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Visions of Rural Identity

A study of the rural figurative image in Australian art since 1880

Thesis submitted by Jill O'Sullivan BVA (Hons)
James Cook University

in August 2004

For the degree of Master of Creative Arts

in the College of Music, Visual Arts and Theatre

James Cook University

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ABSTRACT

The portrayal of the human presence placed in an Australian rural or outback environment has been a distinct feature of some of the most notable and iconic works within the history of Australian art. This imagery, through its history, has demonstrated artists' concerns with ideological notions of nationhood, myth making, legendary narratives, social and political issues but always with the focus remaining on the unpretentious folk of the bush. Iconic images have arisen from this genre and have become part of the national psyche providing a visual form of national self-identity. The genre has been at the forefront of innovative practice and changes in direction in Australian art since its inception.

This thesis explores, using a historical approach and through the relevant literature and art, the complex and varying forms of the rural figurative vision and the concerns of the artists that formed these visual representations of the rural figure. The discourse takes as its starting point the emergence of an Australian school of art in the 1880s that took the rural identity as important in defining both a national type and a specific originality for the recognition of Australian art. The research then continues to discuss the ever-changing role of the genre through the twentieth century.

The thesis investigates the influences, relationship to changing attitudes in society and the application of new methods and concepts to the continuous flow of new interpretations and transformations of the vision of the rural figure. Crucial works that represent the importance of the genre are discussed in this context. The study also offers insights into why certain works have become iconic symbols of Australian nation.

Research indicates that the developing role and nature of the rural figure in Australian art history and theory is contained within layers of landscape tenets.

Consequently, in the literature, landscape ideology appears to overshadow the exurban figure. This study seeks rather to centre on depictions of human figuration within the context of the bush, isolating the theme as a distinct part of Australian art history. Through the study of the literature there appears to be an imbalance in acknowledging the importance and the history of a separate rural figurative genre. This thesis aims to address this.

As a case study to synthesize with the theoretical research and informed by the research focus, this artist/researcher presents a body of work centred on the people of a small rural community, Dajarra, in North West Queensland. This studio practice reflects on segments of contemporary rural life and examines the reality of the rural figure in a modern context. The methodology, concepts and exhibition are discussed in relationship to these visual studies.

The research reaches conclusions that validate the rural figurative imagery as a separate genre and establish its importance and influence within the history of Australian art. This research also concludes that much of this genre’s imagery has become iconic due to its continued reflection of Australian culture and society, emerging self-identity and aspirations.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 The Significance of Rural Identity in Australian Art

This thesis examines the significance of the rural figurative genre within Australian art through an analysis of its development and changing conceptualisations from the latter years of the nineteenth century to the present. The studio practice contained within this project focuses on visual interpretations of the rural community of Dajarra, a North Western Queensland town.

Australia's subliminal visions of the people of the outback have been widely contributed to by artists' interpretations over the last century. Since the latter years of the nineteenth century, many artists in Australia have contributed to a significant art form associated with the rural sector, which has produced many iconic images relating to perceptions of a national self-image.

Images depicting Australia's rural people in a relationship with their environment were a popular theme with both artists and the public by the 1880s, with Astbury (1985) noting the "veneration of the bushman in both literature and painting" (Astbury 1985:11). Calls were being made by Sidney Dickinson (1890), James Green (1889), Julian Ashton (1889), Fred Broomfield (1889) and other writers, for a national school of a distinct Australian character based on the Australian bush identity. Notable artists whose rural figurative works are discussed in this era include Tom Roberts (1856-1931), Frederick McCubbin (1855-1917), George Lambert (1873-1930), Julian Ashton (1851-1942) and Arthur Streeton (1867-1943).

In the ensuing years, artists have continued to add new layers of meaning to the original concept leading to complex interpretations. Authoritative writers such as Burn (1991), Dutton (1964), McCaughey (1987), White (1981), Willis (1993) and Sayers

(2001) have written interpretive discourses on works by artists Sidney Nolan (1917-1992) and Russell Drysdale (1912-1981). Works from the 1940s series by Sidney Nolan and Drysdale’s works relating to the peopled outback have succeeded in becoming iconic, imbedded into a national psyche. This research will also discuss other aspects of human relationships to the rural sector that have been defined by artists through the twentieth century. This ambiguous imagery is seen in works including those of Lin Onus (1948-1996) and Tracey Moffatt (1960-).

Through this time, artists’ perceptions in depicting aspects of rural life can be seen as relative to the cultural and social qualifiers of their period. Artists’ diverse and varied interpretations of this subject will be reflected on in this research. This involves investigating the evolving nature of the rural figurative imagery and its place in the history of Australian art. Further, this study discusses and questions the reasons for the creation of lore that, in part, has established this visual iconic imagery.

1.1 Visual Interpretations of Dajarra

Visual observations of life within a contemporary rural society, Dajarra, in North-West Queensland, are integrated within the theoretical research as a case study aligned to the research topic. Dajarra is a small town located 155 kilometres south of Mount Isa in Northwest Queensland with a population of 203 people in the town, although the broader community extends over thousands of square kilometres. Dajarra was believed to be, in local lore, the most important railhead for cattle movement in Australia in the first half of the twentieth century. However, today urban perceptions may regard Dajarra as a forgotten dusty settlement where little happens. These nebulous perceptions of an outback town perhaps stem from iconic images developed by Russell Drysdale and other artists, as well as today’s media presentations. Nonetheless, it can be argued that people who live here are enduring and not accepting a stereotyped and

desolated isolation, but rather see themselves as a viable community with a strong relationship to their place and to the region.

A focal point for much of the source material and the development of a body of visual work are the residents and clientele of the local pub, *The Dajarra Hotel*. The visual practice is intended to be as a case study within the tenets of this dissertation of the rural figurative genre. To this end, the traditions, methods and directions of this research focus are considered and evaluated as possible directions of interpretation and concept. For example, the Heidelberg pastoral generalisations, with their heroic and noble overtones of historic nostalgia, sentimentality and masculine labour are not intended to be applied. However, relevant to the visual concepts are McCubbin's quiet rural figurative depictions of ordinary and anonymous people who are elevated to a noble status and his "engagement with the significance of the subject" (Astbury 1985:133). In this way, too, is Drysdale's use of daily life in the bush to enhance his subject matter (Burn 1991).

This visual material parallels the theoretical research in the depiction of the human presence in rural settings and its continuing role in Australian art. Thus, in visually considering segments of contemporary rural life within this outback settlement, a synthesis is sought between this artist/writer's practice and that of the dissertation.

1.2 Rationale

This researcher's awareness of key works that could be referred to as the rural figurative genre in Australian art precedes this research. The need to specifically investigate the progress and role of the rural figurative genre is indicated primarily through the lack of literature considering the genre in its own context through the history of Australian art. For example, Willis (1993) notes "there has been little

investigation into the processes by which particular works have become national favourites" (Willis 1993:72).

Although a few writers, like Astbury (1985), Clark (1985) and Galbally (1979), have investigated the era of the nineteenth century where rural figuration has played an important role, the exurban figure genre is overshadowed in art theoretical writings. This is indicated through much of the literature's preoccupation in discussing landscape within Australian art history, subjugating the rural figure to a subordinate role within the broader context of landscape. In the history of Australian visual imagery diverse writers, such as Britton (1997), Burn (1991), Hughes (1970), Lendon (1980), Sayers (2001), Smith (1991) and Willis (1993) perceive the rural figure as symbolic in contributing to the ascendancy and power of the Australian landscape, rather than having a distinct entity. Willis (1993) profiles "landscape as the most pervasive theme in Australian high culture" (Willis 1993:61). Britton (1997) writes of Drysdale's work "people are merging with and dwarfed by a gigantic nature" (Britton 1997:17) while Willis (1993) sees in the Heidelberg paintings a "minimising of the narrative human element in favour of the landscape" (Willis 1993:82). Willis (1993) further argues that the appeal of the Heidelberg painting lay not in the figuration of bush workers and pioneers but rather in the viewer's sense of recognition of the landscape itself. However, Burn sees the rural figure as "a point of access to the landscape" (Burn 1988:42).

Other writers reach similar conclusions. Placing figure as an adjunct to describing landscape is indicated by Sayers's (2001) judgments on rural figurative works by Tom Roberts (1856-1931), Frederick McCubbin (1855-1917), Sidney Nolan (1917-1992), David Moore (1927-) and Arthur Boyd (1920-1999). For example, Sayers's (2001) comment on Roberts and McCubbin argues "both these artists produced their greatest paintings when they sought the stories which gave cultural meaning to

particular landscapes" (Sayers 2001:87). Again, Sayers (2001), evaluating Nolan's Kelly series, writes "A deeper appreciation of Australia's landscape through myth was a significant motivation for the Kelly paintings" (Sayers 2001:168). This view is also taken by Britton (1997) who sees Nolan using mythical encounters to define the landscape as "different notions of nationhood" (Britton 1997:17).

In contrast, artists state different views for their interpretations of the rural figure. Drysdale, in a 1960s interview with Geoffrey Dutton, placed the emphasis on his bush figure, asserting, "you can try and point out that this is a man, or man, just man unconquered by landscape" (Drysdale cited in Dutton 1964:102). And of the bush types, "Those are the people that are fascinating …They're the kind of towers that reach out. The survival that means something" (Drysdale cited in Dutton 1964:100). Roberts (1890) and Streeton (1891) wrote similar intentions for dramatising men and labour. The rationale for undertaking this research is to address this imbalance by studying the rural figurative genre as a separate and distinctive field in Australian art history.

1.3 Aims of the Research

The aims of this study are to;

- investigate the complex and changing form of the rural figurative genre since the latter part of the nineteenth century to the present,
- explore the reasons why individual works have been iconically identified as representing a national self image,
- document and evaluate the position and importance of the rural figurative genre within the history of Australian art through a sound practical framework and context.

1.4 Scope and Structure of the Research

This thesis examines the rural figurative genre in Australian art through its varying manifestations from the 1880s to the present. The term 'rural figurative genre', for the purpose of this research, will be used to define depictions of human presence within rural or outback settings in the Australian bush. For the discussion, the thesis will separate this time span into three general periods that are classified by stylistic approaches and changing cultural realisations within a historical framework. These periods are the decades;

- 1880 - 1920s,
- 1930 - 1960,
- 1960 - present.

Within this broad outline the discourse will predominantly reference two-dimensional representations of the rural figurative genre and, in Chapters Two and Three, the particular focus will be on those works that are now generally regarded to have become iconic within the nation psyche. For example, Roberts's *Shearing the Rams* (1890), McCubbin's *Pioneers* series of the 1890s, Nolan's *Kelly* series from the late 1940s and Drysdale's outback works from the 1940s are used to develop the argument. Artists and works specifically discussed will be those most notable of the genre and of their times, although others that contribute to the argument will also be reviewed. From the research approaches, the research structure will follow a sequential order in which each period discussed is generally determined by the context of its pertaining culture and by the related artists' conceptual directions and influences. Within each of these chapters historical, cultural and social aspects will be discussed to provide a structure for the ensuing argument. Within this framework, the thesis will proceed to consider and draw conclusions from past and current theories, influences and

artist's concerns in interpreting the rural genre. Among artists important to the research are Julian Ashton (1851-1942), Arthur Boyd (1920-1999), Russell Drysdale (1912-1981), Sam Fulbrook (1922-), George Lambert (1873-1930), Frederick McCubbin (1855-1917), Tracey Moffatt (1960-), Sidney Nolan (1917-1992), Lin Onus (1948-1962), Tom Roberts (1856-1931) and Albert Tucker (1914-1999). The thesis is organised through the following order:

Chapter One Introduction

Chapter One introduces and provides an overview of the research through an explanation of its rationale, aims, parameters and methodology. This chapter also overviews and defines the visual project on the people of Dajarra as a case study for rural figuration.

Chapter Two National Identity and the Bush 1880 - 1920s

Chapter Two presents an overview investigating social and cultural influences that determined the Australian development of a rural figurative art form between 1880 and 1920. Further lines of enquiry will be into the rural ethos that developed a nationalistic and idealistic figuration that impacted on and influenced the national self-perception during the First World War and the immediate years after.

Chapter Three The Transformation of The Rural Figurative Genre 1930 - 1960

This chapter investigates the extent that post war uncertain social and cultural conditions had on artists' interpretations of the rural figurative genre. Following this, the chapter will reflect on the individual paths that artists took in creating rural figurative imagery. Questioned is the extent to which some of this imagery has succeeded in becoming as iconic as the preceding visions of the earlier artists.

Chapter Four Issues of Rural Identity in Australian Art 1960 - 2000

This chapter examines the significant and complex shifting issues of political, cultural and social elements that seemingly determine artists' responses in defining the rural figurative genre. The emergence of a re-evaluation of national identity through questioning old values and stereotypes is considered.

Chapter Five Defining the Case Study: Selection and Focus

This chapter will discuss the methodology for developing imagery that considers and interprets people and aspects of life in Dajarra. Aims and concepts of the practical project are discussed.

Chapter Six Dajarra: Process towards Product

This chapter documents the development of practical work. Methods and techniques of practice are outlined. Concepts and rationale in developing the works are discussed. The final body of work is documented in regard to process, editioning and all relevant details.

Chapter Seven Presenting the Exhibition

This chapter outlines and discusses details of the venue, exhibition and production of the catalogues and reviews.

Chapter Eight Reflection and Conclusion: The Rural Figure in Australian Art

Aims are revisited and reflected upon. Outcomes are evaluated and conclusions from the study are made.

1.5 Methodology for Theoretical Research

Key focus areas of information for the theoretical research in the rural figurative genre have been sourced from historical writings and recent theories and arguments that relate to the development of the rural figurative genre. Thus, the research methodology

underpinning this framework encompasses an interaction of systematic historical and qualitative processes through the analysis of visual arts writing and images.

Research approaches for this thesis include examining and analysing published and unpublished documentation relating to both historical and current theories. The study of relevant artwork within State and National Gallery collections forms part of this investigative process. Sources are;

- historical literature that relate to the topical social culture, nationalism, artists and works of each period reviewed,
- theory relating to the development and context of the rural figurative genre,
- recent art history and theory relevant to the rural figurative genre,
- relevant literature in Australian national self identification,
- relevant literature within social and cultural studies,
- specific rural figurative genre art work.

