomas, quoted in Geoff Ormiston, 'Failure or success', *Sculptor's Bulletin*, December 1976, p. 7.

VAB to legitimately promote contemporary art practice, a particularly risky venture dealing in unproven and in many cases undiscovered artists, it would need a professional network to validate who was included; who, in fact, controlled the selection process.

The triennial as an adaptive model was the next challenge to the uniqueness of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials. The fact that McCullough could direct, consecutively, two similar types of events – 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial and 1976 Biennale of Sydney – is a further indicator of a convergence of a national field of professional practice that moves from the margins to the centre with great rapidity.[563] However, the successful transfer of the Mildura template to the metropolitan centre ensured that McCullough had established a major competitor for funds and attention – one that, because of its location, already enjoyed greater symbolic and cultural capital.

John Davis: 1975–1976

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

Davis and the 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial

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

[563] An important effect of the significant increase in funds available and distributed to the expanding institutional field of the visual arts, was 'a more articulated structure at the field level' resulting in a mimetic isomorphism, where 'organisations copy each other's structures and procedures'. See Alexander, *Museums and Money*, op. cit., pp. 112–13.

boards, 120 x 120 cm. Three of these boards were erected on the outskirts of the town at each of the main roads that entered Mildura from Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney. In the gallery space, the fourth board leant against the white wall. The remaining exhibits in the gallery space included three photographs of each of the other boards, ten photographs of Davis tying nine lengths of string together (shot at Pinacotheca Gallery) and a video showing him plaiting nine lengths of string together. *Plaiting*, which took forty-five minutes, was shot at the Ewing Gallery and had been included in his 1974 Pinacotheca exhibition. In Noel Sheridan's interview with Davis he referred to another 'object' in the room – string wound around paper poles and suggestive of 'proof or reminder of the work which was done in the gallery'. [564] *Place* continued Davis's formal investigation into the elemental concerns of sculpture: space, duration and material.

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

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

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[564] 'Notes on twelve exhibits by Noel Sheridan, M.A.', op. cit., p. 5.
[565] Since Sculpturscape '73, there had been major shifts and movements: from Sydney, Donald Brook was now Professor of Visual Arts at Flinders University, Bert Flugelman was lecturer in sculpture at SASA; Noel Sheridan was executive officer of Adelaide's newly established EAF; Noel Hutchison was senior lecturer in charge of sculpture at the Tasmanian School of Art in Launceston; and Patrick McCaughey was Professor of Visual Arts at Monash University. Many other graduates were running regional and other funded galleries, which were also undergoing rapid development and change.

Within the generously funded college system, funding was available to pay for visiting lecturers as well as increased staff development opportunities. The 6th Mildura Sculpture Triennial in early 1975 offered the selected sculptors more professional opportunities to accrue status and increase income within this highly leveraged network of the visual arts profession. For Davis, the opportunities for visiting lectureships and exhibitions were negotiated at the triennial event in Mildura. A sculptor's reputation was now not so determined by prizes, commissions, collector purchases and exhibitions at commercial galleries but rather by inclusion in invitational exhibitions, grants, university residencies, acquisition into public collections and teaching positions within the new college system. There was also a definite hierarchy beginning to develop that favoured VAB funded, non-commercial, 'experimental and innovative' initiatives.

Professional development

On his return to Melbourne from the triennial, Davis wrote a letter to the Prahran CAE staffing committee requesting that his position and salary be upgraded to senior lecturer. Although he stated that he was applying for the position of senior lecturer in Fine Art, he was arguing the case for the number of Fine Art senior lecturer positions to be expanded: 'at the present time the School of Art and Design has three senior lecturers, and more specifically the Fine Art area has one'.[566] He had the support of the dean of the School of Fine Art and Design and was aware of other institutes within the VIC that had designated senior lecturer positions to heads of departments. His application substantiated his claim of developing and expanding the sculpture department from a staff of two with nine students in 1973 to four staff and thirty-five students by the beginning of 1975. He also noted his extensive professional relationships with staff at other colleges and the number of guest lectureships he had undertaken at these various colleges; many of these relationships were forged at the Mildura Sculpture Triennial gatherings. The number of senior lecturer positions within the School of Art and Design at Prahran CAE was

[566] John Davis, letter to Staffing committee, Prahran CAE, 24 April 1975, Davis archive, correspondence.

increased: Davis was appointed as senior lecturer in sculpture.[567] Not only was his own reputation as a sculptor and educator enhanced, but also that of the Prahran CAE Sculpture Department: increased reputation equated with increased resources.

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

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

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[567] Fred Cress had retired from teaching to paint full time. Jeffrey Makin was appointed as senior lecturer in Fine Arts, as Head of Painting, and John Davis as senior lecturer in sculpture. What is not clear is whether Davis's appointment was via an advertised and competitive process or whether the new position was created for him.
[568] John Davis, letter to Robert Jacks, 7 June 1975, Robert Jacks archive.

removal of Domenico de Clario's scatter piece in one of the *Artists' Artists* series of exhibitions. The organisation for the sit-in was driven by the Ewing Gallery Advisory Committee, of which Davis was a member. Following the sit-in, Davis was appointed to an artists' steering committee to draw up recommendations to press for improved representation of contemporary Australian art and artists by the NGV.

Between August and September, Davis was involved in three exhibitions: *The Grid Show: a structured space* at the Ewing Gallery and two solo exhibitions emanating from the Mildura exhibition and discussions (Figure 75).[569] Patrick McCaughey had invited Davis to show *Place* at the Monash University Gallery. Following discussions at Mildura, Davis refined the work and asked Noel Hutchison to write a catalogue essay. Hutchison's Introduction is almost manifesto-like in its opening proclamation: 'We have gained a position free from the domination of a commercially successful style, of the dictates of one fashionable set of criteria.'[570] The defensiveness and underlying anxiety is clearly Davis's and it is possibly a response to competitive tensions at the 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial, particularly in relation to Peter Tyndall's parodic work, *Eulogy (Black)*. Tyndall regarded Davis's *Tree Piece* at Sculpturscape '73 as the posturing of a new school of sculpture, the 'sticks and stones/pseudo ritual' kind.[571] Davis, through Hutchison's writing, was attempting to substantiate that his use of systematic processes and organic materials was the result of his own internal enquiry and not a cultish adaptation of new international styles. The claim to be 'free of the dominance of a commercially successful style' was an act of misrecognition, which was fully revealed in the following statement in the Introduction:

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[569] His solo exhibition at the Contemporary Art Society in Adelaide, entitled *Substance-cause-number-relation*, drew on many of the works that had comprised his exhibition at Pinacotheca in 1974.
[570] Noel Hutchison, 'Introduction: John Davis and *Place*', exhibition catalogue, Monash University exhibition gallery, 2-26 September 1975.
[571] Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura*, op. cit., back cover credit. Given that McCaughey had offered Tyndall the first artist-in-residence at Monash in 1975, this invests the Introduction with an even more loaded significance.

> In this one moment of relative wealth, relative lack of outside control and relative lack of public concern about his activities, the Australian artist is free and responsible to himself alone …[572]

These exhibitions were about strategic positioning; Davis's intention was clearly not merely to exhibit but also to seek to improve his status within what was manifestly an autonomous network of inextricably linked, and increasingly powerful, individuals and institutions.[573]

However, the achievements of the past year were overshadowed by the dramatic events in November of the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor Government, followed by the overwhelming federal election victory of the Liberal-Country Party led by Malcolm Fraser and his call for accountability and a reduction in public spending. The effects of the rapidly declining economic situation were felt directly: "The Prahran College is like everybody else, on hard times, staff contracts not being renewed etc, student intake to be cut."[574]

By early 1976, Davis was successful in his application for a direct assistance grant to the VAB for $2690 that would contribute to the work he intended to make during his residency at Monash University's Department of Visual Art. Combined with the VAB-funded six-monthly stipend of $3750 for the residency, his grant earnings for the first half-year were $6440, a substantial sum.[575] Having hosted Tom McCullough while he was in Melbourne in January, Davis was also briefed by McCullough on his selection as the director for the 2nd Biennale of Sydney. Through Davis, the core group of Melbourne sculptor-advisors for the Mildura Triennials would maintain their advisory relationship with McCullough.

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[572] Noel Hutchison, 'Introduction: John Davis and "Place"', *Place*, Monash University Exhibition Gallery, Department of Visual Arts, September 2–26, 1975, n.p.
[573] McCaughey offered Davis the second artist-in-residence position starting in February 1976 at Monash University. Ironically, the first residency in 1975 was offered to Peter Tyndall. Donald Brook and Noel Sheridan invited Davis to participate in the EAF's survey exhibition, *Post-Object Art in Australia and New Zealand* in May 1976.
[574] John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, 16 November 1975, Noel Hutchison archive.
[575] $6440 in 1976 was equivalent to $33,000 in 2008. Prahran CAE also paid him one day a week to research and develop a new museology diploma for the college.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 72: top, John Davis in his studio, c.1974-75. Silver gelatin photograph, 40.5 x 30.4 cms. Photographer: Richard Beck.
Figure 73: bottom, John Davis, part of his installation *Place* 1975, video, plastic, photography, mixed media. Included within Place was a process entitled *Plaiting* which was shown on video and also in a series of 10 black and white photographs, on the wall. *Plaiting* was a record of Davis plaiting nine lengths of string together. See Scarlett, *The sculpture of John Davis*, p.82.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 74: top, John Davis, *On the need for a proper delineation in a moment* 1975, 36 small photographs, rectangle of plastic sheeting on the floor, square shallow lead tray, two vertical cardboard cylinders covered with canvas, filled with sand and linked by two lines of string a small square latex form with four ceramic rods attached to the top, square bundle covered in canvas, a square of cast papier maché and a large stack of sheets of papier maché with drawing on top. Dimensions variable. This work was part of Graeme Sturgeon's *Artists' Artists* series of exhibitions at the NGV which were part of the Arts Victoria 75 celebrations.
Figure 75: bottom, John Davis, *Ewing Work* 1975, ceramic rods, latex sheet with eyelet holes, string, cardboard cylinder covered with canvas strips and ceramic rods tied with string. Dimensions variable. This work was exhibited at the Ewing Gallery in *The Grid Show: A Structured Space* from 11-22 August 1975.

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Captions from the following page:
Figure 76: top, John Davis's campsite at Hattah Lakes, May 1976.
Figure 77: middle, John Davis, installation using sticks on the ground at Hattah Lakes, May 1976.
Figure 78: bottom, John Davis, installation beside the Ovens River, Myrtleford using materials found at the site, September 1976.

This page:
Figure 79: John Davis, *Nomad* 1976. Grid of fibreglass and polyester resin rods, tied together with cotton, help by loops of latex, suspended by string from the ceiling. One sheet of latex with eyelet holes is suspended from the rods. A square of knitted string on floor with tied bundle of twigs. Three small structures on the floor, from left to right, are made from: fibreglass, carved wood and twigs. On the wall, twenty six black and white photographs of installations at Hattah Lakes. Grid dimensions: 183 x 250 x 30 cms. This work was exhibited in the 2nd Biennale of Sydney at the AGNSW, 13 November – 4 December, 1976.

The six-month residency at Monash University's Department of Visual Arts began in February. As Scarlett observed: 'the appointment which had been brought about by Patrick McCaughey's admiration for recent work by John Davis, carried considerable prestige'.[576] It was also, for McCaughey, a matter of accruing prestige and establishing a differentiated position within the competitive world of Melbourne fine arts academia and university galleries. The residency offered Davis an important freedom: 'I just work through day after day non-stop uninterrupted on my thing.'[577] The time to think and sift through an accumulation of diverse influences, impressions and experiences was transformative. However, what remains significant is that the generative processes in two significant series of works were created outside Melbourne, in isolation, and introduced the element of memory as an important element in his work.

Davis's work for the EAF survey exhibition *Post-object art in Australia and New Zealand* which opened in May 1976, comprised text and video. Entitled *Passage-Scan-You Yangs* it was an extension of the ideas present in *Place*; Davis described *Passage* as 'a formalist work composed of sixty-two views of an area of the You Yangs, Victoria'.[578] The area he chose to film was a windswept, featureless plain in which he had placed a white painted board, the introduced element, around which time and space would be tested in this series of video views. However, the high horizon line held throughout and the long slow horizontal panning highlighted the filmic medium's ability to offer an interpretation of his experience of the particularity and endlessness of that landscape.

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

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[576] Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit., p. 65. McCaughey was part of the concurrent rapid, university expansion in departments of visual and fine arts in Melbourne. In 1972 Peter Tomory was appointed as foundation Professor of Art History at La Trobe University and McCaughey was appointed in 1974 as the foundation Professor of Visual Arts at Monash University. At the same time, Donald Brook was appointed foundation Professor of Visual Arts at Flinders University in Adelaide. During McCaughey's term of appointment on the VAB (1973–74), he drafted the artist-in-residence policy, which was predicated upon raising the status of visual artists.
[577] John Davis, letter to Frank Watters, 16 June 1976, Davis Archive.
[578] Scarlett, op. cit., p. 83.

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

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

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

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

[580] *Nomad* was shown at the Monash University Gallery on completion of the residency and was Davis's entry in the 2nd Biennale of Sydney in November 1976, directed by Tom McCullough. Many of the smaller works such as *Mat* and *Bicycle* were exhibited in a group show at Watters Gallery in Sydney during the biennale.

suspended matrix and the knitted string rug on the floor beneath referenced his old canvas tent and sleeping mat. The three small structures on the floor traced his own sculptural development: from carved wood, to fibreglass mould to twig constructions. The twenty-six black and white photographs on the wall documented the process of selecting the tree site (a row of dead trees on a flat and desolate plain), collecting branches, twigs and twine and constructing the series of installations around the dead tree's girth.[581] The title of the work was deliberate, referencing Geoffrey Blainey's recently published *Triumph of the Nomads: a history of ancient Australia*, which at the time provided a controversial reassessment of Australian Aboriginal history, pre-European settlement.[582] Davis had also read the Monash University historian Geoffrey Serle's book on the cultural history and development in the arts in Australia entitled *From deserts the prophets come: the creative spirit in Australia 1788-1972* and was possibly introduced to him by McCaughey during his residency at the university.[583] The title of Serle's book was taken from a line in A.D. Hope's poem 'Australia'.[584] The final two stanzas of the poem offer a particularly pertinent insight into Davis's intentions:

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

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[581] Looking at the relationships between the dead tree's upper branches and Davis's constructions, there is an equivalence with Sogetsu Ikebana, the radical modern form of traditional Japanese Ikebana, which encouraged the use of any materials including styrofoam, found objects and bark. In an interview, C Elwyn Dennis remembered discussing ikebana with Davis (although he couldn't be specific about the date). Sogetsu Ikebana was widely practised in Australia during the 1960s and 1970s, through the efforts of Norman Sparnon, and made particular use of Australian flora.

[582] Geoffrey Blainey, *Triumph of the Nomads: a history of ancient Australia*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1976. Blainey's history and Davis's interest stemmed from the paradigm shifting discoveries of the extensive Lake Mungo Aboriginal cremation sites excavated in 1968, which established this site as possibly the earliest example of human burial in the world. From his time in Mildura, Davis was familiar with the great dry Lake Mungo and the Walls of China. He and Ken Scarlett had taken their students from Caulfield Institute of Technology there during their visit to the 1967 Mildura Sculpture Prize.

[583] Geoffrey Serle, *From deserts the prophets come: the creative spirit in Australia 1788–1972*, Heineman, Melbourne, 1973.

[584] Given that the Cantrills spent 15 months on an Australian National University Creative Fellowship between 1970 and 1971, they would no doubt have had many discussions with the then dean of the Faculty of the Arts at ANU, poet A.D. Hope.

> Such savage and scarlet as no green hills dare
> Springs in that waste, some spirit which escapes
> The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes
> Which is called civilisation over there.[585]

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

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

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

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[585] A.D. Hope *Australia*: http://www.convictcreations.com/culture/poetry.htm#aus, viewed 6 August 2009.
[586] Davis had a solo exhibition at Watters Gallery in 1971, which had received good critical feedback, though few sales. Frank Watters regularly attended the Mildura Sculpture Triennials and many of the artists that he represented also attended the triennials, and it is most likely that Davis had met up with Watters at the 1975 event.
[587] John Davis, letter to Bruce Pollard, 22 July 1976, Davis Estate, Box B Correspondence: Galleries.

find Melbourne a stimulating place to show my work … I would like to be associated more fully with a group of people whose interest is in art ideas and who are interested in different kinds of art and will discuss it.'[588] Davis would not find a Melbourne gallery to represent him till 1979.[589] His reputation as a sculptor-educator was firmly established in Melbourne; his reputation as a professional practising contemporary sculptor would now shift from Melbourne to national and international projects and exhibitions based upon a network of contacts emanating from arts organisations and contacts made in Sydney and through McCullough and the Mildura Triennials.

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

Davis and the 2nd Biennale of Sydney

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

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

[589] Davis held a solo exhibition at Pinacotheca in 1974.

[590] John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, 13 April 1976. Noel Hutchison archive.

'periphery – time lag' view of Australian practice as the poor and belated relation of the dominant Euro-American block.

Davis was particularly concerned that McCullough's concept of 'stylistic cores' providing 'a strong thematic basis' should not result in a 'collection of current overseas styles [with] examples of reflected work from here. A show of different alternatives would be a real first in this country.'[591] The rising tension for control between McCullough and some of the Melbourne sculptors was increasingly evident in their exchanges. As much as the VAB regarded the Mildura Triennials as the model for the biennales, the core group of sculptors from the three principal metropolitan centres – Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide – who had participated in Mildura since 1970 and 1973, certainly took a proprietorial view of this Biennale of Sydney.[592]

The competition amongst the Mildura cadres was intense. When the final Australian and NZ selection was announced, no-one commented publicly that of the twenty-two selected, twenty-one were all directly associated with Mildura. That, it would seem, was 'natural' selection. Instead Davis made an undisguised political observation: 'Tom McC [sic] certainly toughened up on the Australian area – no signs of flack down here yet altho' I bet Sydney bubbled for a couple of days & Tom won't be allowed in Adelaide at all.'[593] For Davis and his successful Mildura colleagues, their almost exclusive invitation to participate in what was a very significant exhibition in the Australian art world was clear evidence of the prestige and legitimacy that this emerging autonomous field (an alternative economy) had rapidly acquired. Issues of control continued; in an incident similar to the boycott threat at Sculpturscape '73, Davis along with eleven of the

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[591] John Davis, letter to Tom McCullough, n.d. (but written in response to Davis's letter of 19 July 1976), McCullough archive, PA 97/33, Box 6, SLV.
[592] In a rather terse and detailed response to Davis's querying of him about whether he had followed the recommendations by the Melbourne sculptors, McCullough observed: 'Does this demonstrate how much that Melbourne conference with your colleagues has influenced the overall approach to Biennale planning? I am sure it will be a really good show for that influence and I hope that you'll all accept some of the credit it if succeeds (no one really wants anything to do with a failure, of course).' He signed the letter very formally 'Thomas G. McCullough, Director'. See Tom McCullough, letter to John Davis, 19 July 1976, McCullough archive, PA97/33 Box 6, SLV.
[593] John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, 16 November 1975, op. cit.

Australian artists, joined another 100 members of the art world in a walkout during the opening ceremony by the prime minister Malcolm Fraser. They joined a further 300 protesters outside the gallery in a noisy demonstration that garnered significant publicity for the biennale.

In keeping with the transplantation of the Mildura model to Sydney, Davis brought several of his students from Prahran CAE to help in the installation of works at the biennale. *Nomad* was located in the end gallery at the basement level in the AGNSW (Figure 79).[594] The curators responsible for this section were Daniel Thomas and Frances McCarthy; Robert Lindsay and Bernice Murphy worked on the front and mid galleries of the basement level. They worked with the artists on the plan and installation of each work. Although Davis had met some of these curators at previous Mildura Triennials, working directly with them during the installation of his new work offered him an important opportunity to extend his cultural network, particularly as he now did not have any representation in Melbourne. Given the tremendous flux and movement in the expanding and increasingly professionalised field, this would prove to be a valuable association for Davis.