Historical writings provide a social and cultural context important for discussing connections between rural figurative concepts and the periods in which they were created. These writings include books, journal articles, newspaper articles and letters written in the time being examined. These ideas and concerns expressed by artists, critics and journalists in articles and letters underpin both the critical assessment of artists' concern and the developing iconic perception of this genre.

Most of the actual reasoning concerning the rural figurative genre during the latter part of the nineteenth century is only assessed through these writings and the art itself. Articles by nineteenth century art critics and artists, Ashton (1889), Broomfield (1889), Dickinson (1890), Green (1889), Roberts (1890) and Smith (1890) are investigated to provide topical insights into calls for an Australian school of art based on a rural figurative genre representing nation. These writers, especially Sidney

Dickinson and James Smith were highly regarded as critical and influential art writers during the latter years of the nineteenth century, albeit at variance in their opinions in what form colonial art should take. Artists' viewpoints are represented by Roberts's strong defence for his *Shearing the Rams* (1889) and Ashton's (1889) article, *An Aim for Australian Art.* These are used to illuminate artists' aesthetic philosophies and rising nationalism regarding the rural figurative genre and are noted in the research. Twopeny (1883) and Davitt (1897), with their views on colonial culture and social conditions develop an understanding of the prevailing sentiments that influenced artists' depictions of the rural genre.

Recent critical art theories commenting on nineteenth century art base much of their argument upon these early writings. Within recent critical theory the developing rural genre in the nineteenth century is the most widely discussed. Recent discourses based on these nineteenth century theoretical and visual resources disclose differing viewpoints regarding artists' intentions and the meaning of visual representations. Authors whose writings are considered within this context are Astbury (1985), Burn (1991), Clark (1985), Galbally (1979), Lendon (1980), Quartermaine (1980), Serle (1987), Smith, B. (1991) and Smith, T. (1980).

The rise of nationalism in Australia, and national, social and cultural perceptions through the scope of the research is reviewed through recent writings by Dixon (1995), Dixson (1999), Gibson (2001), White (1981), Willis (1993), and Williams (1995).

Visual art catalogues are referenced for;

- artwork related to the rural figurative genre,
- critical assessments.

Writings are referenced for;

- opinions by artists, contemporary journalists and art critics,

- cultural and social influences on the rural figurative genre.

Libraries used for this methodology are:

James Cook University Library, the State Libraries of New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland, the National Library of Australia and the National Archives.

Some of the early and original material, especially articles published in journals of the 1890s is categorised as rare and can only be obtained through personal visits to relevant libraries and galleries holding this material or microfiche records. This has been achieved through two journeys south to Brisbane, Sydney and Canberra. Rare source material obtained from The Queensland State Library required handling with white gloves and hand copying owing to its fragility. Personal sightings and study of relevant artwork, such as the *Kelly* series by Nolan, to gain a first hand understanding of the work, rather than reproductions plays an important part in examining this hypothesis. Galleries visited include the National Gallery of Australia, State Gallery of New South Wales and the Queensland Art Gallery.

1.6 Methodology for Visual Research

Visual work includes depicting facets of life within Dajarra. This work develops imagery that considers and interprets people and aspects of life in Dajarra and encapsulates and conveys a sense of a contemporary outback culture. Visual content is sourced from drawings, photographs, conversations and historical background material gathered through several field trips to Dajarra over the period of this research. Field trips have been conducted in May 2001, September 2001 and July 2002. Reference is made to artworks studied within the scope of the research, to inform the development of concepts for the imagery. Preparatory art from these resources includes drawings, monotypes, and experimental work through drawing, mixed media and monotypes. Stages of development are;

- field drawings and photographs obtained from field trips to Dajarra,
- experimental work developed from the field work through drawing, mixed media and monotypes,
- work from experimental work used to developed and finalise body of work,
- finalised body of work for exhibition.

Imagery from initial experiments is developed through lithography, monotypes and intaglio print processes.

1.7 Conclusion

Through the investigation and evaluation of the rural figurative genre this research project contributes to new insights into this genre, establishing it as a viable entity within the history of Australian art. The practical case study results in a body of work for a solo exhibition, in a modern interpretation of the exceptional qualities of the rural figurative genre.

Chapter Two

National Identity and the Bush 1880 - 1920s

2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines and discusses the genesis of the Australian figurative rural genre and its perceived development as a symbol of national identity in the latter part of the nineteenth century within the broader social context of the times to gain some understanding of its development.

A growing awareness of the need for a distinct cultural identity, both in the fine arts and literature became apparent at the time that many colonists were seeking a national Australian political identity independent of Britain. A focus on self-identity issues of burgeoning nationhood is discussed by examining the political and social culture of the period. This examination contextualises the genesis of a rural figurative genre, encompassed within the emerging "Australian School of Art." (Broomfield 1889:887). Colonial art critics and writers, including Fred Broomfield (1889), James Green (1889) and Sidney Dickinson (1890) perceived the need for a nationalist imagery based on the romanticism of the rural bushman to establish this 'School' in its own right. Other influences on the genre are the periodical and journal illustrations of the rural sector that were extremely popular (Astbury 1985). Influences of personnel from various art schools and public galleries on this developing art form are discussed within its historical development. The interpretations of this genre through selected figurative rural works by the leading Australian artists of the time are then considered. These artists include those of the Heidelberg school, such as Roberts, (1856-1931), McCubbin (1855-1917), Streeton (1867-1943) and other artists apart from the Heidelberg group including Longstaff (1862-1914) and Lambert (1873-1930).

Twentieth century theorists, including Burn (1990), White (1981) and Willis (1993) observe that war artists, when depicting Australian nationhood at war during the First World War, appropriated the rural figurative imagery developed through the preceding decades. According to Willis (1993) and White (1981), the use of an idealistic military image based on rural values placed the noble rural identity firmly into the national psyche. Also discussed are Burn's (1990) perceptions that depictions of the rural imagery into overseas battle areas had deeper connotations. Burn (1990) perceives these undercurrents as crucial to post war reassessing of the traditional values based on the earlier rural visions. Essays and opinions current between 1914-1919 relating to war artists and their subject matter will be used to assess these viewpoints.

Finally considered is the role of this genre in the years immediately following the First World War when according to Galbally (1979) there was a "wash of sentimental nationalism which flowed through Australian institutions in the 1920s" (Galbally 1979:65) that entrenched the early artists' work as the pinnacle of Australian art in the view of traditionalists. Burn (1990) sees landscape art dominating the Australian art scene during this period, with Streeton's work being regarded by traditionalists as the pinnacle in Australian art. However, art theorists such as Eagle (1978) and Smith (1991) perceive this nationalistic fervour in the art world as part of a defence against the rising Modernism in art practice.

2.1 The Rise of National Identity

2.1.1 The developing sense of nation

By the 1880s, many in the colonies of Australia were considering themselves Australians, albeit of British stock. Census records of 1881 indicate that the overall population in the Australian Colonies had risen to 2 250 074 with 1 422 533 of these being born in Australia (Australian Historical Statistics 1987:8). Those born in the

British Isles numbered 696 692, with 827 541 coming mainly from Europe, although 38 381 Chinese are included in that number (Australian Historical Statistics 1987:8). White (1981) notes that the majority of Australians were "proud of both Australian and imperial achievement" (White 1981:71). However, White (1981) also believes:

> What helps explain their [writers and artists] direction towards what has been seen as a distinctively national culture is the fact that the younger generation was more likely to be Australian born. The 1890s generation, predominantly native born, felt more at home in the Australian environment and felt more need to promote an indigenous culture (White1981:87).

Dixon (1995) sees this time as a turning point in relations between British and colonial interests, arguing

> ...a series of diplomatic and military crisis made it increasingly obvious that British and colonial interests were on different courses [causing] fractures in imperial ideology (Dixon 1995:6).

These fractures are seen in Garran's (1888) damning comment on the English and European attitude to Australia:

> In England and Europe, at the present time there is as profound an indifference as there is ignorance regarding this New World…On the Continent we are regarded as the sleeping partner of Great Britain; we are looked upon as that little "Co." whose name need not be mentioned and whose number need not be counted (Garran 1886:v).

Dixon (1995) asserts that this colonial seeking for independent identity, although still in a strong relationship to England, is reflected through the late nineteenth century Australian adventure novels. These, Dixon (1995) states, are written in the style of H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1888):

> These novels[1] offered traditional themes of pastoral or mining or bushranging romance [but are] symptomatic of the fractures and divisions around discourses of race, gender, nation and empire characteristic of colonial nationalism (Dixon 1995:12).

This, too, may be considered in relation to looking at colonial artists' themes in creating a distinct Australian identity. Gibson (2001) believes that the artists Roberts, Ashton

[1] These include J.F. Hogan's *The Lost Explorer,* (1890), E. Favenc's *The Secret of the Australian Desert*, J.D. Hennessey's *An Australian Bush Track* (1886) (Dixon 1995:63).

and Streeton imbued their bush-workers with idealised virtues, contrasting these with the “corrupt traditions of the imperial system and society” (Gibson 2001:43).

White (1981) discusses the developing perceptions of a distinct Australian identity within the colonial culture, saying that:

> Some sense of Australian identity did develop in the nineteenth century, especially towards the end. Its basis was a belief in the existence of an Australian ‘type’. The idea it was possible to isolate national ‘types’ at the end of the nineteenth century was the most important intellectual pillar supporting the complex structure of ideas about national character, which developed in the nineteenth century (White 1981:64).

White (1981) argues that this theory was typical of scientific theory in the nineteenth century, when a Eurocentric obsession with classifying everything into categories led to the idea of national type, stating:

> The concept of national type fitted snugly into the nineteenth century intellectual landscape, a central feature of liberal, national and racial ideology”(White1981:64).

However, Dixson (1999) considers that Australia’s developing sense of nation in the nineteenth century came more from the middle and lower classes rather than ruling classes or intellectual thought. Dixson argues that this developing need for a distinct identity, was part of a much wider British and European cultural trend stating:

> The ‘lower classes’ had their own profound stake in the nation…In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, throughout much of Europe, national sentiment was associated with a radical enlargement of civic rights for the common people (Dixson 1999:47).

Similarly, Burn (1991) notes “In the late nineteenth century, inherent in the call for a national culture, was the ideal of a democratic culture. This was reflected in much of the artistic expression of the period” (Burn 1991:140). Gibson (2001) sees “the egalitarianism associated with late nineteenth century cultural nationalism informed the ways in which Australian art was constructed as useful” (Gibson 2001:43). In Gibson’s (2001) argument artist’s use of the

> ...male bush worker…was depicted as the bearer of a set of ideal qualities, which included comradeship, resourcefulness and egalitarianism...At a time when Australia was awash with divided loyalties, the common national identity constructed in

> Australian painting was thought to be capable of promoting a unity which was nonexistent at the time (Gibson 2001:43).

This theory could be justified in examining the rising interest in Australian art and its subject matter, reflected in colonial publications during the 1880s. Colonial writers and art critics, including a visiting American art lecturer, Sidney Dickinson (1890), were suggesting themes pertaining to pioneers, stockmen, shearers and other bush workers, in order to establish a distinct Australian school of art indicative of nation.

2.1.2 The genesis of the Australian noble bushman

Roberts, McCubbin and other artists and writers during the 1880s romanticised the bush type with representations of noble stockmen and shearers, free spirited swagmen and heroic pioneers. Astbury (1985) breaks the Australian rural figurative genre of the latter nineteenth century into four categories: pioneer, bushranging, pastoral with its symbolic strong masculine labour and swagmen. In each of these themes Astbury (1985) sees defining structures such as nostalgia, optimism in a democratic life style, freedom and independence, heroic action and romance, all of which are vital elements of the "rural myth in art and literature" (Astbury 1985:79). Serle (1987) and Ward (1965) reason that for ex- convicts, once freed, the enticements for remaining in the outback existence were several, including the ability to become anonymous, the distance from police authority and sense of freedom in the open spaces. Independence and security were maintained through the shortage of labour[2] in the bush until after the gold rushes of 1851. This labour shortage allowed a freedom to choose employment and be on equal terms with bosses. At the same time, Ward (1965) contends that the hardships that ex-convicts had endured made them ideal and resourceful bushmen, qualities that were acknowledged by employers. Ward (1965) writes that specialised

[2] "In 1829…stockowners and settlers were met with the ever increasingly difficulty of finding a sufficient supply of labour" (Garran 1886:33).

jobs like shearing and bullock driving were usually given to ex-convicts and ‘currency lads’[3]

> ...the hardest and most highly skilled kinds of works were usually performed by old hands[4] and native born youths…the fact they were the pioneers and their higher average level of skill gave to the old hands and Currency Lads an influence and a prestige among their fellows (Ward 1965:70).

Garran (1886) points out not all the settlers were happy with this ex-convict labour. The growing “repugnance felt towards it” (Garran 1886:33) led the colonial governments, from 1829 to encourage immigration of free settlers through various immigration free and assisted schemes to overcome the labour shortage. However, these schemes were generally unsuccessful in obtaining labour for the outback (Garran 1886). Colonial accusations levelled at Britain that paupers and immoral lower classes were being sent to Australia under these schemes indicate that the character of these were perceived to be little better than convicts (White 1981). Ward (1965) observed that the immigrants preferred to settle in towns, usually were unskilled for pastoral work and were lowly regarded as bush workers, but contends those new comers who succeeded in the bush were shaped by the outback culture:

> It seems that outback conditions exercised a kind of natural selection upon the human material. The qualities favouring successful assimilation were adaptability, toughness, endurance, activity and loyalty to one’s fellows, just as those traits already noticed as being typical of the convict and currency elements of the population…Frontier conditions fostered and intensified the growth of the distinctly Australian outlook (Ward 1965:76-77).

At this time, traditional values of the English aristocracy were being diminished in Australia due to the “disproportionate weight of the lower class group” (Ward 1965:18). This group was composed of convicts, or ex convicts, their descendants, or later the assisted immigrants who mainly came from working or pauper classes in England, Ireland and Scotland. To those from this background, the defining ethos formed and

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[3] Those born in the colony, whose parent were usually convicts or emancipists.
[4] Ex-convicts

sustained from an outback culture was of more relevance than that of the ruling classes[5] according to Ward (1965). Consequently, the developing bush ideology affiliated with convict ethics of mateship, strong independence, freedom, the hostility towards authority and 'gentry', egalitarian class solidarity and loyalty spread rapidly through the colonies. Ward (1965) wrote that

> ...the convict-derived bush ethos grew first and flourished in its most unadulterated form in the mother colony of New South Wales, but that it early spread thence, by osmosis as it were, to become the most important basic component of the national *mystique* (Ward 1965:5).