John Davis 1977–1978

Davis had only one exhibition during 1977 at Watters Gallery in Sydney. The experience of working, solitary, in the landscape around Hattah Lakes in 1976 had 'taught him to think very carefully'.[595] The screeds of text in which he elaborated his investigation of dialectical relationships through material, space and time, which gave his works a theoretical underpinning, were superseded by the powerful and real experience of 'place',

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

[595] John Davis, Survey 1, transcript of video interview with Robert Lindsay, NGV, 1977–78.

specifically the indelible memory of the Mallee area of his childhood around the Murray River. Davis's subject changed from being about art and theory, to a poetic, ambiguous sense of 'place'. He moved from an explanatory approach that had characterised his work since 1973, which reflected the new professional definition of 'research based' work, to a more elusive, personal approach: 'Successful works … extend my idea of what sculpture can be. I make art for myself – it is a contemplative, private activity.'[596]

He had purchased a Ford Transit van and converted it into a camper for his working trips, a kind of travelling museum cum workshop full of twigs, bark, feathers and other found materials (Figure 81). He also began taking students on some of these trips to introduce them to working in the landscape with found materials. In a letter to Noel Hutchison in April 1977, he reported on the first student trip: 'it went very well and good work evolved. Students very excited by the experience.'[597] The experience would prepare those students interested for the 1978 Mildura Triennial. For Davis, working with the students enabled him to clarify his own thoughts and understanding, while he prepared for his solo exhibition at Watters Gallery in July. About his process, Davis wrote:

> The work seems to be coming 'naturally' and I'm not seeking any external solutions, pressures etc. The pressure is from the 'inside' and I feel quite free and at last beginning the 'trip'.[598]

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

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[596] ibid.
[597] John Davis, letter to Noel Hutchison, 24 April 1977, Noel Hutchison archive.
[598] ibid.

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

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

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[599] During 1977, conflict regarding control of acquisition policy between the professional curatorial staff and trustees at the AGNSW reached crisis point. It was indicative of tensions throughout the whole sector, including in regional galleries, as the new professional 'expert' staff increasingly challenged the appointed trustees, often amateur enthusiasts with political and economic power. A number of the curators Davis associated with during his installation at the Biennale of Sydney at AGNSW, and who regularly attended the Mildura Triennials, made significant moves: Daniel Thomas was appointed curator of Australian Art at the ANG, Robert Lindsay was appointed to the newly created position of curator of Contemporary Australian Art at the NGV, Frances Lindsay was appointed to the newly opened gallery at the Victorian College of the Arts and Bernice Murphy was appointed as exhibition coordinator for the new professional entity, Australian Gallery Directors Council.

Also in 1976, Elwyn Lynn assumed the chair of the VAB, and within its various committees he was appointed chair of the Exhibitions Committee, responsible for selecting Australian participants for international exhibitions. As the curator of the Power Institute at Sydney University, Lynn had developed an extensive international network of artists, critics and curators, particularly in Europe. Tommaso Trini, who had made the European selections for the Biennale of Sydney and was subsequently brought out as a visiting critic by the VAB, was known to Lynn. Trini would prove useful to the VAB, particularly as he participated in 1977 in preparatory discussions with international critics and scholars regarding the direction and theme – *From Nature to Art, from Art to Nature* – for the 1978 Venice Biennale.[600] In his essay, published in the Venice Biennale catalogue, Trini provided the rationale that would differentiate this biennale from previous ones; specifically it was:

> … not burocratic [sic] but experimental, not a museum of standards but a laboratory full of experiments taking place … Today, the Venice Biennale really is a laboratory, compared to what it was in the past … It was therefore decided to hold an exhibition … which would illustrate some of the experimental art which has not been seen in Venice from 1972 to the present day, because of the well-known vicissitudes caused by the transformation and crisis of the Biennale.[601]

The emphasis on 'experimental … laboratory' accorded with the VAB's selection criteria preference for innovative and experimental. However, discussions about Australia's re-engagement in the Venice Biennale after a twenty-year lapse were already underway by mid 1977 between Daniel Thomas and the Venice Biennale authorities. By September, Thomas had submitted a detailed proposal for two exhibitions: one focusing on Australian artists, pre-1960, whose work exemplified the theme; and the second an exhibition which comprised examples of contemporary Australian art arranged within five sub-themes – traditional media, installation and environments, new media, Aboriginal art and international avant-garde.[602] Although welcomed by the biennale

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[600] Stephen Naylor, 'Australian contemporary visual arts from the outside in: a spatial analysis of Australia's representation at the Venice Biennale 1954–2003, unpublished PhD thesis, Faculty of Art and Design, Monash University, 2007, p. 54.
[601] ibid.
[602] ibid., pp. 55–56

authorities, with only a ten-month timeline these proposals posed a huge and expensive undertaking for the Australian organisers.

Trials and triumphs of 1978

The selection process was referred to the Exhibition Committee of the VAB, chaired by Lynn. No proposals were sought, however, by January 1978, three artists were notified: Robert Owen, Ken Unsworth and John Davis.[603] All were sculptors and had been selected for McCullough's 1976 Biennale of Sydney; all were lecturers in art within the new system of colleges of advanced education; all had solo exhibitions in 1977, of which the works selected for their Venice presentation formed the nucleus; and all had recently had works purchased for the Australian National Gallery collection, the most active, well funded and prestigious of the major institutions.[604] Both Owen and Davis had received significant funding from the VAB in 1976 to produce new works which were presented in their solo exhibitions, thus their selection for the Venice Biennale could be seen as a further validation by the VAB of its grant programs as successful support for innovative and experimental work.

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

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[603] ibid., p. 56.

[604] Robert Owen had returned from living US and London in 1975 to take up a position at the newly created School of Art at the Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education and Ken Unsworth was lecturer in sculpture at the School of Teacher Education at the Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education, Sydney. John Davis was senior lecturer in sculpture at Prahran CAE, Melbourne. During 1977, Owen exhibited at Tolarno, Melbourne, Unsworth exhibited at ICA (Institute of Contemporary Art, the old One Central Street Gallery premises) and Davis at Watters Gallery, in Sydney. All three would exhibit at the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial in 1978, held prior to the Venice Biennale. Works acquired for the ANG collection during 1976–77 included: Robert Owen, *Memory and Logic Unit: Phase zone 1-2*, 1976 (and the working drawings for this series); Ken Unsworth, *A different Drummer*, 1976, *Sculpture as ritual and burial place,* 1975, *Five secular settings for sculpture as ritual and burial place*, 1975, *Suspended Stone Wallpiece*, 1976; John Davis, *Bicycle II*, 1976.

network of peers with preferences that favoured 'not a museum of standards but a laboratory full of experiments' that Tommaso Trini expressed.[605]

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

The critical response to Davis's *Survey 1* exhibition at the NGV was mixed. His was the inaugural exhibition in a series of surveys of contemporary Australian artists curated by Robert Lindsay, whose position and program Davis had advocated as part of the Artists Steering Committee in 1975. Of the thirty-one works and two videos on display, five were from Davis's recent working period. These works had only been shown in Sydney: *Nomad* at the Biennale of Sydney at the end of 1976 and the other four as part of the Watters Gallery exhibition in July 1977. One Melbourne reviewer was critical of Davis's 'progress (I will not say development) [which] is marked by a gentle shifting from one academically acceptable manner to another'. [606]It typecast Davis as a typical member of the rapidly expanded teaching profession, rather than an artist; an issue that was particularly exacerbated in Melbourne because of the sheer number of and competition between, tertiary art schools within that city. Davis's secure position as senior lecturer meant that he was not dependent upon the sale of his work for a living. Clearly, there were competing claims as to who had the authority to define and rank artists.[607] The review also revealed issues surrounding the contested and shifting role of the premier art

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[605] Naylor, op. cit., p. 54.
[606] Ronald Millar, 'The safe side', *The Australian*, 27 March 1978, quoted in Scarlett, *The Sculpture of John Davis*, op. cit., pp. 123–4.
[607] Schwarz, *Culture and Power*, op. cit., p. 221.

gallery, from a storehouse of works that have proven, public worth to an exhibition venue for experimental works entirely dependent on 'expert' selection and recommendation.

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

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

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

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[608] W.E.P. Pidgeon, 'The maturing of a sculptor', *Sunday Telegraph*, 28 May 1987, quoted in Scarlett, op. cit., p. 124.
[609] Donaldson, 'Cultural legitimacy in the Australian art world', op. cit., p. 289.
[610] 'Tyndall and some other Australians, such as John Penny and John Davis, were exhibitors who've written to me mentioning their disappointment that so many Australians' works at Mildura seemed to lack

control of the selection criteria. Apart from the networking opportunities of the opening weekend, Mildura was now expended as a necessity for Davis by the new, more accessible and in most cases more prestigious metropolitan opportunities now on offer in Sydney, Adelaide, Canberra and Brisbane. He was also increasingly taking his students to work with him at various remote sites in Victoria; the experience of working within a range of natural environments was now a regular part of their curriculum. Further, the number of exhibiting opportunities for students and recent graduates provided by university and art school galleries, regional galleries and artist run spaces was on the increase. Many of these galleries replicated the art school, 'experimental' experience with programming of forums, seminars, discussions with visiting artists, critics and theorists, and an emphasis on new media, critical writing and thematic group shows. However, McCullough's forced resignation in July from the Mildura Arts Centre drew severe criticism from many sculptors, including Davis. Discussions about bringing the triennial event to Melbourne began to gather momentum, particularly as it was viewed as a national visual arts event that could counteract the perceived cultural favouritism of Sydney which had both the Australia Council and the Biennale of Sydney.

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

> I humbly join my European colleagues in awarding the palm to the Australian pavilion and the three highly competent and technically equipped artists it presented … Over and beyond the new prestige, it was doubtless salutary also for the three Australians most intelligently selected to be shown. With artists of such integrity, apparent strength and maturity … it is to be hoped that if Australian art is now ready to take its place in the big international exhibitions it will be able to keep safe and fresh its own qualities…[611]

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sufficient intellectual rigor.' See Tom McCullough, 'N.Z. Sculptors at Mildura' in *N.Z. Sculptors at Mildura: National Tour*, Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, Auckland, 1978, p. 5.

[611] Ronald Millen, 'The Venice Biennale: Nature morte with a brace of Australians', *Art and Australia*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1979, pp.81, 83.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 80: top, John Davis, *Solar Piece* 1977, installation near the You Yangs, using found rocks, sheet of steel. Dimensions: 87 x 217 x 115 cms.
Figure 81: bottom, dashboard of Davis's Ford Transit van with installations made of found objects: bones, feathers, twigs, bark and string c.1977.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

Figures 82 & 83: top, John Davis, *Continuum and Transference* 1977-78, installation at the 38th Venice Biennale 'From nature to art, from art to nature', 1978. The installation was composed of the following works: *Marker* (two parts) 1977, *Ridge* 1977, *Tower* 1978, *Device* 1978 and *Flag* 1978.

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

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

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[612] Although the issue of the use of art to support the promotion of a national identity is beyond the scope of thesis, the insistence on links to Aboriginal culture and rituals in both Lynn and Loeffler's essays certainly begs the question in terms of the selection criteria of the VAB.
[613] Ronald Millen provided a definition of Tracker Art: 'ephemeral fragments of nature and human life, the past and present are given permanent existence in arrangements and ensembles rich in ecological, geographical and anthropological suggestions: an archaeology of the present.' See Millen, 'The Venice Biennale', op. cit., p. 81.
[614] Norbert Loeffler, 'John Davis', *Venice Biennale 1978: From Nature to Art, from Art to Nature: Australia: John Davis, Robert Owen and Ken Unsworth*, VAB, Australia Council, Sydney, 1978, np. Quoted in Naylor, 'Australian contemporary visual arts from the outside in', op cit., p. 66.

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

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

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

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

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

[616] The Melbourne group included Janine Burke, John Davis, Lesley Dumbrell (wife of Lenton Parr), Robert Jacks, Peter Kennedy, Robert Lindsay (curator of Contemporary Australian Art, NGV), John Nixon and Jenny Watson. 'Sydney Biennale: White elephant or red herring: comments from the art community 1989', http://www.ianmillis.com/documents/historyherstory.htm, viewed 7 July 2007.

[617] John Davis, handwritten draft of a letter to Nick Waterlow, 16 August 1978, Davis Estate.

> to call a public meeting of Melbourne artists to thoroughly discuss this situation and its implications for Australian artists.[618]

The fundamental issue of the representation of Australian artists echoed the same concerns that Davis and the Melbourne advisors had expressed to McCullough in both 1973 and 1976. However, increased selection pressure was caused by the 'unprecedented expansion of the market [both commercial and the new, funded alternative economy under the umbrella of the Australia Council] … linked by a relationship of circular causality to the inflow of [young art school and university art graduates]' which provided the personnel for the rapid expansion in exhibition opportunities, galleries, publications and administration. This factor combined with a worldwide recession and the new government's stringent fiscal controls and demand for increased organisational transparency and efficiency, led to increased competition for diminishing resources.[619] Competition for control of the selection criteria by Australian artists and the director of the Biennale of Sydney and his board, increased. The exclusion of the critical elements of the Sydney and Melbourne artists' demands from the selection indicated a shifting power balance in the peer network, and was indicative of the complex field of competition for the monopoly of artistic legitimation that now defined contemporary Australian art practice.[620] Davis, like his Mildura selector colleagues, no longer controlled the selection process nor did he have the power to influence the new director or his board and their network of contacts.

The diminution of status and relevance of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials to Davis personally was indicative of the increasing dominance and concentration of competing hierarchies of positions and institutions in the metropolitan centres.[621] Sculpture was no longer the main game; the contested discourse of post-object art that had increasingly marked the invitational Mildura Triennials from 1970 to 1978 was no longer regarded as

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[618] 'Sydney Biennale: White elephant or red herring', op. cit.
[619] Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, op. cit., p. 54.
[620] ibid., p. 132.
[621] Davis, like many of his Melbourne colleagues, would have been aware of Westbrook's (as director of the Victorian Arts Ministry) commissioning of a feasibility study into establishing a major arts festival in Melbourne. The study had premier Hamer's support. 'Victoria may get arts festival by 1979', *The Age*, 16 November 1977, p. 2.

relevant.[622] Davis would have to compete for a position as a contemporary artist within a much more complex, differentiated and competitive environment.

McCullough's Mildura Swansong

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

Professionally, his participation on various national and state boards and committees of major arts funding bodies increased his status within the art world.[623] Participation in these activities and a funded overseas research trip in 1977, regarded as important professional development opportunities, again required his further absence from Mildura.

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

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

[623] McCullough had been appointed to the Craft Board of the Australia Council and was the chairman of their Exhibitions Committee. During 1976, he was appointed to the executive of the Australian Galleries Directors Council as well as also on the organising committee of Arts Victoria 78: Craft, a further initiative of Eric Westbrook and his Victorian Arts Ministry.

director within a rapidly evolving set of new hierarchies. However, it is the velocity with which the various types of symbolic and economic capital shift and change in this volatile new art system, in response to changing government policies, that contribute to McCullough's demise at Mildura.

Changing professional relationships: national issues

Between 1975 and 1978, there were significant conflicts and developments in the two major metropolitan art galleries – the AGNSW and NGV – that would have implications for McCullough. The NGV had provided McCullough with professional, curatorial and museum management mentoring in his early career, hence the resignation of NGV director Gordon Thomson in 1975, at the end of a very difficult year, removed a personal and professional connection to the NGV for McCullough.[624] Thomson was a great supporter of Australian sculpture. He had been part of an important triumvirate which included Eric Westbrook and Victorian premiers Bolte and Hamer who had both taken a very active involvement in cultural policies and the arts portfolio. It was this powerful combination of political and cultural will that saw the development not only of the Victorian Arts Centre but also the regeneration and expansion of the regional galleries network in Victoria. By mid 1976, Eric Rowlinson, previously registrar at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, accepted the directorship of the NGV.

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

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[624] There had been artists' protests concerning the removal of an *Art and Language* project at the time of the Museum of Modern Art's blockbuster exhibition *Manet to Matisse*, followed by an artists' sit-in of the gallery in protest at the treatment and removal of Domenico de Clario's work (part of Graeme Sturgeon's *Artists' Artists* series of exhibitions), which led to the establishment of an artists' steering committee and recommendations for greater engagement with contemporary Australian art practice. In October 1975, the curator of Australian Art, Brian Finemore, was brutally murdered.

to take up the positions respectively of director, Victorian College of Art Gallery and assistant curator of Australian Art at the NGV. Education officer Bernice Murphy moved to the Australian Gallery Directors' Council in the position of exhibitions coordinator (overseas exhibitions). McCullough had worked closely with both Peter Laverty and his deputy Gil Docking (who had known McCullough and the Mildura Sculpture Triennials in his previous position as director of the Auckland City Gallery) as part of the biennale management committee in 1976. He had also established a working relationship with the professional staff of the AGNSW during the Biennale of Sydney, many of whom had left the gallery during 1977.[625]

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

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[625] 'Conflict and confusion about the rights and powers of both Trustees and professional staff are causing problems in State art galleries around Australia. Nowhere is the conflict more apparent than in the Art Gallery of New South Wales, where a spate of resignations arising from discontent at the present running of the gallery is raising questions about the functions of State galleries … The gallery had doubled in size [since reopening in 1972] and had its first proper staff. They were young, drawn from Australia's new art museum profession and were impressively weighted with degrees … under Laverty with his highly trained staff, the implication was that the board would have to acknowledge staff wishes on acquisitions.' See Susanna Short, 'Staff, trustees and conflict at state art galleries", *The National Times*, 10–15 October 1977, p. 46.

within these institutions. The expansion of potential participants in the field, both in numbers of organisations and individuals, created the need for more professional structures and inter-organisational exchange. This in turn created the need for more rigorous selection criteria, hence increased competition for a diminishing number of positions relative to the increasing number of potential participants. Yet this increasing need for shared professional standards across positions in the field, paradoxically, created a pressure in each organisation to develop a specialised or unique niche relative to other similar organisations. McCullough had to redefine the triennial's niche in response to increasing competition from other visual arts festival-type events (associated with tertiary art schools and universities) and more specifically, the Biennale of Sydney.

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

Cracks started to appear in the relationship between McCullough and some sculptor-selectors who, sensing that McCullough had gone too far in his pursuit of experimental forms, refused to exhibit in 1978. The most public example was a boycott by Ron Robertson Swann: 'what happens at Mildura is more truly elitist than anything … the more regional you are, the more post-object you become'.[626] This was clearly a reference to Professor Donald Brook at Flinders University, the Australian proponent of the term, 'post-object art' and the EAF, headed by Noel Sheridan, both based in Adelaide and great supporters of the McCullough and the Mildura Sculpture Triennials.

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

[626] Susanna Short, 'Sculpture as an event', *The National Times*, 10–15 April 1978, p. 39.

craft was roundly dumped by the sculptor-selectors.[627] Also a proposal to invite Aboriginal artists' participation was encouraged by a number of his sculptor advisors, but according to McCullough, the proposal met with resistance from the Aboriginal Arts Board.[628]

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

Following his European trip in 1977 when he met and spent time with Joseph Beuys in Kassel, McCullough was still committed to the Mildura Triennials having a more international engagement. Like the 2nd Biennale of Sydney, he was keen to present Australian artists alongside their international peers. The VAB was keen to bring international contemporary artists to Australia, not just at biennale time, but also to involve them in what they regarded as sites of avant-garde activity.[629]

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

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[627] McCullough was on the Crafts Board of the Australia Council and on the Arts Victoria 78: Craft organising committee and had proposed thematic exhibition which addressed the artist/artisan debate to be Mildura's contribution to the Victorian initiative.
[628] Tom McCullough, "Seventh Sculpture Triennial Bulletin to Artists", undated c.1978, McCullough archive, PA 97.33, Box 20, SLV.
[629] The EAF in Adelaide and the Sculpture Centre in Sydney had both been funded on this basis. Both these venues became important network nodes for McCullough. Terry Reid and his international mail-art exchange in Sydney and Noel Sheridan at the EAF were regular participants at the Mildura Triennials and associates of McCullough.