Ward (1965) states that by 1900 the bushman had become part of the Australian folklore and that, with the tradition of the 'noble bushman' well established, led the 'bushman' to being "the national culture-hero of the twentieth [century]" (Ward 1965:12). Similarly Serle (1987) notes, in the 1880s, the Sydney *Bulletin* was adding to the romanticism of the bushman through its promoting of

> ...a genuine folk culture [that] had begun to emerge in the pastoral interior [for Australians at this time] the bush almost came to act as a kind of conscience for Australians, as the city man came to yearn for an idealized vision', a 'lost Eden' (Serle 1987:65).

The colonial painters joined in this rural idealisation: Willis (1993) judges that by the 1880s, "even with the extraordinary short time of settlement, they [the Heidelberg painters] looked back nostalgically to days of bushranging and pioneering" (Willis 1993:75). Serle (1987) also had noted this factor in Roberts' work, writing:

> Roberts is a classic transmitter of the urban idealization of the outback…with elements of myth making, of harking back to the past, of idealizing pastoral life (Serle 1987:77).

Burn similarly (1991) observes these 'national favourites' having an enduring impact, stating, "Perhaps no other local imagery is so much a part of an Australian conscious and ideological make-up" (Burn 1991:19).

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[5] The numbers, strong political power and anti-establishment feelings of the immigrants and ex convicts in the 1840s is outlined by Henry Parkes in his *Fifty Years in the Making of Australian History* 1892.

2.1.3 The colonial type

However, the emerging Australian identity was questioned. Concerns were that there was a possibility that the new generation Australian may not "preserve all the noble features of that old British type from which it had sprung" (White 1981:70). Dixon (1995) suggests that these concerns are reflected in nineteenth century novels stating:

> In examples of imperial romance associated with Australia, anxieties about racial and cultural decline were exacerbated by a concern that the loss of an originary [sic] Englishness would not be replaced by a fully-formed colonial identity (Dixon 1995:63).

Social Darwinism[6] theories were popular, to the point where an actual enquiry to deliberate on the nature of the native born Australian of British origin was set up by Redmond Barry, a Supreme Court judge and an influentional trustee of the National Gallery of Victoria (White 1981). This enquiry and other debates considered whether the colonial-born would be either an improvement or degeneration on the original British stock with concerns being voiced that the climate would eventually weaken succeeding generations. McCubbin (c.1900) wrote that he remembered as a boy being "called a gum sucker, a colonial and no good, no stamina, would be old and broken by the time I reached thirty or so" (McCubbin c.1900:73). White (1981) comments that the question was very seriously treated "but most Australians were more optimistic about the future Australian type" (White 1981:71). This questioning of the fitness of the racial type showed in the native-born colonists desire to prove that they were "not degenerating under the Australian sun. In fact they were positively eager to demonstrate how they measured up to anything that might be seen as a test of the race" (White 1981:72). This was generally in the fields of sport (Twopeny 1883) and military

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[6] Social Darwinism was a late nineteenth-century sociological theory that was based on the theories of biological evolution and natural selection put forth by biologists Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace and social philosopher Herbert Spencer's theory of social evolution.

prowess, although White (1981) mentions Australian intellectual development at English Universities was measured and that "Nellie Melba's operatic career was seen as demonstrating the race's cultural potentional" (White 1981:72).

In fact, according to White (1981:75) some colonial patriots and visiting authors felt that the new Australian colonist was developing into a superior being, being derived from pure British stock but coming from hardy pioneers that were enterprising, self reliant and vigorous, rather than those of less moral strength who stayed in England. Authors of the period who commented on the development of the colonial type included visiting English writers, Anthony Trollope (1871), Richard Twopeny (1883) and an Irish writer Michael Davitt[7] (1897). Trollope stated "the emigrant is superior to his weaker brother whom he leaves behind him" (cited in White 1981:75). Davitt (1897) also saw the native born colonist being superior to their counterparts in Britain. Believing the climate, food and better working conditions adding to the inherited courage and strength of the colonists, Davitt (1897) noted:

> The Australian, born of British and Irish parents, is the best physically developed man of either of these races…The dry and healthful climate…the outdoor life and labour beyond the confines of the few very large cities… all go, I think, to explain the vigorous frame, manliness of bearing and stamp of independence characteristic of the average Australian (Davitt 1897:118).

Feeling that the influences of the climate extended also to women, Davitt (1897) thought their "build is finer and firmer, and gives hope of a more vigorous offspring" (Davitt 1897:120), adding:

> So when we add to these more helpful conditions in the building up of a vigorous race of people, the hereditary influence begotten of the courage, enterprise, and strength of body and will, which must have distinguished the types of men and women from Europe who laid the foundations of new Anglo Saxon and Celtic races under Australian skies…we are able to understand why the 'native sons of such parents excel their distant kin in strength, health and physique (Davitt 1897:120).

[7] Michael Davitt was a radical Irish politician, Fenian, author, and inveterate traveller (http://www.museumsomayo.com/davitt1.htm 2002)

Twopeny (1883), although not stating that the Australian type was an improvement on its antecedents, saw the citizens of Melbourne as being the ones to see

> ...the fullest development of Australasian civilization… the first population of Sydney was of the wrong sort[8] whilst that which flooded Melbourne was eminently adventurous and enterprising (Twopeny 1883:3).

2.2 The Distinct Australian and the Press

White (1981) sees the 1880s as a time when a "self conscious local patriotism developed…Its growth coincided with an increasingly cultural fetishism for the distinctly Australian" (White 1981:73). In a speech reported in *The Argus* (1888) Alfred Deakin clarified the aims of *The Australian Natives Association* [9] for Australia:

> The aims and objects of the association were not difficult to discover...It was not, under any circumstances, a sectarian or party organization … it was, in the first place a benefit society…devoted to the moral, social, and intellectual improvement of its members…The membership of the association is limited to young men in Australia…and to men under 40 years of age…the Australian natives were not blind to the fact that while their fathers brought to this country greater experience and matured views, they bought to it also the factious feeling and the partisan views and old world prejudices...The aims and objects of the association were not difficult to discover …It was not, the partisan views and old world prejudices…Let us have an institution racy of the soil, something that would be Australian in its texture, and free from these views and prejudices. [The report further stated its aims with] The Australian Natives Association believed not only in the glorious possibilities of this country, but in the glorious possibilities of its people. They believed that there lay in this young community a patriotism which only needed to be called into existence (*The Argus* 1 May 1888:10).

Deakin's speech, although somewhat effusive, gives some indications of the rising patriotism and enthusiasm for a distinct and new identity, which was endorsed by the "cultural/nationalistic discourse of the Bulletin of the 1890s" (Dixon 1995:7). Serle (1987) states:

> Late in the century the Bushmen as a class had developed a range of radical nationalist assumptions, were confident in their environment, knew they had something to say and said it in the *Bulletin*, which also said it for them (Serle 1987:61).

Astbury (1985) confirms this view saying that the Bulletin in the 1880s had "an

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[8] Twopeny (1883) was referring to the convict origins of the Sydney colonial population.

[9] The Australian Natives Association was formed in 1870. Twopeny (1883) in defining Australian language terms states "A native of Australia would mean a white man born in the colony" Twopeny 1883:245).

Australia wide reputation as the vehicle for a distinctive brand of radical nationalism" (Astbury 1985:11). The connection between this nationalistic discourse and what Australian painters should strive to depict in the way of national identity are indicated through opinions published in the Bulletin and other newspapers and journals from the 1880s onwards. The extent to which the press influenced popular opinion and artists to consider a "veneration of the bushman in both literature and painting" (Astbury 1985:11) was most likely determined by the popularity of the newspapers to their broader audience.

In the 1880s, magazines, journals and newspapers had proliferated[10]. Richard Twopeny, an English journalist, observes 1880s Australia: "is essentially the land of newspapers…if there is one institution of which Australians have reason to be proud, it is their press" (Twopeny 1883:221). Further Twopeny (1883) comments that most colonists could read[11], were inquisitive, could afford[12] to buy more papers than those in Britain and:

> Excepting the Bible, Shakespeare, and Macaulay's essays the only literature within the bushman's reach are newspapers. The townsman "deems them…equally essential to his well-being" (Twopeny 1883:221).

Referring to art in the colonies, Twopeny (1883) notes "The press is very energetic in fostering taste" (Twopeny 1883:247). Williams (1995) agrees that the nineteenth and early twentieth century press was a powerful influence on cultural tastes saying, "Critics advised them on the plays worth seeing, the books worth reading and the art which merited attention. The cultural power of the press was almost total" (Williams 1995:19).

2.3 Rural Genre: Influences of Illustration and Photography

Smith (1980) sees an "illustrative background" (Smith 1980:111), emanating

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[10]The *Sydney Bulletin,* in 1890, had a weekly circulation of 80 000 (Serle 1987:60).
[11] School attendance was compulsory in all the colonies from the mid nineteenth century (Australian Historical Statistics 1987:328).
[12] "Broad indicators have being compiled showing that for much of the nineteenth century Australians received high wages by world standards" (Australian Historical Statistics 1987:146).

from the Australian illustrated nineteenth century publications, contributing to the rise of the rural genre as a fine art form. Other art historians agree. Astbury (1985), Galbally (1979), Lendon (1980) and Quartermaine (1980), see the illustrations used in these journals as the genesis for artists' sources of the bush genre to reflect nation. Galbally (1979) considers that:

> It has become obvious that the 'heroic' subject-matter of shearers, bushmen and pioneers had its roots in popular contemporary imagery such as photography and the black and white illustrations found in the *Illustrated Australian News* and *Australasian Sketcher* of the 1870s and 1880s (Galbally 1979:65).

The Sydney Bulletin, Illustrated Australian News, Illustrated Sydney Mail, Australasian Sketcher and other periodicals employed many of the rising artists, such as Ashton, Lambert, Roberts and Streeton as illustrators, engravers and lithographers. According to Quartermaine (1980), these publications followed the precepts established by the first Australian illustrated journals[13] in presenting a "comprehensive visual picture of the colony" (Quartermaine 1980:55). Quartermaine (1980) notes:

> It was natural that one of the main interests in these early journals should have been in depicting bush life, for these would have been recognized and appreciated by many of the readers (Quartermaine 1980:61).

These artists were also employed by commercial projects for illustrated volumes regarding the development and history of Australia. Astbury (1985) states that the Australian self-image within the publications was also aligned with depictions of bush life:

> With the rise of illustrated atlases in the mid and late 1880s, the influence of photography and illustration on Australian painting were consolidated…[these] were all proudly parochial in their self-conscious portrayal of an Australian image. The illustrators of these volumes tackled nearly every subject popularly conceived as distinctly Australian: gold-diggers, explorers, pioneers, pastoral labourers, sundowners, stockmen, and selectors (Astbury 1985:67).

The importance given to accuracy in illustration within these projects is emphasised by

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[13] *The Melbourne Pictorial Times,* in 1855 and *Melbourne Illustrated News* 1853 (Quartermaine 1980).

Garran, editor of the *Picturesque Atlas of Australasia* (1886), who states "the pictures contained in the following volumes are delicate, fine and photographically accurate" (Garran1886:vi). Quartermaine (1980) refers to the importance of photographic referencing in these early days, writing that many of the artists used photography as a base for the illustrations and that by the 1870s many of the "illustrated journals came to rely increasingly upon photographs as the source for their engravings" (Quartermaine 1980: 640).

Astbury (1985) develops this argument in outlining influences of photography and illustration on artists' representation of the bush genre, stating:

> In the 1870s photographers took up the challenge, eschewed by painters, of portraying Australian motifs other than the ever-present landscape. In particular, J.W. Lindt (1845-1926) and Nicholas Caire (1837-1918) became significant exponents of Australian pastoral figure subjects. Through the 1870s and 1880s Lindt and Caire…recorded the lives of pioneers and settlers (Astbury 1985:44).

Astbury (1985) considers that the public appeal of these photographs, apart from an urban interest in pastoral genre themes, "lay in their verisimilitude of the representation" (Astbury 1985:44). However, Astbury (1985) points out that many of these genre pastoral images were taken in constructed studio settings stating "it was Lindt and Caire's deliberate manipulation of the photographic images for an urban market that was ultimately to prove most influentional on Australian painting" (Astbury 1985:44). Astbury (1985) sees this influence developing from the narrative possibilities of photographing the bush genre in set situations, writing:

> In the early 1870s Lindt developed what he termed the genre style: he took 'pictures of character' illustrating 'up country life' …his early genre photographs are not informal glimpses of pastoral life but carefully arranged compositions…. Caire extended the possibilities of the genre style in the 1880s to include a new literary and narrative interest, posing figures with a pastoral setting to illustrate Australian literary themes like *The Sick Bushman* or *Down on His Luck* (Astbury 1985:44).

In drawing comparisons with these popular photographic interpretations of rural life Astbury (1985) emphasises their relationship with McCubbin's pioneer themes,

Robert's shearing paintings and Streeton's settler paintings, all being part of the nationalistic pioneering myth being developed during the 1880s. Another author also sees the association between the bush photograph/illustration genre and that of the rural genre paintings. Lendon (1980) talks of the interrelationships between artists, photographers and illustrators during this period, drawing strong comparisons between Charles Bayliss's (1850-1897) photograph *Interior of Woolshed* (1880) (Pl.1) and Roberts[14] *The Golden Fleece-Shearing at Newstead* (1894) (Pl.2). Lendon (1980), nevertheless, notes that "Clearly the artist illustrator fulfilled a need for the imaginative, evocative, dramatic and even romantic image which the photographer was unable to provide" (Lendon 1980:75). Astbury (1985), seeing this development in illustrative works by the Ashton brothers, states:

> The brothers' illustrations of pastoral subjects continued a firmly established tradition, but their work was distinguished by its fine draughtsmanship and an awareness of overseas artistic trends…Julian Ashton showed that such illustrative subjects could be readily adapted to suit paintings of bush life and contemporary genre subjects…in Ashton's paintings such subjects are bought into the realm of fine art (Astbury 1985: 57).

Clark (1985) agrees that the working of pastoral subjects was dignified by an academic approach. For example, writing of Roberts's work, Clark (1985) states "His serious academic treatment elevates essentially popular subject matter to the status of 'High Art'" (Clark 1985:133).