> Mildura's reputation for encouraging the experimental and emerging sculptors among its wide-ranging list of invitees has been applauded universally … This confidence must encourage unashamed regionalism as is characteristic of new art in California, England and some European countries at present.'[630]

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

Funding issues for McCullough

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

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[630] Tom McCullough, Preface, *Seventh Sculpture Triennial at Mildura Arts Centre, 25th March – 28th May 1978*, catalogue, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, 1978, n.p.

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

[632] The Director's Report to Mildura Arts Centre Advisory Council, *Mildura Arts Centre Annual Report 1976 –1977*, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, 1977. This was the first time that a regional gallery had been assisted with an acquisitions grant from the state arts ministry. Interestingly, it coincided with the announcement that the popular VAB Australian contemporary art acquisition scheme, which had provided financial assistance to galleries to purchase contemporary Australian works, would be terminated. McCullough also received five gifted works from the Biennale of Sydney, bringing the total contribution to the Mildura collection to 18 works.

The riverfront cultural park, which the Mildura City Council had endorsed in principle in 1971, had not progressed any further since the 1975 committee's plans and budget.[633] A number of encroachments on the boundaries of the park had been allowed and, although the Mildura City Council continued to endorse the project, it was dependent upon significant government funding in order to realise the plans. Given the Mildura Art Centre's tight financial constraints with regard to the forthcoming triennial, park development could not be considered a priority.

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

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

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[633] As McCullough revealed in this Director's Report, 'Unfortunately, the $10,000 planning budget provided by the Visual Arts Board in 1974 has achieved nothing but attractive landscape designs … and an edition of small explanatory publications, with estimates, which were sent to State and Federal government bodies', ibid.
[634] ibid.
[635] The specifics of the VAB funding decision is covered in the following section on the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial.

Changing professional relationships: Local issues

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

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

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

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[636] Short, 'Sculpture as an event', op. cit.
[637] 'Frontal attack on nude stage show', *Sunraysia Daily*, 24 November 1977, p. 2.

McCullough acknowledged his need for controversy in order to get greater coverage and engage public interest in the triennials.[638] However, he had misjudged his most important local ally, the MACAC. Not only did he have two vocal objectors in the positions of chairman and deputy chairman, but his trusted friend and advisor Reg Etherington could no longer support McCullough's position: 'We had a good and long-lasting relationship until the final years when the Triennials became so controversial that the Council and I started to move in different paths. Reg, I thought, started to let me down at that stage and backed the City Council's fear of the Triennials.'[639]

The fight between McCullough and a group of councillors, namely Councillors Gambetta, Mills, Burr and Beasy, can be traced through the *Sunraysia Daily* news clippings (Figure 84). The mounting suspicion that unacceptable forms of contemporary art would be foisted on Mildura was behind the action of these councillors when they issued a warning to McCullough and artists just prior to the opening of the 7th Triennial, that there was to be 'no blood letting, no pornography and no nudity', with further threats that if this was transgressed it could mean the end of the triennials in Mildura.[640] By early March 1978, the mounting public controversy had drawn the participating artists into the fray, in support of McCullough and against the conservative attitudes expressed by the Mildura City Council and MACAC. Nancy Borlase in her review noted that the Art Centre cost the ratepayers of Mildura 'a cool $100,000 a year to maintain' and continued with a measured observation:

> What does rankle are comments which are seen to ridicule the locals. Without community support, involving for one thing, the cooperation of council employees in countless ways, there would be no triennial, even with the funding that comes from the Visual Arts Board and the Victorian Ministry for the Arts.[641]

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[638] McCullough: '[I]n my reading of exhibitions around the world, anything that is at all controversial will get more press than something that is not controversial … let's have a bit of controversy if it means public interest'. See McCullough's interview with de Groen, op. cit.
[639] McCullough, interview with the author, 30 March 2006.
[640] 'Arts Centre not for crudity: Burr', *Sunraysia Daily*, 16 March 1978.
[641] Nancy Borlase, 'One martyr, many views', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 April 1978.

Separation of McCullough from Mildura

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[642] Paul McGillick, 'The Mildura Triennial', *Quadrant*, vol. 22, no. 5, May 1978, p. 41.
[643] McCullough, interview with the author, 30 March 2006.

experimental art to Mildura'. [644] However, as he himself acknowledged, 'the Triennials ... were never mounted principally for the majority of people living in Mildura; they existed and expanded by virtue of the artists' belief in the Mildura Triennials being a truly national art event'.[645] From 1973 onwards, Mildura Arts Centre provided the site and staff while the project was principally financed by state and federal arts funding.

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

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

> Government support will go to those who can provide evidence of effective organisation and sincere interest in national/state projects, so it is inevitable that a new venue will be eagerly sought and found for the next Australasian Sculpture Triennial. (e.g. La Trobe University's Sculpture and Performance Festival, June 1978).[646]

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[644] McCullough, email response to the author, 30 May 2007.
[645] Tom McCullough, 'Mildura City Council Policy for Future', 26 June 1978, p. 1. McCullough's written response to the town clerk's memo 're: introspection policy and support limited to Mildura etc', McCullough archive, PA 97.33, Box 29, SLV.
[646] McCullough, 'Mildura City Council Policy for Future', op. cit.

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

7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial

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

aspirations for the future development of the sculpture park, collection and triennial in Mildura.[647]

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

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

> [T]he Mildura Triennial because of its size, exposes an awkward relationship between contemporary art and artists and a small conservative agricultural community … the particulars of the community seem to be considered more as a physical location than as a social context … In most instances, participating artists have not dealt with the situation as a particular social interplay in which they may participate.[648]

Mannix, whose background was in community theatre, replied:

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[647] 'Victoria may get arts festival by 1979', *The Age*, 16 November 1977, p. 2.
[648] Terry Reid (ed),'Mildura Broadcast Sculptors Bulletin', *Radio Ozone*, Sunnyland Press, Red Cliffs, 1978, n.p.

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

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

Selection Process

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

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

[650] Following the 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial, Terry Reid lived in Mildura for 18 months and organised a community oriented, fluxus *Mask* exhibition at the Mildura Arts Centre during the period when McCullough was in Sydney. Unlike other sculptor-participants and selectors, this period afforded Reid insights into the local community and nature of the Arts Centre's relationship with them.

gallery and contemporary art space exhibitions. They were concerned to maintain their increasing professional status. However, McCullough stressed 'that higher selectivity for the sake of quality would not compensate for the loss of stimulus which Mildura's openness has provided' and the increase and exposure that the triennials offered new, younger artists was maintained as a defining element.[651]

Although Victorian participation was still the largest component, constituting forty-eight per cent of the total of 125 participants, changes in the selectors and the selection process were reflected in the participants and their works. Whereas since 1973 the Victorian participation had shown significantly larger percentages of emerging sculptors exhibiting compared to all age ranges than had other regions, by 1978 the Victorian percentage of fifty-one per cent of participants under thirty years old was the same percentage for the rest of states of their total participation numbers. However, the rate of participation over the whole field who were born in 1945 or after (therefore thirty-three years old or less) rose to almost seventy-seven per cent of the total. By 1978, all states and territories had made the transition to art schools as part of the parallel tertiary CAE system. Overwhelmingly, more than three-quarters of all the participants were the products of post-1965 education policy changes. Rather than a national survey of the state of sculptural practice in Australia, the 1978 Mildura Sculpture Triennial was a survey of emerging art practices in Australia, which were the direct product of the new, autonomous, tertiary art education system. It was in the nature of this evolving professional field, as with any profession, 'to maintain control over the mechanism designed to ensure their reproduction'.[652] The Mildura event was an important extension of this autonomous functioning of the art education system.

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

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[651] Tom McCullough, 'Notes from a discussion with 12 South Australian Sculptors and Students – Saturday 6th August, 1977', McCullough archive, PA 97/33 Box 20, SLV.
[652] Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, op cit., p. 251.

and significantly offered promotions for a number of McCullough's core selectors. [653] However, these new entities emerged at a time of crisis, where major cultural and educational figures were accused of calling for 'an elitist policy in art education' in response to funding cuts and a shortage of good teachers.[654] Dr Philip Law, vice president of the VIC, called for limits to be imposed on the number of students doing fine arts, craft and performing arts through the application of stricter selection criteria. Chairman of the Australia Council, Professor Geoffrey Blainey, concurred, adding, 'Artistic standards should be high, not to turn artists and performers into an elite, but because *the audience deserves the best* [my italics].'[655] Calls for funding allocations (in both education and the arts) to be more demand or audience oriented challenged the autonomy of the emerging alternative art economy.

Funding Issues

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

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

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[653] As Jim Allen had recently been appointed as director of the new Sydney College of the Arts, McCullough flew to NZ to discuss plans for the triennial with artists and curators, and invited the young curator and artist Nicholas Spill to co-ordinate the NZ contingent.
[654] "Mixed feelings on elitism", *The Age*, undated news clipping, August 1978.
[655] ibid.

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

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

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Figure 84: top left, Headline, *Sunraysia Daily*, 1 March 1978.
Figure 85: top right, Peter Tyndall, *Shooting Gallery / Ritual Significance or State Your Aim / Set you sights/ Make your mark*, 1978, installation and performance. Canvas backdrop, targets, slug gun and information stands. Dimensions: 240-300 (h) x 390 x 300 cms.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

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Figure 86: left, George Christofakis, *Structure III* 1977, timber, netting, rope and rocks, 450 x 120 x 120 cms. Collection Mildura Arts Centre.
Figure 87: right, Adrian Mauriks, *Through Square* 1977, painted mild steel, 154 x 320 x 200 cms.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

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Figure 88: top, Isabel Davis, *Kitchen Creation* 1977, wood, Perspex, fabric and household residue, 22 x 46 x 26 cms. Collection Mildura Arts Centre.
Figure 89: bottom, Tony Coleing installing *Happy Christmas* 1978, mixed media, dimensions variable on the lawn outside the Mildura Arts Centre.