2.4 The Bushman Theme and the Australian School of Art

Discussions in the nineteenth century journals and press indicate strong opinions as to what directions Australian artists should take and reasons why. In an article, *What Should Australian Artists Paint,* Dickinson[15] (1890) felt that an approach whereby an uneducated colonial public could learn to appreciate fine art was "only by visible

[14] Lendon (1980) refers to Robert's employment as a photographer, stating "Robert's familiarity with photography is an intrinsic part of his whole career" (Lendon 1980:82)

[15] Sidney Dickinson was an American critic and lecturer, with "a fair claim to be regarded as the first serious art critic to support an indigenous school of Australian painting" (Smith 1975:247).

instances produced in their midst, and by artists of their own time" (Dickinson 1890:22). Dickinson (1890) stated that themes for "visible instances" should include

> ...the characteristic life of the station and bush furnish countless subjects…It should be the ambition of our artist to present on canvas the earnestness, rigour, pathos and heroism of the life that is about them (Dickinson 1890:22).

Further, Dickinson (1890) encouraged the development of a national vision. Noting the efforts already made by colonial artists, Dickinson (1890) wrote:

> The chief strength of English art to-day lies in its intense nationality… Some efforts in this direction have already been made…It is to be hoped that Mr. Roberts, Mr McCubbin, and the others who have been impressed with the opportunities for pictorial description which lie in Australian life will not be discouraged either by silent indifference or outspoken criticism, but persevere in an effort which speaks more hopefully for Australian art than almost any other that has ever been inaugurated (Dickinson 1890:22).

Green (1889)[16], in his article *The Art Society of New South Wales*, considered that Australian culture was not ready for the higher and aesthetic quality of art that was appreciated in Europe although he thought that Australian culture was ready to accept depictions of the Australian way of life, and artists should heed this. Green (1889) seems to be touched with some nationalistic ideals when he describes Julian Ashton's *The Prospector* (1889) (Pl.3), "The man stands before us intent on his avocation, his figure typical of the bone and sinew of the nation" (Green 1889:273). Broomfield[17] (1889) adds his support to the argument for depicting the bushman as representative of a truly Australian art form. Broomfield, in defining what form Australian art should take, states "if the bushman is painted from the standpoint of the bushman…clothed in his own proper atmosphere, the painting will be an example and a triumph of the Australian School" (Broomfield, 1889:887).

However, opinions differed and artists and writers were somewhat hesitant in

[16] Smith (1991) regards James Green as the "leading critic of Sydney" (Smith 1991:117) after 1880.
[17] F.J. Broomfield was a sub-editor of the Bulletin in the 1880s, and professional contributor to periodicals. "Broomfield is traditionally credited with accepting Henry Lawson's first Bulletin contribution" (http://Austlit.edu.au.elibrary.jcu.edu 10 March 2002).

supporting the call to paint outback bush subjects. Astbury (1985) states "they feared that an unquestioning acceptance of the *Bulletin* radical-nationalist ethos could lead to an insular attitude that ignored the higher purposes of art" (Astbury 1985:5). Julian Ashton also felt that much of the rural figurative imagery was not fine art. *Table Talk* (1888) reported that Ashton asserted caustically that the typical Australian picture was expected to be in a "gilt frame: then as much paint as will produce a blackfellow, a kangaroo, and a emu [and that] if a digger and dream can be thrown in so much the better" (*Table Talk* 27 January 1888:3). Ashton seems to have felt strongly on the type of bush imagery being used to define Australian fine art, although he worked in this genre for illustrative periodicals. Astbury (1985) notes, after their arrival from England, "Julian and George Ashton quickly mastered the illustrator's repertoire of Australian bush subjects" (Astbury 1985:56). In a following 1889 article *An Aim for Australian Art,* Ashton (1889) continues to argue against a specific Australian art form derived from the bush. Ashton (1889) believed that Australian art should not be categorised by concepts that included arid landscapes, Aborigines or any form of men suffering or dying, calling these "repelling and ugly" (Ashton 1889:31). Though obviously not believing that this content represented national ideals, Ashton did paint much bush imagery, for example, *The Prospector* and Aboriginals, *Gib it Bacca, Boss* (1893). Concerned more for aesthetic depiction of current life in Australia, Ashton (1889) felt that artists should paint their subjects "by interpreting with grace and beauty, the simple themes that every day life will furnish" (Ashton 1889:32). In this way, Ashton (1889) saw the education of the public in the fine arts would eventually be achieved. Ashton (1889) stating his vision for a national art, wrote:

> If the artists of Australia will band themselves together to paint the Australia of today, they will leave behind them historical pictures of the greatest value to coming generations. Pictures, which, in spite of all criticism, must perforce be eventually Australian (Ashton 1889:32).

Astbury (1985) observes that a number of artists, such as Ashton, McCubbin and Roberts had painted large rural works by the late 1880s. These, Astbury (1985) claims, were completed in response to critical calls for nationalistic work. However, it is hard to define what impact these writers' opinions had on artists in sourcing the bush figure genre to represent both nationalistic ideals and a distinct Australian school of art. In-depth articles by serious art writers, like those written by Ashton and Dickinson, may have been more an outlet for discussions from within the art circles than from public interest.

2.5 The Rural Genre - Illustration or High Art

Critic's appraisals of works denoting the bush genre varied. This, Astbury (1985) sees in the way conservative critics looked on Australian bush scenes as illustrations rather than high art, writing: "Subjects bearing a close resemblance to scenes in contemporary illustrations were thus conveniently relegated to the category of low art" (Astbury 1985:7). The furore in 1890 surrounding Robert's *Shearing the Rams* (1890) (Pl.4) exemplifies the attitudes towards bush genre by the conservative art establishment, headed by James Smith, the *Argus* critic and National Gallery of Victoria trustee.

An editorial in *The Argus* (28 June 1890) stated the National Gallery should not buy Robert's *Shearing the Rams* (1890) because it belonged in the category of illustrative books, rather than fine art (Astbury1985). Smith also rejected the possibility that the National Gallery of Victoria would acquire Robert's *Shearing the Rams* for its subject matter, deeming it unworthy of being called great art according to Clark (1985). In fact, The National Gallery of Victoria strongly rejected buying *Shearing the Rams* until 1932, Roberts being "pointedly ignored by the trustees and the Director for forty

years" (Galbally 1986:36). Roberts's defence[18] of the subject matter for *Shearing the Rams* sought to establish the aesthetic nature painting of this subject. Roberts wrote:

> Yet, as your leader of Saturday last deals more than anything with subject in pictures and in art, will you allow me to put my view, and to justify myself as an artist in taking up my subject…being in the bush and feeling the delight and fascination of the great pastoral life and work, I have tried to express it (Roberts1890:10).

Roberts noted that he would have been able to describe the broader and lyrical visions of pastoral life had he been a poet, but as an artist, states

> ...being circumscribed by my art it was only possible to take one view, to give expression to portion of all this…the troops come pattering into their pens, the quick running of the wool carriers…the subdued hum of hard fast working, and the rhythmic click of the shears, the whole lit warm with the reflection of Australian sunlight, it seemed that I had the best expression of my subject, a subject noble enough and worthy enough if I could express the meaning and spirit—of strong masculine labour, the patience of the animals whose years growth is being stripped from them for man's use, and the great human interest of the whole scene (Roberts 1890:10).

These words indicate that Roberts certainly felt that he had moved far from the illustrative precedents of the rural genre, an opinion shared by other art critics.

Nineteenth century differences in perceptions are demonstrated by a number of published critiques by various art critics. Smith's very conservative opinions contrasted to those expressed by the more egalitarian *Age* and *Table talk* critics. In spite of Smith's rather dogmatic and negative review, the painting's public appeal was noted in mostly favourable reports in these and other journals and papers. For example, the *Age* critic (1890) saw the painting as "the most important work of a distinctly Australian character that has been completed up to the present time" (*The Age*, 30 May 1890:7). The *Table Talk* critic agreed, writing "*Shearing the Rams* is a distinctly Australian picture…a work that will live, and a work by which Mr. Roberts' name will always be remembered" (*Table Talk*, 30 May 1890:7). The *Age* critic also expressed the view that "the work, as a whole, will appeal not only to the small minority that know something of art methods,

[18] James Smith, art critic for the *Argus,* and a trustee for The National Gallery of Victoria had criticised Roberts's use of subject matter, deeming it unworthy of being called great art (Clark and Whitelaw (1985:133).

but to the immense majority who like a painting that tells its own story" (*Age* 30 May 1890:7). Perhaps not only the nationalistic vision appealed. The *Table Talk* critic looked past the represented imagery to see in the painting strong aesthetic qualities, writing:

> The colouring is marked by a succession of soft harmonies, and the general tone of the painting light, and of a subdued brilliancy, that is not broken in the whole of the work. Mr Roberts' painting is always strong, but in the present case it is masterly (*Table Talk* May 30 1890:7).

Smith (1980) sees *Shearing the Rams* rising above its illustrative source saying "the academic treatment 'elevates' a popular subject to the level of high art, and the use of popular imagery opens an academic painting to wider audiences" (Smith 1980:111). Spate (1996), agrees that a differing and aesthetic role came with use of these bush genre themes in oil painting, writing "paintings in oil gave such activity a different status, that of high art, one which could ennoble" (Spate 1997:78).

2.6 The Role of State Galleries in Supporting the Bush Genre

In spite of Robert's impassioned defence of his painting the trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria continued to largely ignore the efforts of rising colonial painters and their claims of creating fine art. According to Galbally (1979), the trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria, in the 1880s, were less interested in purchasing colonial artists efforts than the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Astbury (1985) writes "from its inception the Melbourne Gallery had a policy purchasing original paintings of modern masters of acknowledged ability" (Astbury 1985:80). These original paintings were preferably those of European source. Purchasing paintings characteristic of the bush genre met with what appears to be strong resistance by the Victorian trustees, as already discussed, a notable example being the rejection of *Shearing the Rams*. Galbally (1979) notes that both Roberts and McCubbin were not favoured[19], stating in fact that "the first preference of the early trustees was overwhelmingly landscape because here, it

[19] Roberts *Shearing the Rams* was finally purchased in 1932 and McCubbin's *The Pioneer* in 1906 by the National Gallery of Victoria (Galbally 1979).

was felt, the character of Australia lay" (Galbally 1979:36). When, due to economic conditions[20], the Victorian trustees in the 1890s turned to buying Australian art because it was cheaper than the favoured European art, the emphasis remained on landscape (Galbally 1979). Even then, Astbury (1985) noted, "their purchases included no nationalistic figure subjects" (Astbury 1985:7).

As mentioned, Galbally (1979) commented that the Art Gallery of New South Wales gave more support than its counterpart did in Victoria, to Australian artists through the acquisition of their works in the 1880s and 1890s. Although the trustees, under collection policies formatted in 1874, were to use their judgement in buying colonial art, (Gibson 2001) the differing attitude in acquisition policies, was in part, due to the efforts of Julian Ashton.

Ashton became a trustee of the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1889 and continued there until 1899. These years saw a great influx of visitors, Gibson (2001) noting that between 1886 and 1897 some 2 560 974 people visited the Gallery. While in this position, Ashton used his influence to pass a resolution that the Gallery annually spend £500 or more in purchasing Australian works of art (Clark 1985:13). Lindsay (1920) remarked that Ashton "fought the battle of the Australian artist for twelve years; and it is due to his continuous insistence on the quality and claims of our painters that they are all represented in the National Gallery today" (Lindsay 1920:22). The effects of Ashton's efforts were soon seen. Bevan (1893), commenting on the collection of colonial works in 1893 and its popularity, also noted the subject matter of the Australian collection:

> The establishment of a colonial court devoted to the work of Australian Artists is becoming a feature in the Sydney collection [of the State Gallery]… Visitors evince great interest in this section of the gallery, where the scenes represented for the most part are 'redolent of the soil'…Another satisfactory result of the formation of the

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[20] The depression of the 1890s.

> picture gallery has been to make the public a great deal more critical with regard to work produced in Australia (Bevan 1893:80).

Amongst the scenes, 'redolent of the soil' were Julian Ashton's *The Prospector* and Frank Mahony's *Rounding up a Straggler* (1889) (Pl.5). Other works in the nationalistic bush genre acquired later, while Ashton was still a trustee, were George Lambert's *Across the Black Soil Plains* (1897), Frederick McCubbin's *On the Wallaby Track* (1897), Tom Roberts's *The Golden Fleece- Shearing at Newstead* (1894) and Arthur Streeton's *Fire's On* (1893).

2.7 The Art Schools and the Rural Genre

Although the National Gallery of Victoria did not support colonial artists through purchasing their work, Clark (1985) sees "there is no doubt that the Victorian government's support of art education was one of the most significant influences on Australian painting of the period" (Clark 1985:33). In the 1880s, there was a strong emphasis on academic training in art schools in Sydney and Melbourne with teachers employed at these schools having studied academically in Europe. A historical review of the *Royal Art Society of N.S.W. A Brief History* (2002) notes that in the 1880s European artists were arriving in the colony with

> ...knowledge of the social realist style of painting which placed emphasis on depicting the working and living conditions of the ordinary man and woman…The Society ran classes at their rooms, not only to provide sound art training for students, but also to encourage the development of an Australian style which incorporated some of these new ideas (*Royal Society of NSW- A Brief History* 2002:1).

McCubbin (1916) remarked that, with arrivals of influential artists from Europe bringing new painting methods of 'relative values' and the emergence of students from art schools, a school of Australian art began to be noticed by the public and the press. Although noting that these methods were not altogether accepted by older 'traditionalists'[21] who harshly criticised the new work, McCubbin saw this as "a period

[21] A possible reference to James Smith, and his comments on the 9x5 exhibition in 1889.

of great enthusiasm…the necessity to paint everything on the spot" (McCubbin 1916:86).

The National Gallery Art School of Victoria founded in 1870, provided early academic training for Roberts, McCubbin, Longstaff with others. The strong influence of George Folingsby[22] (1828-1891) master of the National Gallery School from 1882-1891 was to prove significant in the development of Australian art, including that of the nationalistic bush genre, according to Clark (1985). The importance of Folingsby's influence in composition, figure drawing and academic training on the development and interpretation of the bush genre is seen through his formidable classical academic training and a keen interest in historical and sentimental narrative genre. Galbally (1987) states "Young students were encouraged to paint the dramas of the everyday settler in the scale and manner of national history painting" (Galbally 1987:48).