Images have been removed due to copyright reasons

Figure 90: Ken Unsworth, site preparation for installation, *Shark* 1978, earth, gravel and slate. Circumference 965 cms, height 47 cms. The slate 'fins' had not yet been inserted when this photograph was taken.

In late July, Mildura was dealt a severe blow with the announcement that the VAB, 'which had contributed $16,000 to the last triennial, had advised that there was no money available'; the headline in the *Sunraysia Daily* spelled out the reality: 'Plans for the 1978 Sculpture Triennial could be scrapped.'[656] McCullough protested that Mildura be recognised as the sculpture centre of Australia and met with the VAB to convince them of the need to financially support the continuance of the triennial. By September 1977, McCullough had secured a conditional commitment of $23,000 from the VAB: $15,000 for administrative costs, $5000 for a proposed visiting overseas artist and $3000 for his European research trip in preparation for the 1978 triennial.[657]

The grant was conditional upon the Mildura Arts Centre and the community being able to raise $8000 for the purchase of works from the triennial. The total funding contributed by the VAB and the Victorian Ministry for the Arts amounted to $37,500. The $12,000 loan put up by the Mildura City Council was necessary in order for the Mildura Arts Centre to qualify for matching funds from the arts bureaucracies. Thus as McCullough pointed out, the loan of $12,000 plus the $8000 required for purchase funds would have to be raised through the Mildura Arts Centre, in effect making it a significant sponsor of the event to the value of $20,000.[658] The final funding for the event totalled $41,500 and was provided by the VAB, Victorian Ministry for the Arts, Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council in New Zealand and the Sidney Myer Foundation. Although successful in gaining funding for the 7th Triennial, the initial refusal by the VAB was no accident and indicated that the Mildura Sculpture Triennials and Mildura Arts Centre's aspiration to be a national sculpture centre were lesser priorities than the development of metropolitan events such as the Biennale of Sydney and the Adelaide Festival of the Arts, which could certainly claim larger audience participation levels.

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[656] 'Plans for the 1978 Sculpture Triennial could be scrapped', *Sunraysia Daily*, 20 July 1977, p. 2.
[657] McCullough noted as part of his recommendations to MACAC that he be granted leave for the overseas research trip because: 'The occasional need for overseas professional study and renewed contact is no longer considered unusual for art gallery personnel in Australia. The main problem is the getting of the finance and permission from employers.' See submission to MACAC, 7 September 1977, Mildura Arts Centre archives, File 1978 Triennial, Mildura.
[658] Tom McCullough, 'The Sculpture Triennial at Mildura Arts Centre: Support and crisis', 13 November 1979, McCullough archive, PA97/33, Box 29, SLV.

Selected works and the exhibition

McCullough's swansong was the largest yet: 125 artists presented 163 works and for fifty-four per cent of the participants, this was their first showing at Mildura. 1978 also had the largest contingent from New Zealand and discussions circulated on extending the Australasian focus in future. Peter Tyndall spent the full eight weeks, every day, acting as the *Shooting Gallery* attendant at his exhibit; in effect, a de facto artist-in-residence (Figure 85).[659] There was a significant women's presence, although nowhere near the thirty-one per cent participation rate in 1961. The premise of Mildura as an 'experimental laboratory' encouraging a workshop attitude, was enacted in a large area of the Sculpturscape section marked out for spontaneous installations by students and others. This premise was carried further with more exhibiting areas spreading into the Mildura township, occupying vacant buildings, some scheduled for demolition.

Socially and politically informed performance pieces aimed at direct engagement or confrontation with Mildura residents were another larger feature of this triennial, including the Lazlo Toth Art Vandals from Adelaide who attempted to disrupt the opening event. The twelve New Zealand sculptors brought into sharp relief the difference between high selectivity in their case and the art school embracing openness of the Australian selection. As McCullough recalled, 'cerebral Australians like Peter Tyndall … and some other Australians, such as John Penny and John Davis, [have] written to me mentioning their disappointment that so many Australians' work at Mildura seemed to lack sufficient intellectual rigour.'[660] However, New Zealander David Mealing, who created some of the most socially challenging performances, made some brutally honest observations about the condition of contemporary practice and its relation to audience:

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[659] 'Artists gets a verbal blast', *Sunraysia Daily*, 27 May 1978; Cr Beasy (deputy chairman of the Mildura Art Centre Advisory Council) was quoted as saying: 'The Shooting Gallery operated by My Tyndale (sic) at the triennial received 10 percent of the special fund purchase.' Peter Tyndall was awarded $800 from the acquisitions budget of $8000 for his marathon installation/performance work.
[660] Tom McCullough, 'NZ Sculptors in Mildura', op. cit., p. 3.

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

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

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

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

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[661] David Mealing, letter to Tom McCullough entitled 'Impressions and observations', reproduced in *Exhibition Exposition*, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura, 1978, p. 70.
[662] Elwyn Lynn, 'Sculpture at Mildura', *Quadrant*, vol. 22, no. 5, May 1978, p. 42.
[663] Klaus Rinke also created a work that he donated to the Mildura Arts Centre collection. The untitled work is reproduced in *Exhibition Exposition*.

Acquisitions

With the $8000 raised from entrance fees, fourteen works by twelve artists were purchased for the Mildura Arts Centre collection from the 1978 Triennial.[664] In March 1977, McCullough with MACAC approval purchased thirteen international works from the Biennale of Sydney, valued at $22,000.[665] Added to this were five donated works from the biennale.[666] These works were funded on a dollar-for-dollar grant from the Victorian Ministry for the Arts. By 1978, the Mildura Arts Centre had assembled an impressive and unique collection of contemporary Australian sculpture, and some valuable contemporary international works; in Australia, it constituted a unique survey of the period from the 1960s and 1970s of the upheavals in sculpture and the emergence of new kinds of art practice. The investment of $30,000 between 1977 and 1978 in the Arts Centre's sculpture collection was significant and provided a poignant backdrop to the escalating tensions surrounding the future of triennials in Mildura.[667]

21st Anniversary RGAV meeting

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

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[664] See Sturgeon, *Sculpture at Mildura*, op. cit., p.105, for a complete list of the purchases.
[665] The acquired works from the 2nd Biennale of Sydney were: Robert Arneson (US), *Search for significant subject matter*; Nigel Hall (UK), *Cross*; Julian Hawkes (UK), *Kami*; Tony Ingram (UK), *Landscape Fold*; Tatsuo Kawaguchi (Japan), *Red light and Blue light*; Robert Kinmont (US), *Lesson No.9* and *Artist's Table*; Gloria Kisch (US), *Gateway Piece*; Carl Plackman (UK), *Your voice must be heard/herd*; James Pomeroy (US), *Fear Elites*; Terry Powell (NZ/UK), *Untitled*; William Wiley (US), *Lay Plaza de Ordinairevent*. Tabled in 'Report to the RGAV Annual Meeting 1977 by the Director of Mildura Arts Centre', Art Acquisitions Appendix. McCullough archive PA 97/33, Box 11, SLV.
[666] Mitsuo Kano (Japan), *Grapeshots (book): concerning positional ubiquity*; Keiji Usami (Japan), *Profile*; U-Fan Lee (Japan/Korea), no title registered; Tony Coleing (Australia), *Bus Stop*; Stuart Brisley (UK), *Hyde Park Installation*. Tabled in 'Report to the RGAV Annual Meeting 1977', ibid.
[667] By current calculations, $30,000 in 1978 is equivalent to $125,500 in 2008.

As the director of Victoria's Ministry for the Arts and convenor of the Arts Victoria 78: Craft initiative, Westbrook's non-attendance at the important 21st RGAV conference (he was listed as a keynote speaker), contributed to rising local doubts about the political and cultural prestige of the triennials to the Mildura community. His close association to the Bolte and Hamer governments and also long history of support for and involvement in the Mildura Arts Centre and its sculpture triennials had conferred McCullough and the triennials with significant cultural legitimacy.[668] His decision not to attend, however inadvertent, would remove a level of professional protection that his association afforded McCullough and the triennials in the local community.

It was a challenging conference with major changes recommended in the association's constitution, which were symptomatic of the impacts of external pressures and internal conflict upon the whole visual art field. The executive body was expanded to include two gallery director positions, effectively ceding greater financial and management control of regional galleries to the professional directors and further, it was agreed that gallery directors would have voting rights in future general meetings.[669] With Reg Etherington appointed as the government nominee on the executive committee, the irony would not have been lost on McCullough and others, of how this new willingness by the organisation to acknowledge its professional officers and allow them greater autonomy exposed the recent deep conflicts between the Mildura Arts Centre director, his advisory council (MACAC) and Mildura City Council over control of the centre and its programs.

Audiences and the local response

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

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[668] Westbrook's commissioning of a report into the feasibility of a major recurrent Victorian arts festival, and Hamer's obvious interest in the proposal, would have also been causes for concern within MACAC and the Mildura City Council. See 'Victoria may get arts festival by 1979', *The Age*, 16 November 1977, p. 2.
[669] 'Arts men to help run galleries', *Sunraysia Daily*, 1 May 1978, p.2.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[672] Ron Robertson Swann quoted in Short, 'Sculpture as an event', *National Times*, op.cit.

energy and/or commitment', indicated that there was no longer universal support within the art world for the Mildura event and that its prestige was under threat.[673] This would have fuelled the doubters' concerns within the MACAC and the city council.

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

There were other voices, a number within those selected to participate, who considered that the definition of audience should encompass the community of Mildura.[674] Terry Reid observed that for many of the participants, 'the particulars of the [Mildura] community seem to be considered more as a physical location than as a social context'.[675] George Mannix's response, drawing on his knowledge of the findings of the IAC in relation to performing arts, proposed an innovative interpretation to the report's

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[673] David Dolan, 'Mildura – revisited', *The Advertiser*, 27 May 1978, p. 20. Full quote: 'It is suggested that over the last decade the triennials have relied heavily on the support of a core of sculptors who are running out of energy and/or commitment. This theory is linked to the idea that art events such as Mildura's have a naturally limited lifespan – or organic-cum-cyclical concept, and highly questionable.' This review was written at the conclusion of the 7th Mildura Sculpture Triennial.