Arriving in 1879, and becoming head of the National Art School in 1882, Folingsby had studied at the Royal Academy in London, The National Academy of Design in New York, the Munich Academy in Germany, leading ateliers in France and under Paul Delaroche (1797-1856), a leading academic in historical social realist paintings. Folingsby also studied under Karl von Piloty (1826-1886) who was well known for his realism in historical genre paintings (Astbury 1985). Leading artists whom Folingsby taught included McCubbin, Aby Alston (1867-c1949) John Longstaff, David Davies (1864-1939), Rupert Bunny (1864-1947) and E. Phillips Fox (1865-1915). Folingsby revitalised the school, with structured courses in life drawing and composition. By 1884, *The Argus* commented on Folingsby's pupils "extraordinary progress" (*The Argus,* December 19 1884:6), also remarking that everything was painted from life, including landscapes and genre scenes. *Table Talk* also noted

[22] Academically trained in Europe, Folingsby provided "sound, conservative academic training" (Clark 1985:33).

"Folingsby's guidance is doing so much for the future artists of the colony" (*Table Talk* April 29 1887:8).

Not all were so enthusiastic for Folingsby's teaching method, based on his Munich training, with several artists and critics feeling that it was more German than the more popular English mode (Astbury 1985:36). By 1886, a similarity to Folingsby's style in the students work was also noted, with an "increasing appearance of sentimental and anecdotal subject pictures" (Astbury 1985:32). Criticised in 1886 by George Ashton for having nothing "distinctly Australian" (Astbury 1985:36) being produced by his students, Folingsby then initiated a Travelling Scholarship to be awarded by the National School each year for the students which "provided the necessary impetus for the future creation of large subject compositions with specifically Australian subject matter" (Astbury 1985:37). Clark (1985) writes:

> Folingsby initiated the travelling scholarship for study overseas…This was of great importance for the subsequent development of nineteenth century Australian subject painting and the popular appreciation of Australian art. Inevitably, in this proud centenary decade, the scholarship paintings were large scale figure compositions with distinctly 'National' content (Clark 1985:33).

The first travelling scholar ship was awarded to Longstaff's *Breaking the News* (1887) (Pl.6), a sentimentally narrative work based on a mining disaster. This work was extremely popular with the public and press, receiving high approval from journal and newspaper art reviews. Clark (1985) notes this work was significant in the development of Australian narrative figure painting with its "strong appeal to the rising sense of nationalism" (Clark 1985:47). Perhaps, as part of this appeal, popular perceptions of strengths of male bush workers are unintentionally transmitted to the woman who will have to bear with fortitude her loss. Alston's *Flood Sufferings* (1890) (Pl.7), winner of the second travelling scholarship followed Longstaff's theme, in sentimentalising bush incidents. Again, the theme proved extremely popular with the press reviewing this painting. Critics from *The Age, Table Talk* and *The Argus* were amongst those who

wrote favourable reports, praising the theme and the artist's techniques, while the *Australasian Critic* (1890) also noted "A strong prejudice prevails in Australia in favour of pictures describing local incidents or characters" (*Australasian Critic* 1 December 1890:74).

Alfred Daplyn (1844-1926) was the first official teacher in 1887 at the Royal Art Society of New South Wales's Art school, directed by Julian Ashton. Daplyn had been interested in *en plein air* sketching in France and had studied in Paris at the École des Beaux-Arts under Jean Leone Gérôme (1824-1904) and possibly Corot (1756-1875)[23] (Clark 1985). Julian Ashton also trained in Paris and London, and exhibited with the Royal Academy before coming to Australia. Arriving in Melbourne in 1878 Ashton, an advocate of *plein-air* painting, encouraged McCubbin and others to follow principles of painting from nature and life around them (Astbury 1985). Moving to Sydney in 1883, Ashton taught privately in Sydney, first at the Royal Society Art School and then started his own art school in 1896.

Tom Roberts left Australia to further his studies at the Royal Academy Antique Schools in London from 1881-1885 and, briefly, at the Académie Julian in Paris. Roberts returned following and preaching a "technique meeting the high standards of modern French tonal painting, and soon to be identified as describing high keyed Australian sunlight" (Eagle 1996:46). Correspondence between Roberts and McCubbin indicates a continuing investigation in different ideas, and conceivably adapting the overseas techniques to interpret local subjects objectively. Roberts writing to McCubbin says:

> Doing this work reminds me of our early companionship & the way we had to try things out—how we were led and misled, and how we did our best in our innocence, and we come back to that after all (Roberts 1905 October 23).

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[23] De Libra, the art critic for the *Australian Art Review*, noted a resemblance to Corot's work in Daplyn's tonal treatment (De Libra June 11899:21).

Willis (1993) writes of McCubbin's closeness in concept and stylistic treatment of pioneers to that of Bastien-Lepage's romanticised peasants, though McCubbin seems to have regarded him more as a resource. Writing to Roberts that he had a photo of Lappage's work, McCubbin stated, although the work was lovely, he felt that "I do not feel that my way lies in direct inspiration but rather what I can see in the possibilities" (McCubbin 1891 March 26). Whitelaw et al (1996) see in McCubbin's work influences characteristic of a number of artists, Bastien-Lepage, Corot and later, Turner (1775-1851), but say that he "never slavishly copied these masters. Their works provided him with a starting point" (Whitelaw et al 1996:256). This view is substantiated by McCubbin (1916) who believed that the ready availability in Australia of "very fair fac-similes of the great pictures of the world" (McCubbin 1916:91) was advantageous to Australian artists in understanding composition, drawing and colour. McCubbin (1916) saw the application of this knowledge in being of great value for Australian artists.

Burn (1988) argues stylistic and conceptual dependence on European modes was only one factor in the development of Australian art. It has to be assessed within historical interpretations, and pointing out that there was "a concentration by artists on the searching out and expression of regional characteristics, of the people (as types) and of their environment" (Burn 1988:5). This view is similar to that expressed by McCubbin in 1916 who wrote

> ...however much Australian art owes its existence to other lands, its existence as a National asset, has depended to a great degree upon its being an unconscious expression in some form or other of the ideals of the people amongst which it developed (McCubbin 1916:91).

2.8 Nationalistic and Heroic Visions of the Rural Figurative Genre

Tom Roberts painted only four large purposeful nationalistic paintings related to the bush genre, *Shearing the Rams*, *The Breakaway* (1891), *The Golden Fleece Shearing at Newstead* and *Bailed Up* (1895). Radford (1996) notes that these four

paintings "have become icons of Australian cultural identity" (Radford 1996:10). These, with a number of smaller bush genre paintings, in works like *Wood Splitters* (1886), *Lumbering* (1893-96) and, returning to the theme in 1926, *Country Road Makers* (1926), Roberts sought to present a view of 'strong masculine labour' (Roberts 1890:10). Recent literature gives much attention to this factor in the bush genre work by Roberts and his associates. Clark (1985) points out that the theme of strong masculine labour "reached heroic proportions in his great shearing subjects" (Clark 1985:128). Astbury (1996) agrees, asserting Roberts created "a series of related masculinities which can be identified through their representation in different subjects [and thus becoming] icons of masculine labour"(Astbury 1996:124). Smith (1980) sees an extension to the overt masculinity of *The Shearing of the Rams* even further, noting, "Roberts chose to celebrate …the special session during which only rams were shorn" (Smith 1980:104).

The overt masculinity of Robert's bush workers is less apparent in McCubbin's more sentimental approach to his subject. This depicted rather the noble, heroic and enduring spirit of the pioneer settlers, both male and female. Art critics, from 1890 to 1906, reviewed the *Pioneer* series of works with enthusiasm praising both their artistic merit and the national spirit they were seen to embody. This favourable opinion of McCubbin's art and his subject matter is reflected by the *Table Talk* reviewer who proclaimed McCubbin "chose incidents in bush life and painted them as no other man did or could, before and since" (*Table Talk* October 23 1896:16). Reviewers saw McCubbin's *Down on His Luck* (1899) as "thoroughly Australian in spirit" (*Table Talk* April 26 1889:5), while the popular *Bush Funeral* (1890) (Pl.8) was seen by Dickinson (1890) as representative of both McCubbin's Australian trained and highly developed artistic skills, and of nation. Dickinson (1890) stated:

> The highest importance of the picture is found in the intimation it gives of the possibility of finding in Australia material that shall be at once peculiar to the country

> and susceptible of the highest artistic treatment. Nowhere could a subject be found more affecting in its pathos, more picturesque in its setting and more truly characteristic of national experience and environment (Dickinson 1890:11).

McCubbin, himself, felt *The Pioneer* (1904) (Pl.9) was his best work to date. In a letter to Roberts, McCubbin wrote, "The big picture [*The Pioneer]* is to my mind my best effort in Art" (McCubbin June 14 1904). Reviewers agreed, again praising the work for its national approach. *The Age* stated "*The Pioneer* marks the passage in art in Mr. McCubbin's career from incidental art...to that of monumental art" (*The Age* April 22 1904:8) and "The most significant picture in the history of Australian art…It is one of the finest works that Australia has produced" (*The Age* March 1906:5). The work has remained engrained within popular Australian taste although degraded to plentiful reproductions in various forms, from posters to tablemats.

Astbury (1985) views these responses to McCubbin's pioneer themes, although feeling McCubbin owed their style and concept to European realism, as developments in the pioneer mythology. The popularity of these developments, Astbury (1985) perceives as having two directions, with conservative opinion seeing it as a reminder of a revered past, and for the more progressive as "laying the foundations for the new society and pointing the way to future action" (Astbury1985:131) in following the noble virtues of the pioneering spirit. Astbury further sees "the recurrence of their subject matter in local popular subject matter made and still makes them readily accessible to a more general audience" (Astbury1985:131).

Writers of their time and art theorists of the twentieth century regard McCubbin and Roberts as outstanding exponents in idealising bush types as noble and heroic representation of the national type. However, other artists were also recognised for their contributions to this noble vision. For example, Streeton's *Fire's on!* (1893), was seen by *The Age* critic as representing the spirit of the new world by the depiction of "the

tiny little figures in front of the huge resisting mass of rock express the triumph of human ingenuity over matter" (*The Age* May 27 1892:6). Lambert's *Across the Black Soil Plains* (Pl.10) represents, according to De Libra (1899), "poetry of action" (De Libra 1899:10) while Astbury (1985) sees in this painting a creation of heroic image which "captures the romanticism of the pioneer ethos" (Astbury 1985:150). Moore (1934) regarded Frank Mahony as important as Roberts in depicting the outback ethos, writing:

> The most characteristic [paintings] of outback life are those from the brush of Tom Roberts and Frank Mahony...What Lawson did in song and story to stimulate a national sentiment, Mahony accomplished, to a certain extent, in his paintings and drawings. He had a rare facility for giving a peculiar Australian touch to everything he depicted (Moore 1934:129).

Other artists painted similar visions, including Julian Ashton and Walter Withers, but the imagery of Roberts and McCubbin relating to the noble bushman has remained the most notable. Spate (1996) writes "Roberts was subject to the dominant ideological currents of his time but he also sought to exploit some of those ideologies in his art" (Astbury 1996:124). This could well apply to the other artists who took a bush ideology of illustrative origin to a fine art form that came to be seen as representing nation. These works, each representing the artists' aims in presenting pastoral or bush genre as a fine art form, can be seen as the outcome of a period in Australian art when national ideals were becoming more popular.

2.9 Mythical Virtues of the Australian Rural Figure and the War

The rural mythology defining the national identity in the period preceding the First World War is generally regarded as a significant influence on the creation of new national myths during this war. According to Burn (1990), Johnson (1999), White, (1981) and Williams (1995) the character of the Australian soldier was seen to inherit all of the perceived qualities of noble and heroic bushmen. Willis (1993) argues that the distinct Australian type of bush masculinity, graphically visualised by Roberts in

Shearing the Rams was used to further the Anzac myth. "The Anzac legend then got layered onto this already existing figure of Australian masculinity" (Willis 1993:161).

White (1981) suggests that the national type, derived from the bush stock, was being assessed for military prowess from the end of the nineteenth century. By 1907, White (1981) notes, C.W. Bean,[24] was promoting the bush ethos as a force in shaping the fighting qualities of an Australian soldier. In doing so, White (1981) says Bean was following a "nationalistic sentiment favouring an ultimate test of the fibre of the new national type" (White 1981:126).

In 1913, not all agreed that a national type had emerged. Williams (1995) says doubts were expressed by some writers although they acknowledged that if there was a distinct Australian type it "was said to be derived from the bush" Williams (1995:77). In 1914, a reporter viewing the characteristics of an emerging national type in Queensland troops coming from the bush, stated

> …slightly built, wiry young men with the sun tinted faces from the plains and bush lands of the northern State. For all the multifarious types composing the people of a country too young to have a distinct type, Queensland bushmen most nearly approximate a characteristic group. The Light Horse, as they have always been [sic] in Queensland, are a body of fine horsemen, drawn from the farms and stations of the State (*The Age* October 6 1914:7).

The commissioning of war artists by the Australian government began in 1916 and continued through to the 1930s to provide a documentation of Australia's involvement. Burn (1990) states that no other nation went as far as the Australian government did in this documentation, in that a "huge investment in the nationalistic sentiment in the war was demonstrated by the extraordinary lengths gone to document and memorialise Australia's involvement" (Burn 1990:62). Burn (1990) sees the visual imagery produced as invoking a

> ...common bond–in spirit and often in pictorial form–between the earlier moment of

[24] The War Historian, whose *The Anzac Book* helped to define the Anzac legend.

> artistic struggle for a sense of national individuality and the attainment of what the ideologues of war claimed was nationhood on the battlefields (Burn 1990:73).

In Burn's (1990) opinion, much of the war imagery contained deliberate references to the pre-war art of the Heidelberg painters and their contemporaries in technique and composition. Given that the Australian government commissioned many of the artists involved in the earlier visualisations of Australia the connection is not surprising. A list of official Australian war artists published by *Art in Australia* in 1919 included John Longstaff, Arthur Streeton, George Lambert and Tom Roberts. As examples of the derivation from the earlier imagery, Burn (1990) points to the relationship of Lambert's paintings of the Light Horse to Robert's *Breakaway* (1891) and Mahony's *Rounding up a Straggler* (1889). Burn (1990) also sees the bush imagery of horse teams and men hauling timber and wool substituted to guns in painting such as *Third Ypres, 31 July 1917: Taking the Guns through* (1919) (Pl.11) by H. Septimus Power (1878-1951). This, Burn (1990) states, was to provide a feeling of association with the War, through a use of these familiar concepts, and to provide the public with a sense of closeness to the War:

> These associations recreated the experience of the war as something not so far away, not so alien, not so much a 'foreign war'. The images gave visual credence to claims that the fighting had been for the safety of Australia (Burn 1990:72).

Concurrently, the use of familiar imagery relating to the bush figuration furthered the notion of heroism springing from the virtues of the bushmen. Allen (1997) notes with Lambert's and Streeton's commissioned documentation of Australians at war, the Heidelberg notions of pioneer and bush workers was "transposed into tragic mode" (Allen 1997:91). Lambert's *A Sergeant of the Light Horse* (1920) (Pl.12) is, according to Allen (1997) "an image of the settler turned soldier" (Allen 1997:91). Burn sees in this war-art a return to academic realism, needed for historical accuracy and to suggest the gravity of the subject arguing "for Australian artists the war demanded realism

which discouraged experimentation and unnecessary embellishment" (Burn 1990:74). According to Sayers (2001), these restraints hindered the production of great art, excepting Lambert's *A Sergeant of the Light Horse*. Sayers (2001) feels that Lambert's *Anzac, The Landing,* (1915) is "Australia's greatest painting of a military subject [and] the defining moment of Australia's nationhood" (Sayers 2001:122).

The grandeur of much of the commissioned work empathising heroic moments in the Australian's war did not impress all. Charles Marriott (1919), writing for *Art in Australia*, admired Will Dyson's (1880-1938) approach in portraying the business of war:

> [Dyson's war drawings] bring home the size and weight of the war as pictures of great moments could never do. Australians have good reason to be proud of the fact that it is one of their artists [who] has given to the world an interpretation of the war which will seem truer and truer the further the war recedes into perspective (Marriott 1919 pages unnumbered).

Marriott (1919) felt that Dyson had managed to capture the boredom of war, its 'democratic' nature and the nature of the unheroic common man who happened to find himself a soldier and who was there at the end when needed. Dyson drew what he saw, without embellishment, according to Marriott (1919) rather than "the parvenu war artist [who] has to be always reminding himself of the sacred cause and underlining it" (Marriott 1919 pages unnumbered). Perhaps Marriott's 'democratic' and 'common man' could be seen in relationship to McCubbin's *Pioneers*, returning to the egalitarian nature and qualities of the Australian bushman.

According to Speck (1999), a number of women, Thea Proctor (1879-1966), Hilda Rix Nicholas (1884-1961), Jessie Traill (1881-1967) and Margaret Preston (1875-1963) who were in England and France in 1916 were not considered for the role of war artists. Speck (1999) sees this exclusion as a widely held belief at the time that women were unsuited for depicting masculine heroism or the construction of national image

deriving from this concept. According to Speck (1999), the Australian War Memorial's rejection of Hilda Rix Nicholas's work was an outcome of this belief:

> The war memorial's claim that Rix Nicholas's painting conveyed an overly intimate response to death is a significant admission which betrays what it is impossible to establish: a belief that women artists could not be fully objective in documenting the first world war (Speck 1999:36).

Further, Pigot (2000) relates this belief to the

> ...kinds of restrictive gender relations… sealed into the nation's cultural life in the 1890s. They promoted a special kind of masculinity that not only defined manly activity but Australianness as well (Pigot 2000:43).

Burn (1990) also observes that war art reinforced the patriarchal order, with the mythologising of the masculinity ideology, and "graphically enshrined the male stereotype" (Burn 1990:62). Adding to this Burn (1990) argues "the creation of the Anzac legend also served to mythologise the urban-living experience, renewing a claim to the bush ethos" (Burn 1990:72). Johnson (1999) arrives at similar conclusions, seeing a link between the values of the latter nineteenth century being assimilated within the war and then carried through to the post war era, stating:

> The growing inventory of the Australian soldiers virtues were taken over from a mythic type, then generalised and projected forward into the post war period...The Anzac...imagery and its mutually confirming continuity with a pre-war national mythology are inscribed in artistic responses which have distinctly Australian accents (Johnson 1999:69).

Williams (1995) perceives this continuity of a national vision was based on a general acceptance of the idea that "the soul of the AIF was agrarian and the digger was the bushman reincarnate" (Williams 1995:125). Galbally (1979) remarked:

> The same period [the 1920s] saw a tendency to look back to the years preceding the First World War, particularly the 1880s and 1890s, and to see in them manifestations of an unsullied Australian nationalism (Galbally 1979:65).

Burn (1990) also declares the war was a contributing factor in the transformation of Australian art, with a reinterpretation of the heritage of the 1880s leading to a pastoral vision that was to exclude narrative and people in the immediate post war years.

2.10 Changing Visual Perceptions

Burn (1990) sees in post war art of the 1920s the national sentiment turning to landscape which represented a symbolic embodiment of social structure and possession, rural harmony, prosperity and order, in keeping with the now dominant image of a pure and wholesome Australia with little intrusion by man or machinery. Burn (1990) argues that the base for this "investment of national character in the landscape" (Burn 1990: 102) remained the legacy of the Anzac mythic qualities. Discussing the painting techniques used for works by Streeton, and other post war landscape artists, Burn (1990) states:

> The energy and physicality of the painting technique were important in constructing the 'psychological space' of the paintings at once, confident, positive assured and masculine. It is not difficult to draw parallels between the manly style and the mythic fighting qualities attributed to the Anzac soldier (Burn 1990:92).

However, there were artists who painted the rural figurative genre successfully, although remaining firmly within the now traditional concepts of the latter nineteenth century artists. In the 1920s, according to Pigot (2000), Rix Nicholas focussed on representing "the men and women of the bush as heroic symbols of Australian country life [finding them] more interesting than the pastoral landscapes" (Pigot 2000:46). The Heidelberg themes of the heroic bushman were repeated in Rix Nicholas's *The Shearers* (1922) (Pl.13), *In Australia* (1922-3) and *Looking for Stragglers* (1927). Nevertheless, these are without quite the conviction that was evident in Roberts' works, obtaining more a contrived sense of a prosperous landed class than the earlier vision of the heroic bush worker. Lambert painted similarly, although more convincingly, in *Weighing the fleece* (1921) (Pl.14), but as Burn points out "far from the 1890s ideal of strong masculine labour" (Burn 1990:104).

The legacy of the Heidelberg painters remained strongly entrenched in the immediate post war years. White (1981) notes that the 1920s was a time when "national

insularity sought a pure and uncorrupted golden age" (White 1981:106). Agreeing, Williams (1995) writes that a reactionary art establishment headed by Lionel Lindsay (1874-1961) sought to "preserve the Australian art world as an Edwardian gentlemen's club, contentedly encouraging the practices of the late nineteenth century" (Williams1995:165). According to Williams (1995), in Lindsay's eyes, the advent of modernism in the Australian culture was to destroy the "uniquely Australian qualities" (William 1995:165) of Australian art based on a pioneering and bush tradition.

2.11 Legacy of the Early Visions

Referring to the time of his student days, McCubbin remarked "There used to be a sort of legend about that time that Australia would do great things in Art where it sprang from or how goodness only knows" (McCubbin c1900:70). Certainly, by 1934, the feeling was that this had been achieved through the efforts of McCubbin and his contemporaries. William Moore (1934), who wrote the first important book on Australian art history *The Story of Australian Art* (1934) saw the role of the Heidelberg group as decisive in the development of Australian art, stating

> ...no doubt that they were quite unconcerned that they were greater than they knew. But one thing is certain, they did serve the future hour, their influence on the art of Australia being much more apparent now than it was then (Moore 1934:76).

However, White (1981) and Willis (1993) write that rather than being unaware of their position in Australian art, these artists sought to create a nationalistic legend through a fine art approach. In White's (1981) opinion, the creation of this nationalistic legend was self-serving, based on the artists' professional and economic interests and needs. By establishing themselves in the public view as the "only true interpreters of Australia" (White 1981:106), the artists were seeking to protect their standing against imported culture. To do this they needed to reference popular themes and thus "consciously strove to paint Australian themes…they depicted distinctly Australian social subjects such as shearers, stockmen, bushmen, pioneers and bushrangers" (Willis

1993: 72). Although Galbally (1979) states that the myth of the bush genre iconic form representing nation was yet to rise at this time, it seems that many of the artists of the time were certainly intent on representing a vision that could only be Australian. Clark (1985), discussing bush imagery with its nationalistic associations, states Roberts, McCubbin and their fellow painters believed "outback and pioneering subjects…distinguished Australian life from that of any other nation" (Clark 1985:128). Dickinson's (1890) appraisal of McCubbin's *A Bush Funeral* (1890) is representative of nineteenth century critical recognition of the artist's aims in depicting an imagery representing nation:

> The highest importance of the picture, however, is found in the intimation it gives of the possibility of finding in Australia material that shall be at once peculiar to the country and susceptible of the highest artistic treatment. Nowhere could a subject be found…more truly characteristic of national experience and environment (Dickinson, *Argus* 24 April 1890:11).

Willis (1993) points out that McCubbin's work exemplifies the "consciously selected nationalistic themes that celebrate the white settlement of Australia…the nationalistic appeal was based on its distinctness – the portrayal of bush types" (Willis 1993:73). The legend extended to these artists being regarded by "successive generations of art professionals, popular and academic [who] have seen the Heidelberg painters as the founders of the nation's visual culture" (Willis 1993:71). Burn (1990) agrees, and sees these artists' visions as important in establishing Australia's artist traditions:

> This blending of artistic naturalism and nationalism, coloured with egalitarian sympathies, inspired some of Australia's most enduring cultural values and ideas about an artistic tradition (Burn 1990:16).

Nostalgia and idealism for the rural sector flourished with the popular press in the latter years of the nineteenth century and, albeit begrudging at times, there was an acknowledgment of rising Australian artists who developed the theme into a fine art form. It must be pointed out that the bush visions were only part of these artists' work. Roberts, Ashton, McCubbin, and others were also painting many other subjects, such as

portraits, city scenes and coastal scenes that did not reflect aspects of either nation or pastoral visions. However, these were not seen as representative of nation then or in later years. This representation remained the province of the bush genre, a factor that was to continue through to the twentieth century, albeit in differing manifestations and philosophies.

Chapter Three

The Transformation of the Rural Figurative Genre 1930 - 1960

3.0 Altered Visions of Rural Figuration

This chapter examines a number of artist's interpretations of the rural figurative genre through selected images, focussing specifically on Sidney Nolan and Russell Drysdale and the iconic nature of their work. Other notable artists, such as Arthur Boyd and Albert Tucker, with works in this genre are also considered and discussed.

In the 1930s, a rising generation of artists began to radically alter the course of art in Australia. Haese (1981) refers to the period between 1930 and the beginning of the Cold war in 1948 as "years of unparalleled intellectual and artistic ferment" (Haese 1981: vii). This 'artistic ferment' redefined the nature and direction of Australian art, with influences through, amongst other factors, the awareness and adaptation of European modernism.

Smith (1991) attributes the development of changing and challenging imagery to the advent of new art schools like the Bell-Shore School in 1932, contemporary art societies[25], influx of European artists fleeing Hilter's regime and art students returning from Europe. The advent of Modernism, coupled with a "drift from academic taste" Smith (1991:205), impacted on all aspects of Australian art, including the rural figurative genre. Haese (1981) observes Modernism "enabled radical artists to reject all traditionally accepted modes of representation and to reach out towards new expressions of the Australian experience" (Haese 1981:ix).

Haese (1981) states that added to these modernist influences there was a "rediscovery and re-examination of an authentic Australian cultural tradition" (Haese

[25] The Contemporary Art Society was established in 1938, partly in counteraction to the establishment of the traditionally focussed Australian Academy of Art championed by Robert Menzies, then Federal Attorney General (Sayers 2001).

1981:3), while Burn (1990) also observes that:

> Throughout the 1930s the limitations of a purely pastoral vision of Australia were becoming increasingly evident and the specific character of 'national' definitions had become looser with competing styles and ideas (Burn 1990:197).

Williams (1995) notes that the reactionary ideologies espoused by Lionel Lindsay and J. S. MacDonald[26], who favoured an Arcadian national vision "locked firmly in the past" (Williams 1995:198), were no longer representative of the national culture by the late 1930s. Williams (1995) further states:

> As Australia began to emerge from the depression of the 1930s, this once-radical art of the 1890s, but now a reactionary art that upheld isolation, was again becoming redundant. There could be no substitute in a living, vital culture for a living vital art (Williams 1995:247).

Haese (1981) considers that between the 1930s and 1950s the developing modern art in Australia mirrored changes wrought in Australian society and culture. These changes were a result of the Depression years between 1929 and the mid thirties, the Second World War in the forties and to the beginnings of the Cold War in 1948. Haese (1981) states the art produced became a reflection or "portrait of a period, a generation and its art" (Haese 1981:vii). According to Haese (1981), Drysdale, Tucker, Nolan, Boyd and other artists of the new generation were socially aware and articulate and were to develop an imagery that was characterised by

> ...a deep and persuasive concern for realism, the reality of human social and psychological experience at a time of unremitting crisis and intense intellectual struggle. This preoccupation, filtered and given form through surrealist, expressionist or social realist modes produced images that are amongst the most uncompromising and authoritative records of the Australian experience (Haese 1981:vii).

Although overseas styles were still followed Heathcote (1995) writes within this time of cultural and social change, that now "as never before local artists mined their innate creativity to develop their own idioms" (Heathcote 1995:3). Agreeing with Haese (1981), Heathcote (1995) sees surrealist, expressionist and social realists strands in the works of Drysdale, Nolan and their fellow artists who, in spite of bitter public ridicule

[26] Director of the State Gallery of New South Wales.

by conservative fractions, succeeded in producing "works of astonishing vision, imagination and depth of feeling" (Heathcote1995:3). By 1945, Heathcote (1995) states that "an altered sense of national identity was in the air, a vision of transforming ideals" (Heathcote 1995:1). Accompanied by a lessening of ties with British culture and thought, Heathcote (1995) sees this as a time when

> ...the idea germinated that instead of allowing their culture to be defined and interpreted by others, Australia as a nation should become more assertive (Heathcote (1995:3).