[674] A number of letters from participating artists such as Bonita Ely, Nicholas Spill and others, reprinted in the post-exhibition catalogue *Exhibition Exposition*, made similar observations about more direct involvement with the local community.

[675] Terry Reid, 'Flying Saucer: unexplained mission', *Radio Ozone*, Sunnyland Press, Redcliffs, Vic., 1978, n.p.

admonition that the arts should 'educate, innovate and disseminate', in the hope of encouraging a dialogue between artists and community. Mannix suggested that:

> Perhaps we could usefully invert both the problem and the solution. The programme of 'education, innovation and dissemination' could be applied to the artist, rather than the public. The artist could well be *educated* to the needs of the community, their situations, aspirations, preferences and requirements. This might then enable him to *innovate* in such a way as to better relate to the community as he sees it. This process would depend on the artist's contact with the community as various levels, away from the rarefied world of art schools and art circles. This would form the process, where the artist would *disseminate* both his work and himself.[676]

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

Their dispositions towards autonomy reflected the new position of art schools within the rapidly expanding advanced education system. This autonomous disposition was further validated by the Whitlam Government's commitment to education as a primary support for the development of an informed and educated audience for the arts and its establishment of the Australia Council as a funding and policy setting agency, operating at arms-length from government on the principle of peer review.[677]

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

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[676] George Mannix quoted, ibid.
[677] Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government 1972–1975*, op. cit., pp. 553–4.

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

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

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

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[678] Phil Dadson, commentary in *The Mildura Experience*, Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand, Wellington, NZ, 1978, n.p.
[679] '78 Triennial not accepted by Sunraysia: Burr', *Sunraysia Daily*, 25 May 1978.
[680] Tony Thomas, 'Bringing the arts down to earth', op. cit., p. 6.

Denouement

The May edition of *Quadrant* magazine published two extensive positive reviews of the 1978 Mildura Sculpture Triennial by Sydney art critics Paul McGillick and Elwyn Lynn. The tone of both articles, particularly McGillick's, was aimed at seeking continued official endorsement for McCullough and the Mildura Triennials.[681] McGillick's review offered a potted history of the triennials and amounted to a justification of their significance as 'the only model in Australia for both the art event of the future and the museum of the future'.[682] Whether conscious or not, there is a particular irony in his observation of Mildura as the model art event and museum for the future. The horse had already bolted as far as the principal funding agencies – the Australia Council and the Victorian Ministry for the Arts – were concerned. The Mildura model had already been transferred to the Biennale of Sydney and would be further adapted in the Australian Sculpture Triennials in Melbourne from 1981 to 1993. The metropolitan centres could argue a better case for supplying an educated and informed audience than the fractious regional town of Mildura.

Part of the VAB funding allocation for the triennial was used to produce a documentary with interviews conducted during the event and a black and white post-event publication entitled *Exhibition Exposition* offering a brief chronology of the months of preparation and set-up entailed in mounting the triennial and included personal evaluations, news clippings and photographs. McCullough had resigned his position before the publication could be distributed. It also contained two images of what appeared to be a couple simulating sex, both wearing t-shirts captioned with, 'Art in the service of Capitalism' and 'Capitalism in the service of Art' – the 'capitalist' woman was on top![683] This was the excuse the Council was looking for – a direct contravention of their moral edict.

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[681] Publication in the journal, *Quadrant,* was a strategic move clearly aimed at the Fraser Government and its appointee as chair of the Australia Council, Professor Geoffrey Blainey, as a counter to unflattering reports of the triennial from Mildura. The magazine had definite liberal conservative leanings. Critic and curator of the Power Institute, Elwyn Lynn, had also been appointed as the magazine's editor. Blainey was clearly supportive of the government's increasing audience-demand focus for funding the arts.
[682] Paul McGillick, 'The Mildura Triennial', *Quadrant,* vol. 22, no. 5, May 1978, p. 41.
[683] Although printed before McCullough's resignation and eventual departure from Mildura, the book was not distributed and remained in Council storage until January 1979 when it was burned.

However, the publication of Peter Tyndall's sixteen-page letter of detailed refutations of claims made by certain councillors against artists and the triennial probably contributed to their decision to burn it. *Exhibition Exposition* presented certain City Councillors as redneck, philistine bullies. This was the infamous book that was burned by the Mildura City Council in late January 1979 and created a small storm of indignation. Headlines screamed: 'Nazi book burning', which elicited a response from one of the councillors:

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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[684] George Tilley, 'Council burns Tom's work of art' undated *Sunraysia Daily* news clipping in McCullough archive, PA 97/33 Box 1, SLV. In 1978, the metropolitan city councils of both Melbourne and Sydney were not behaving much better than their Mildura counterparts in terms of their responses to two important public sculpture commissions in major destination locations: Civic Square in Melbourne and Martin Place in Sydney. Interestingly, the list of selected sculptors in both instances was very similar, with strong links to the Mildura Sculpture Triennials. Ron Robertson Swann won the Melbourne competition with his bright yellow painted steel work, *Vault*. There was a vociferous campaign led by certain city councillors in the popular press. The work was quickly nicknamed *The Yellow Peril*. In Sydney, Bert Flugelman's mirror-polished, stacked, steel cubes entitled *Pyramid Tower* was dubbed the *Silver Shish Kebab*, with a similar ruckus caused by disaffected city councillors in the local press.

organising committee, based in Sydney and centred on the Australia Council, AGNSW and Transfield Pty Ltd. Hence, the fact that the VAB decided in July 1977, six months after the successful conclusion of the Biennale of Sydney, not to fund the Mildura Sculpture Triennial, and that this decision was made at the same time that Eric Westbrook and the Victorian Ministry for the Arts funded a feasibility study for a proposed major Melbourne arts festival (with the intention of it commencing in 1979), was not incidental. In the reordering of priorities caused by a scarcity of funds, increased government scrutiny and changing policies, the Mildura Sculpture Triennials were displaced in favour of a concentration of resources and competition between the major metropolitan centres of Sydney and Melbourne.

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

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

director, in relation to the increasingly dominant position of metropolitan institutions and agents within the visual arts field.

Davis on the other hand was exemplary of the trajectory that determined one's rise in status within the new definition of professional artist and of the opportunities available within this new field, through the auspices of VAB. The 1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial for him was an opportunity to leverage support for improved status in the metropolitan centres. The strength of his contacts made through Mildura – McCullough, McCaughey, Brook and Sheridan – ensured his participation in significant events and programs in 1976. In essence, the contacts and projects that emanated from his participation in the1975 Mildura Sculpture Triennial essentially created the necessity for him to 'graduate' from the nurturing network that was Mildura for McCullough's core advisors.

Importantly, it was the funded, six-month residency at Monash University with time alone to work on his own projects that was to prove so valuable. His time at Hattah Lakes, where he produced several installations that informed his work *Nomad*, shown at the Biennale of Sydney, bore the inspiration of childhood memories of that beloved place and also marked the significance of all his attendances at the Mildura sculpture events, particularly the first in 1961, which was the inspiration for him to conceive of the possibility of becoming a professional sculptor. What was remarkable was the rapidity of the transfer of these new works from the relative obscurity of Hattah Lakes and his studio to major exhibitions and events in Sydney, Melbourne, Venice and New Delhi. More significantly, it was the selection of these ephemeral sticks and stones and their placement within the most prestigious of institutional environments that marked a major shift in the institutional values accorded to sculpture.[685] However, on his return to Australia from Venice, he recognised that the control of selection criteria that had remained firmly within the sculptors' control in Mildura and with McCullough and the

[685] Although Davis's *Installation with sticks on the ground at Hattah Lakes*, May 1976, predated Richard Long's *Brokenwood Circle* installation at the NGV in 1977, Long's work certainly added legitimacy to the presence of ephemeral works as installations within the NGV. In a sense Long's work could be seen to have laid the groundwork for such works being accepted within the major consecrating institution.

2nd Biennale of Sydney had shifted; that period of control had come to an end and a new set of competing positions was in the ascendance.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

As stated in the Introduction, this thesis attempts to reinscribe the Mildura Sculpture Triennial events from 1961 to 1978 into recent Australian art history. The purpose of this re-inscription is to support the claim that these triennial events were important contributors to the institutional development of Australian contemporary art practice and that they specifically brought together the disparate components that would connect into a web and eventually create an autonomous field of artistic production, the visual arts profession.

The cultural theorist Pierre Bourdieu's model of the genesis of an autonomous field of cultural production offered a non-teleological framework within which to rehabilitate these events as sites through which to map the rapid changes in government policies, and other external social, economic and political events, that would provide the necessary preconditions for the evolution of an autonomous field of professional activity, within the visual arts.

It is my argument that the Mildura Triennials, between 1961 and 1978, provide a valuable case study through which to investigate the development of a radically new context for art making in Australia. Because there had been only a limited tradition and hence a very small market for sculpture in Australia and, given that the Mildura events of the 1960s were an attempt to establish a basis for both, the impact of the emergence and development of an autonomous field of artistic practice was particularly evident within sculpture. The sculpture triennials were important nodal points in an emerging visual arts

network, thus they provide a window through which the rapid institutional changes in the Australian art scene at the time, can be observed and their impact assessed.

The autonomy that many sculptors, lecturers, academics and administrators had argued for as a necessity for a new type of professional training for artists was imported within the new tertiary education system, which drew upon the autonomous university model with its established concept of value determined by expert peer-review. This logic of educational autonomy and of the autonomous professional dispositions this nurtured, the emphasis on status and credentials (accorded by expert peers), cohered in and underpinned the development of an autonomous field of artistic production. The evolution of each of the components, particularly the expanded tertiary education system and the sculptors' drive for professional recognition and accreditation, was driven by their own needs and necessities and not by the needs of the larger field of which they would eventually become a part.

There is a key misrecognition in the claim that the emergence of a fully funded and functioning Australian Council for the Arts in 1973 was responsible for creating a demand for the arts, evident in the council general manager Jean Battersby's claim that: 'since the grants system was introduced, there has been an enormous increase in creative activity'.[686] What this statement does not acknowledge is that the Australian Council for the Arts (and its later statutory entity, the Australia Council) itself emerged in response to demand; it did not create demand. One of the key pressures it was responding to was this rapidly expanding, new generation of emerging artists being pumped out of the new tertiary art training system, in need of validation and consecration; something that could not be provided by the existing market. The council under the previous Liberal-Country Party government recognised this fact as early as 1970 when it noted that it might be appropriate to consider 'introducing other forms of assistance for artists,' as '[the market] may not have the same validity when applied to certain other branches of the visual arts

[686] Jean Battersby, in response to questioning before the IAC, quoted in 'The cornucopia', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 June 1975.

such as sculpture and possibly to the truly "avant garde" artists … whose work rarely has much initial appeal except perhaps to a very limited public.'[687]

However, this rapid expansion in the numbers participating in the new tertiary art education system, threatened the raised status and credibility of the credentials offered (status accrues to rarity), particularly in sculpture, which had little external market in which to validate its producers and their graduates. This was particularly evident in Melbourne, which had the largest concentration of art schools which taught sculpture, that were transferring from technical colleges to the new tertiary institutes and, because of Victoria's readiness to adapt to the new Commonwealth regulations, was one of the first states to adapt to this new regime. The competitive pressures and the level of participation by recent graduates, young sculptor-educators and their students at the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennials is evidence of this change and further evidence of the very necessity of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials as the only serious opportunity for national exhibition and validation, particularly with the concurrent demise of art prizes.

The autonomous field of tertiary art education was the economic basis for this new generation of sculptor-educators. There was already evident by 1970 – and certainly evident in the invitational (peer-selected) 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial – a pre-existing demand to support emerging artists and experimental art not suited to the market place. As their selection was largely not determined by external legitimation in the market, the necessary corollary for the selection of emerging artists was by professional peer-review, which in the instance of the Mildura Triennials, was often their own lecturers.

New ideas about art forms, new curricula for the teaching of art within a tertiary rather than technical sector, new professional identities and new selection criteria to validate this new professionalism, new critical theories, within rapidly expanding and evolving institutional structures, backed by significant government patronage, came into effect in

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[687] Australia Council, 'Visual and Plastic Arts Board, 9 March Agenda Papers [circa 1970]', op.cit.

Australia within a decade. These were rapid and interconnected changes that created a kind of positive feedback loop where change is cumulative and exponential. However, positive feedback it is an inherently unstable state for any evolving system, leading to unpredictable chain reactions. The fiscal cutbacks ordered by Fraser's Razor Gang across all federal government departments introduced some controls on the exponential growth and paradoxically, some stability. By 1978, Mildura effectively fell victim to a re-ordered hierarchy within the increasingly complex field of positions, competing for scarcer resources, which now favoured a concentration of status and institutions within the metropolitan centres.

The gatherings at Mildura Sculpture Triennials encouraged the development of a concept of being a member of a professional group and these events became part of a complex feedback loop of shared professional identity that developed a momentum all of its own. The Mildura Sculpture Triennials and McCullough's vision literally provide a 'field' on which various entities – professional associations, organisations and individuals – could compete for increasingly differentiated positions within this emergent and rapidly institutionalising field of professional practice.

The Mildura Triennials of the 1960s and 1970s represent a transitional phase in the process of moving from relative neglect of the visual arts by government in Australia to a highly differentiated and complex field of institutions and individuals, funded by and *relatively* autonomous of, government. It was a major paradigm shift, resulting in a new parallel economy made possible by government patronage.

Both McCullough's and Davis's career trajectories could be said to have been 'made in Mildura.' The state of Victoria also offered a particularly articulate view of the unfolding processes; it had a state government that was actively committed to funding cultural infrastructure and was also committed to taking advantage of the Commonwealth Government's new tertiary educational proposals – setting up a parallel system of Colleges of Advanced Education – that was announced in the Martin Report of 1965. By 1967, the Victorian Institute of Colleges was established, and it was through this body that sculptors such as the Centre 5 group and various arts groups and individuals working

with the funding assistance of UNESCO who had been lobbying for the improved status for artists through improving their professional education and training, realised that their advocacy would be realised in these new accredited institutes and colleges.

Davis is emblematic of the new professional sculptor. Like many of the core advisors to McCullough in the 1970s, he is also a member of a self-aware group of young sculptors who are the beneficiaries of the expansion of the new tertiary system of education. The expansion of the education system, and the consequent expanded employment opportunities this offered, posited the first real challenge and alternative economy to the existing heterogeneous market economy for artistic works.

Davis, like many of his Mildura colleagues, came to sculpture at a time of transition. His first real encounter was at the 1st Mildara Sculpture prize exhibition (which he helped install and also participated in) and it was this experience, and those he met there, that inspired him to move back to Melbourne and undertake the associate diploma in sculpture at RMIT, the premier sculptural training institute in Victoria under the direction of leading Centre 5 members. Like a number of his colleagues, he was one of the last of the trained sculptors for whom autonomy was not an assumed given. For his students, particularly from 1972 onwards when the full status of the Colleges of Advanced Education was in place, the reality that generated the Centre 5's professional mandate, its emphasis on education to develop an external market because it was the only market, was no longer a necessity. The professional dispositions Davis's students acquired during the 1970s were fundamentally the product of an expanding educational and institutional system, where the audience for their works was the 'educated and informed' of which they were a part. An under-recognised legacy of the Whitlam Labor Government was its policy linking of education to the arts in order to nurture a receptive audience for the art: 'the objectives of a Labor government [are that]… educational opportunities have as their goal the creation of a society in which the arts… can flourish. Our other objectives are all a means to an end, the enjoyment of the arts is an end in itself.'[688] It is this generation and

[688] Whitlam, *The Whitlam Government 1972–1975*, op. cit., p. 561.

later generations of students trained as artists, administrators and art academics who, because of the professional dispositions learned within the autonomous education and arts environments, underwritten by government funding and policy support, misrecognise the significance of what comes into being and is made visible at each Mildura Sculpture Triennial event.

Tom McCullough, like Davis, began his life in Mildura as a secondary school art teacher. His acceptance of the offer to become director of the Mildura Art Gallery, and later Arts Centre, in 1965 was not unusual. There were no formal qualifications for regional gallery directors; most appointees were part-time seconded art teachers in the role of education officers. He had the backing of powerful political and cultural links between Mildura and Melbourne.

However, by the late 1960s, the issue of professional development as a way of providing a career path for directors of the regional galleries arose, partly driven by the need to counteract the strong competition for art teachers in the new, and better paid art schools. Professional autonomy would increasingly become a feature of the changes within the regional gallery network throughout the 1970s. By the 1970 Mildura Sculpture Triennial, McCullough was an exemplar of the new role of curators as commissioners rather than keepers. In Charles Green's own admission, 'the Mildura Triennials marked a phase in the increasing public role of curators as mediators between artist and audience. This transition encouraged actively entrepreneurial taste-making.'[689]

The change in the event format from prize to a highly selective, invitational exhibition, profiling in many cases unknown, young and emerging artists which gave the triennial events a fresh, festival edge, was premised upon his network of talent spotters. From 1970 onwards, these talent spotters were increasingly drawn from the sculptor-lecturers in the emerging tertiary art education sector. By 1973, McCullough's dependence on this group of peer selectors, exposed his vulnerability to their bid for control of the selection

[689] Charles Green, *Peripheral Vision: contemporary Australian art 1970-1994*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1995, p. 35.

and exhibition process. Although the response to the proposed French exhibition was genuinely a political protest, the threat to boycott the triennials tested the power of this group to challenge McCullough's and the MACAC's control of selection and exhibition. It was not just those sculptors who signed the petition who would boycott the event, it was their control of the access to the emerging artists that was also at stake. However, it is the collusion of McCullough and the Mildura Sculpture Triennials' need for the 'new' to refresh the events and provide a festival atmosphere with his core advisors' need to promote and validate themselves and their products (graduates, students, other young sculptor-lecturers) as the 'emerging' and 'advanced art' new talent, brought together so successfully at Sculpturscape '73, that sustains the claim that the Australian Council for the Arts, reinvigorated under Whitlam's aegis, was a response to existing demand, not the creator of it.

For McCullough the success of the Mildura Sculpture Triennial of 1975 was not only the funding response of both federal and state arts agencies, more significantly it was the recognition by the visiting members and staff of the VAB of the possible transfer of the Mildura model (a festival-type event, McCullough's logistical and negotiation skills, a peer selection process and network) as the structure for the Biennale of Sydney, and his appointment as the director of this internationally focused event in 1976. However, contained within the triumph of the transfer of the model to Sydney and the Australia Council, the biennale's acceptance by the AGNSW trustees and staff into the hallowed halls of the premier state gallery and the event's successful outcome, were the seeds of both McCullough's demise in Mildura and the demise of the Mildura Sculpture Triennial model that he had established.

Although both Mildura and McCullough have largely been forgotten, the conceptual framework of emerging artists and new definitions of art, as well as selection based upon peer review and a definition of audience as both participants and practitioners, has remained as the differentiating marker of an autonomous field of the visual arts practice

in Australia.[690] Bourdieu's treatises on the genesis and development of the autonomous field of cultural production, and the significance of the autonomy of the field of education in relation to the development of an autonomous cultural field, underpins the reappraisal, in this thesis, of the value of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials as sites for mapping this development.

This thesis provides the first critical examination of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials between 1961 and 1978. By examining the broader cultural context of the period, combined with a close reading of primary sources and archival material, this thesis investigates what actually occurred and speculates on the possible causes of these developments. What emerges is evidence that these triennial Mildura sculpture events were more than just a microcosm of developments in contemporary Australian sculptural practice or sites for reading the seismic shifts unfolding in the Australian art world. They were, in fact, catalysts that contributed to the evolution of a new phenomenon, the autonomous field of the visual arts profession.

[690] Returning to a quote from Bourdieu's *Rules of Art*, op. cit., p. 170, used in the Introduction to the thesis: 'The appearance of this new definition of art and the role of the artist cannot be understood independently of the transformations in the field of artistic production. The constitution of an unprecedented ensemble of institutions … the growth in personnel … dedicated to the celebration of the work of art, the intensification of the circulation of works and of artists … and the multiplication of galleries … everything combines to favour the establishment of an unprecedented relationship between the interpreters and the work of art.'

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