Within these changing approaches in social and cultural thinking regarding both visual imagery and national identity the redefining and new perceptions of the rural figurative genre in Australian art was inevitable. Sidney Nolan and Russell Drysdale instituted images of rural figuration in the national psyche that would rival their Heidelberg predecessors. Arthur Boyd and Albert Tucker were other significant artists during these years who also transfigured the rural figure in a different capacity of national self-identity than came to be associated with Nolan's and Drysdale's works.

3.1 New Interpretations of Rural Life – Russell Drysdale

In 1944, the *Sydney Morning Herald* commissioned Russell Drysdale to present a series of drawings to accompany articles on the devastating drought of 1944. In justifying Drysdale's selection for this commission a *Herald* reporter wrote:

> Russell Drysdale is one of the outstanding artists in Australia today…he has established a reputation for his ruthless interpretation of Australia's spacious gauntness and the wear and tear which mankind suffers within such an environment (*Sydney Morning Herald* December 16 1944:5).

Certainly, Drysdale had established his reputation in depicting bush life by 1944. In 1943 Ure Smith (1943) wrote that Drysdale had "in the last few years…presented us with a collection of paintings in the Australian idiom" (Ure Smith 1943: 32) adding that until now, few artists had presented any works of significance of Australian life and character since the works of Roberts, McCubbin and Lambert in the 1880s and 1890s.

Counihan[27] (1947) wrote of the national vision expressed by Drysdale, linking this to Drysdale's work:

> Russell Drysdale has gone further than any of his Sydney colleagues towards capturing the real appearance of rural Australia…His inclination towards the harsh red emptiness of certain country streets, the erosion-wrecked lands, and the lonely struggling families of the outback, is of considerable significance to the renewed growth of a national feeling in our art [and] directly links him with the humanist strain which runs through the greatest Australian art (Counihan 1947:20).

However, Haese (1981) points out that Drysdale's works on the people of rural townships in the Riverina in the early forties were images that

> ...never had been painted before and Drysdale was conscious that in turning to the theme of rural poverty and struggle, together with their simple virtues, he was reacting against the pastoral tradition (Haese1981:260-1).

Smith (1991) further sees these works revealed truthful aspects of Australian rural life that had been ignored earlier by Streeton and others, thus becoming an "implicit criticism" (Smith 1991:244) of the earlier pastoral visions.

Burn (1990) credits Drysdale as the artist who, with these Riverina images, transformed the stylistic nature and symbolism of outback imagery, writing that "Drysdale's images of the period show people accepting the harsh landscape, going about ordinary activities, rabbiting, playing games, feeding dogs" (Burn 1990:194). Haese asserts that the Riverina series painted between 1941-1944 established Drysdale with Dobell, as the "foremost painter of the new generation" (Haese 1981:261). Adding to this assertion Burn (1991) sees this series as the point when Drysdale established his interpretations of the rural genre:

> On to this cultural stage stepped Russell Drysdale with his lovingly painted, richly glazed pictures of harsh isolated outback life. Surrealist borrowings and other modernist techniques enhanced the subject matter, which rapidly caught the public imagination (Burn 1991:78).

Although Counihan (1947) and Ure Smith (1943) suggested that Drysdale was following an Australian tradition of national identity with rural figurative imagery,

[27] Noel Counihan (1913-1986)

others of the time refused to see anything of Australian character in his work. John Reed[28] in 1944 had little regard for Drysdale's work stating that Drysdale's' "lanky figures…derived as they seem to be from American sources do not satisfy one beyond their first impression" (Reed 1944 cited in Dutton 1964:24). Although Reed wrote in 1945 that a record attendance of 50,000 people had visited the 1945 Herald Exhibition featuring William Dobell and Drysdale's work, he felt it "was an organised attempt on the part of Murdoch…to ram Dobell, Drysdale, etc. down the throat of the public" (Reed 1945:405). Reed's comment could have been more political than informed, given huge fractional divisions in the contemporary art circles, each supporting their own favoured modernist artists[29]. Nevertheless, the attendance figures for the Herald exhibition Reed quoted does point out the popularity of Drysdale's work in 1945. At the same time, the traditionalists shared similar views to Reed in regarding Drysdale's skills. One such view on Drysdale is expressed by Rix-Nicholas. In a 1949 letter to her son, Rix Nicholas deplored what she perceived was lacking in Drysdale's drawing and technical skills. Rix Nicholas also felt Drysdale's figures were more representational of those in German Prison camps, than that of "long lean Australians" (Rix-Nicholas 1949 cited in Pigot 2000:67). Interestingly, given this viewpoint, the art critic Hughes (1970) saw Drysdale's vision as being an isolationist one, withdrawing from a disintegrating European world engaging in unspeakable horrors. Hughes (1970) stated:

> Drysdale's aborigines and stockmen are unintentional images of Australian man as he would like to be – innocent, protected by desert and sea from the Auschwitzes and Dresdens at the other end of the world (Hughes 1970:201).

Haese (1981) agreed that Drysdale's early images of the Riverina, such as *Sunday Evening* (1941) (Pl.15), represented an innocent and unknown world on the

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[28] John Reed (1910-1981) was a passionate advocate of Modernism, benefactor of Nolan, Boyd, Tucker and others in the 1940s, and co-publisher of *Angry Penguins* (Sayers 2001).
[29] Reed's strong support of Nolan and Tucker and other artists of the Angry Penguin circle was at variance to Ure Smith's support of Drysdale, and Dobell with neither giving many accolades to artists belonging outside their favoured circle according to Haese (1981:161) and Dutton (1964).

"fringes of Australian society" (Haese 1981:260). In Haese's (1981) opinion, the 1945-46 series of drought pictures saw an end to the innocence and sense of security embodied in the earlier works. Instead, with *The Rabbiters* (1947), Haese (1981) perceives Drysdale had developed a "new sense of psychological reality [and that] a facet of the Australian experience here finds visual experience for the first time" (Haese 1981:265). Klepac (1996) writes that Drysdale's perceptions of the outback people had been recast through his experiences of the drought and brought to his work an altered and new sense of reality:

> Drysdale began to understand the life of people in the outback in terms of a deeper and more complex, allegorical existence. He saw it as the heroic and tragic existence of man exposed to the timeless reality of nature: having to stare infinity in the face every waking moment, and he painted them accordingly …the world in which Drysdale set a particular action or scene is now unmistakably his own (Klepac 1996:83).

Klepac (1996) sees *The Drover's Wife* (1949) (Pl.16) as the first example of Drysdale's new understanding of the people of the outback, stating "It is both allegorical in the sense of isolation and loneliness, and universal in the sense of one's journey through life" (Klepac 1996:85). However, Drysdale had earlier pointed out that his aim was not to emphasise that there was loneliness, but that this was a perception of those who had no experience of the outback. Drysdale stated:

> ...those people who do know, that have been to the back country, there is no loneliness at all. There is a great sense of freedom…the point they bring up about my paintings is that they depict a lone man in a landscape and therefore it's lonely. I don't, quite frankly, really mean to emphasise that there is loneliness … but if you really want to point up a landscape that is deserted, then if you put somebody in it you do two things. You point up the loneliness, not because it's the man in the landscape, but it's because the man is there that the landscape is lonely, unpeopled. At the same time, secondly you can try and point out that this is man, or man, *man*, *just man,* unconquered by landscape, because man is a species which has arisen like every other species on this earth and he is not *alien* to a landscape (Drysdale 1960s interview cited in Dutton 1965:101-102).

Dutton (1965) has a more pragmatic view than Klepac of Drysdale's rural figures that were painted between 1945 and 1950, although he states they were "huge heroic figures" (Dutton 1965:42). These works include Tw*o Children* (1945/6), *The*

Countrywoman (1946), *The Drover's Wife* (1949), *Woman in Landscape* (1949), *The Listening Boy* (1949) and *Dancing Children* (1949) amongst others. Dutton (1965:36) states that work of these years, in comparison with earlier pieces, were more simplified in colour and form was reduced to essentials. Dutton further remarks (1965) that with this later work "his figures are more solidly planted on the ground, and richer in their physical presence, with a wonderfully acute observation behind them" (Dutton 1965:36). Dutton (1965) also points out to this time that "no painter had tackled the subject of women in the outback" (Dutton 1965:36), further stating that Drysdale had treated the subject with honesty, recording the person without attempting to create "sympathy or indignation" (Dutton 1965:38). Klepac (1996) quotes a letter by Drysdale, who, stating his objectives in painting the figure and *Woman in Landscape* (Pl.17), wrote:

> In the big woman I'm doing now I seem to have succeeded in obtaining a simplified solidity of the forms involved – it's by no means an abstract conception but its given me a better understanding of what I want to get at – a single figure against the landscape… whereas the emphasis should confine itself fundamentally to the statement of a form in relation to interacting forms. If a subject is a woman then it shouldn't be Edna[30] or May or what have you, but a sort of archetype" (Drysdale to Bell 15 October 1948 cited in Klepac 1996:120).

Drysdale was quite specific about why he painted the people of the outback. In an interview with Geoffrey Dutton (1965) Drysdale talked of the affinity and fascination he had about the people of the outback developed through his early years in working in the bush, stating:

> You were asking about people that I've painted, individuals, so-called characters. The people like Billy the Lurk and Old Larson and others, as to why I paint them, why I like painting them. This is of course part of one's life and one's own early experiences, these are the people virtually one grew up with (Drysdale 1960s interview cited in Dutton 1965:99).

Drysdale spoke further of the men he knew in the twenties whose links with the bush went back to their fathers and before that to the ticket of leave men and rural workers,

[30] The subject of *Woman in Landscape*, and from Hill End, where Drysdale painted a series of works using local people and landscape for "his seared vision of the Outback" (Wilson 1995:57).

saying “all those curious strange people who had little luggage but a swag, and who travelled and made and built the ethos that we know in the back country today” (Drysdale 1960s interview cited in Dutton 1965:99). According to Drysdale, these all related to what he was recording and what he responded to in his work. The people that meant something to him were the bush people, and these were

> ...the people who are fascinating. They’ve got this character. They are characters. You can take your society people, however beautiful they might be, but to me they are ephemeral people. These others aren’t. They just go on. They are the kind of towers that reach out. The survival thing that means something. These are the lessons learned at the knee (Drysdale 1960 interview cited in Dutton 1965:100).

The reference to people as ‘towers’ could indicate why Drysdale composed imagery with many of his people dominating their background, be this a small township or out back landscape. Further examples of Drysdale’s 1945-1950 series of works that exemplifies this approach are *George Ross of Mullengandra* (1950) (Pl.18)*, Mother and Child* (1949/1950) and *Maria* (1950). Discussed in his letter to Bell, design was important to Drysdale: “In the first place a design if it is a good design will arouse emotion which, because it is based on abstract qualities, is an aesthetic emotion” (Drysdale to Bell 15 October 1948 cited in Klepac 1996:120).

Drysdale had strong views on what art should achieve. In a 1953 article defending modern art practices, Drysdale implied that he was not concerned with creating popular imagery that set out to please. Drysdale summed up what he felt represented what art was and in doing so, indicated what he, himself, aimed to achieve:

> An eminent English artist once said all art is the direct measure of man’s spiritual vision; that one of the main purposes of painting and sculpture is to explain the essence of things and emotions, not merely to describe them. If we accept that statement we accept, then, that the creative artist is not concerned with fashioning conventions that merely enable him to produce a likeness of his next door neighbour. On the contrary he is concerned with creating in the vision of his mind the spiritual experience that he feels (Drysdale 1953:14).

Through these aims, Haese (1981) sees Drysdale achieving a role in Australia art where, with Nolan, he was to

> ...reinstate subject painting in Australian Art in such a way as to offer convincing images for Australians of where they had been. It was a testament to the continuation of a pioneering struggle (whether humble or heroic, tragic or prosaic) in the face of harsh geographic and historical realities (Haese1981:265).

These opinions indicate that Drysdale's work has become iconic within the Australian psyche, and again is related to the pioneering subjects of the earlier Heidelberg artists in defining a national identity based on the bush types. Smith (1991), although referring to Drysdale as a landscape painter, discusses the development of his figurative genre work and the reasons for this genre's successful acceptance in Australian art. Smith (1991) sees in Drysdale's figures a relationship to the early colonial perceptions of struggling with an environment that was "alien and hostile to man, inducing either loneliness and melancholy" (Smith 1991:245). Certainly, the depiction of this struggle was called for by Broomfield (1889), who, in almost forecasting Drysdale's 1940s concepts, foresaw the depiction of the uncompromising desolation and melancholy of life in arid Australia being a popular subject. Broomfield (1889) stated in order to become popular, artists while truly interpreting the landscape through actual contact, should also consider the solitude and desolation of the pioneer's life in a harsh and arid climate, gazing "without hope on the arid plains bordered by the stunted, water-famished gums" (Broomfield 1889:886). Broomfield (1889) further commented, "artists would, in time come to love the Wild, the Melancholy, the Spectral" (Broomfield 1889:887).

Smith (1991) feels early artists such as S.T. Gill (1819-1880), W. Stutt (1851-1915) and even McCubbin had encompassed some of these elements with their work, and that Drysdale's work was not altogether following the traditions of the Heidelberg painters. Smith (1991) sees Drysdale presenting a visual interpretation of the literary tradition of "tough unyielding qualities of the [bush] environment" (Smith 1991:247),

which had become established through writers such as Charles Harpur [31] (1813-1868), Henry Lawson (1867-1922) and later Patrick White (1912-1990). According to Smith (1991) the "real strength [of the bush vision] lay in the literary tradition" Smith (1991:247). In his argument Smith (1991) compares Drysdale's work particularly to Henry Lawson' writings:

> Drysdale finds his true literary parallel in Lawson: he is, indeed, a kind of twentieth century Lawson of painting. He possesses Lawson's compulsion to tell the truth as he sees it, his sense of the absurd, his humour, his crafts-man respect for form, his humanity, and though Drysdale restrains it more thoroughly, Lawson's sentiment. Like Lawson he was able to establish a convincing relationship between his 'characters' and their background setting (Smith 1991:247).

Serle (1987) also took the view that there was a Lawson type quality to Drysdale's images, stating Drysdale "presented a realistic Lawson view of the outback with more affection and less sentiment" (Serle 1987:166). Burn (1991) also pointed out a literary connection to Drysdale's imagery. Burn (1991) stated that in the 1930s and 1940s anthropological studies, books written by Ion Idriess (1889-1979) and the popular *Walkabout* magazine had preceded Drysdale's imagery, thus increasing the "public awareness" (Burn 1991:78) of the outback. This view could help to explain part of the popular public reception of Drysdale's work with the general public, for these writings presented a tangible and authoritative support for the outback imagery.

However, Haese (1981) perceives other reasons for Drysdale's work becoming enduring with an almost immediate acceptance, stating that Drysdale used modernistic techniques in a theatrical way about life on the land that was an "easily accessible subject matter" (Haese 1981:260). Haese (1981) further notes that Drysdale's work was distinguished by the sophistication gained from his European journey and argues "Drysdale's art preserved a degree of craftsmanship, a respect for 'finish' and a sense of seriousness that guaranteed immediate acceptance" (Haese 1981:266).

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[31] Charles Harpur was regarded as Australia's first poet, and although his literary skills are questioned several of his works were of bush incidents (http://www.austlit.edu.au/run?ex=SETISText&brn=28382).

sBurn (1991) states that in the culture of the 1940s “Drysdale’s imagery went far in satisfying the popular need for a modern view of Australia” (Burn 1991:78). A similar view is held by Allen (1997) who regards Drysdale as the first Australian artist to assess and put a meaning to the life of those inhabiting the empty spaces of the outback. According to Allen (1997), Drysdale’s visual symbolism of the Australian outback and its people has come “to epitomize the modern Australian consciousness” (Allen 1997:140). Allen 1997) expands this argument, stating:

> Drysdale’s painting expresses the ambivalent feelings Australians have for the outback: a combination of anxiety about the legitimacy and security of settlement in this continent and of admiration for those who live, unlike themselves, at the very limits of the habitable. The literal conditions of the lives come to replace those of the Heidelberg settler as metaphoric of Australian life and the Australian character. The enormous success of the popular film Crocodile Dundee (1986) demonstrates how true this remains today (Allen 1997:142).

Burn (1988) states that Drysdale, with Nolan, continued and took the tradition of integrating nationhood with the rural figure that had its beginnings in the Heidelberg era. However, Burn (1988) asserts that Drysdale reassessed this tradition with symbolic interpretations of the people of the dry outback using an often surreal and modernist framework. Drysdale’s (1953) statement underpins this argument with

> ...the so-called modern painter does not reject the past. He accepts the conventions of the past, but he creates his own symbols. He is a creator: the traditionalist merely a recorder (Drysdale 1953:14).

The importance and impact of Drysdale’s outback figurative imagery and its development into popular iconic status may be better seen in retrospect than when the new experimental modernist art was in a state of severe conflict with traditional thinking. The background of cultural furore[32] in the late 1930s and early 1940s initially obscured Drysdale’s extension of the Heidelberg rural figurative genre representing a national self-image towards a more symbolic imagery based on marginal existence in a

[32] Drysdale commented on this, stating: “There were people, critics and public who questioned our morals and our sanity in the hysterical articles and letters…to become a modern artist was pretty much outside the pale “ Russell Drysdale, extract from *Guest of Honour* ABC Radio broadcast 18 November 1979.

harsh and arid environment. Nonetheless, as previously noted, articles by Ure Smith (1943) and Counihan (1947) did comment at the time on the relationship between Drysdale's imagery and the Heidelberg symbolic attributes of ordinary bush people living and surviving an unforgiving environment. Drysdale's modernistic interpretation of the outback people was a much more stoic one than that of the Heidelberg artists but he attached the same importance to technical and aesthetic concerns as did his predecessors in the rural genre.

The literature examined continuously refers to Drysdale as a landscape artist, even when Drysdale's genre work is discussed. However, Drysdale's emphasis on the outback figures in much of his work and a general acceptance that this figurative work developed into important Australian iconic figurative imagery must establish his importance and position within the rural figurative genre.

3.2 The Transformation of Rural Figurative Idealism - Nolan

According to Serle (1987), Drysdale's aims parallel those of Sidney Nolan who was also inspired by a desire to express something important about the Australian experience albeit in a much different interpretation of the outback figurative imagery. Nolan set about establishing a new rural symbolism although occasionally producing a version of Drysdale's bush people, though without the magnitude and stoicism of his figures. Burn (1991) noted that Nolan told a different story to Drysdale but that both "at a fundamental level reflected a cultural need to recreate an image" (Burn 1991:79). In recreating this 'image' Nolan's interest in transfiguring and mythologising Australian historical figures and events stemming from the bush began with a narrative imagery through the 1945-1947 Kelly series. Sayers (2001) calls this imagery and the later depictions of Burke and Wills and Mrs Fraser "stories of almost mythical dimension" (Sayers 2001:169), while Lynn (1979) refers to these works as "sagas and trials,

evidence of good and evil" (Lynn 1979:16). Certainly, Nolan's visual interpretations of these stories, and especially the Kelly series, were eventually to have a wider appeal as national iconic mythology.

Similarly, Serle (1987) argues that several influences, which informed Drysdale's visions, contributed to Nolan's visual rural symbolism. These influences, Serle (1987) states, included cultural traditions developed by the artists' predecessors, overseas movements adapted to local significance and a response to local perceived cultural needs. Several art historians note the cultural traditions of the Heidelberg artists exist in Nolan's works. Hughes (1970) sees a relationship to a Heidelberg narrative mode reinstated by Nolan in his 1947 Kelly series while Lynn (1967) writes that Nolan was linked to the earlier painters, such as Roberts, through the democratic depiction of ordinary bushmen. Lynn (1967) states:

> The landscape had been democratised by painters before the turn of the century: gold miners, railway tunnellers, boundary riders, axemen and drovers were depicted as though the country was theirs…the Kelly paintings embodied something of a style common to much Australian painting from the colonial limners to Nolan…another painter now making a virtue of the bush's monotony (Lynn 1967:20).

Smith (1991) too perceives a relationship to earlier Australian painters in the first Kelly series, saying "something of the hand and vision of older men still lingered" (Smith 1991:281). Burn (1991) identifies connections to earlier artists through Nolan's solving of composition problems in his works through his assertion that "Nolan also had a 'powerful grasp of the great lessons' of an artistic tradition[33] *in Australia*…his work is extraordinarily informed…about both Australian and European art" (Burn1991:82). Burn (1991) states that Nolan's pictorial organization could only stem from the earlier Australian art rather than that of any European modernism negating Haese's (1981) viewpoint that European modernism was Nolan's major influence. Further, Burn (1991)

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[33] Throughout his argument Burn (1991) relates Nolan's works to the Australian landscape tradition, rather than to any focus on the human element.

argues that Haese's interpretations could not express the complex "cultural framework through which Nolan's pictures evolved" (Burn 1991:83). Despite Burn's and other historians' arguments, the view that Heidelberg painters influenced Nolan's work seems somewhat tenuous and was not an influence that he sought to follow. Sayers (2002) cited Nolan rejecting the Heidelberg school approach as "superficial [and that in the Kelly series] continued to wrestle with the paradigmatic vision of the Heidelberg painters" (Sayers 2002:10).

Haese (1981) presents strong arguments in favour of European modernist influences on Nolan, and his figurative works. Haese (1981) states that part of the turmoil of these years lay in the "creation of an art that more truly reflected human realities" (Haese 1981:185). This, Haese (1981) claims, originated from a strand of European modernism and surrealism that played a key role in creating Henri Rousseau's '*naïf*' paintings and Arthur Rimbaud's[34] symbolic poetry and that was to influence Nolan, Tucker and Boyd in differing ways. Haese (1981) asserts this complex strand of symbolism and surrealism led to a European art form that helped

> ...break the hold of realism and impressionism. The qualities of the new art were exemplified in four traits: the cult of childhood, humour and delight in the absurd, an acknowledgement of the significance of dreams and ambiguity (Haese 1981:185).

Haese (1981) also outlines the influence of profound articles in *Angry Penguins*, published between 1940-1946 by Max Harris, and John Reed. Nolan, Tucker, Boyd and others took the *Angry Penguin* name in forming a loose and radical art group in 1942 while Nolan became a co-partner in 1944 of the publishing firm that produced the magazine. *Angry Penguins* advanced the cause of European modernist theories and radical thinking, in both literature and visual arts. In 1945 the editors published the

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[34] French poet and adventurer, who stopped writing verse at the age of 21, and became after his early death an inextricable myth in French gay life. Rimbaud's poetry, partially written in free verse, is characterized by dramatic and imaginative vision. His works are among the most original in the Symbolist movement (http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/rimbaud.htm 2003).

magazine's new aims, which according to Haese (1981) were a "manifesto for a new cultural liberalism based on anarchist forms" (Haese 1981:122), but with an Australian viewpoint. Despite the obvious influences that Haese (1981) sees in this magazine with fellow publications[35] that carried similar ideas, it may be said that the *Angry Penguins* also reflected the thinking of the day, and of Nolan.

Haese (1981) sees all these complex influences inspiring Nolan and his fellow artists in formulating a "distinctive Australian Modernism" (Haese 1981:184) by 1946. Haese's view that Nolan's influences were derived from modernist issues rather than earlier Australian traditions is supported by Sayers (2002) and Clark (1987). Sayers (2002) writes "As a young man Nolan was determinately avant-garde" (Sayers 2002:13). According to Sayers (2002) Nolan's early experiments with abstraction, new materials and his quest for new ways of seeing were all a result of "the artists immersion in contemporary European art…Nolan was a voracious reader" (Sayers 2002:14). Nolan had ready access to current art books and exhibition catalogues through John and Sunday Reed's library[36]. Nolan's early experimentations in collage in the late 1930s are crucial, according to Sayers (2002) who sees that Nolan's use of squares was an early indication of the later Kelly helmet motif.[37] Clark (1987) refers to Nolan's early interest in symbols, and the writings of Rimbaud's, stating:

> Rimbaud, whose *Illuminations* he [Nolan] called a 'book of miracles' was perhaps his greatest inspiration: abandoning all poetic conventions for direct experience of the senses, insisting the whole world was in need of transformation. Henceforth, in the words of André Breton, the sprit of discovery would be the basis for his art (Clark 1987:32).

Clark (1987) considers "Nolan's rejection of tired academic traditions" (Clark 1987:47) is evident in paintings like *Railways Yards, Dimboola* (1943) (Pl.19), where

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[35] *The Australian Artist, Art In Australia* (under the editorship of Peter Bellow), and *Meanjin Papers* were the most important for intellectual comment according to Haese (1981:105).

[36] Between 1939 –1947 Nolan spent much time at the Reed's home, Heide (Sayers 2002:14).

[37] Earlier Lynn (1967) had too noted that the iconography of Kelly's helmet originated within these collages.

Nolan made use of “deliberately child-like composition” (Clark 1987: 47). According to Clark (1987), Nolan’s “overriding aim, however, was to be original” (Clark 1987:32). This aim is outlined in Nolan’s discussion, in 1942, of aspects of Cézanne’s (1839-1906) work that he found interesting:

> What he [Cézanne] does to me and that to a large degree is to provide a constant impetus that is never far from me when I am looking…One is eager to find parallels [but] painting itself is something else. One is rejecting with all the force available all the influences that do crowd in. I have a great desire to let the past alone with painters (Nolan 1942 cited in Clark (1987:47).

These complex influences led to Nolan’s development of emblematic bush figures that bore no resemblance to the Heidelberg perceived reality of the rural noble figure. This transformation was markedly seen in the first Kelly series that Lynn (1967) claims “marked a significant development in Nolan’s and Australia’s art” (Lynn1967: 23) while Sayers (2002) perceived the series as being a

> ...culmination of many years of seeing and thinking for Nolan. They look back to his earliest preoccupation with European modernism and forward to further series where he explored landscapes and other old stories arising out of the bush (Sayers 2002:17).

Of all Nolan’s outback figurative work, the Kelly series of 1946-7 was to provide the most enduring iconic symbol in national self-identification. Observing Nolan’s square helmeted *Ned Kelly* (1946) (Pl.20), Rosenthal (2002) states “Nolan out of an Irish outlaw has created an archetypal Australian image in the public consciousness” (Rosenthal 2002:98)[38]. Nolan’s intentions in creating the Kelly series is outlined by Lynn (1985) who says that Nolan, more than any other of his work, had “carefully planned and considered” (Lynn 1985:7) the Kelly paintings. Clark (1987), Lynn (1985), and Rosenthal (2002) all state Nolan carried out a great deal of thorough research through reading reports, histories of the Kelly gang and a visit to the Kelly

[38] Rosenthal (2002:97) cited a 1999 conversation with Nolan’s wife, Mary, in which she claimed Nolan had stated in later years that Ned Kelly had become a millstone around his neck.

country[39]. In Clark's (1987) opinion, Nolan became totally engrossed in the story. It appears, through cited conversations with Lynn, Nolan set out to provide some sort of Australian mythology through the Kelly series through his interpretation of what was a favoured Australian legend by 1946. Willis (1993) states that to "consciously attempt to invent mythologies of Australia was a sure path to success" (Willis 1993:53). Nolan's interest in Ned Kelly as a folk legend worth interpreting is indicated through several conversations. Lynn (1985) quotes Nolan as saying:

> It was no high grade intellectual conviction that started me off. It was partly due to oral history from a number of resources including the Report, but when you take an oral tradition and write it down there is always degradation. When you take an old tradition and paint it there is less of a loss (Nolan cited in Lynn 1985:11).

Nolan further stated to Lynn in relation to his reading on anthropology that:

> Strange things link us [to Kelly], because Australians are a tribe…We are the only tribe that can think of Kelly as part of our culture and history…No, the tribe is, as Claude Levi-Strauss[40] tells us a high form of social organization and we should look at the enduring features of ours (Nolan cited in Lynn 1985:11).

MacInnes (1961) recounts a conversation with Nolan in which he claimed that he deliberately used a naïve approach to enhance the folklore nature of the Kelly story. MacInnes (1961) says:

> Mr. Nolan has told me that his use of this method was quite deliberate, for the reason there are practically no 'folk' forms from which one can borrow in Australia (other than the aboriginal); and that 'Kelly's own words, and Rousseau, and sunlight are the ingredients of which they are made' (MacInnes 1961:19).

Nolan, in 1948, expressed a desire to paint the stories that took place within the landscape. These he observed were to be obtained in country towns, explorers' journals and in memories. Nolan saw the Kelly story existing as one of Australia's myths, a "story arising out of the bush and ending in the bush" (Nolan 1948:20). Sayers (2002) believes, at least at this time, that Nolan was more interested in expressing these myths

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[39] This visit in 1946 was less than successful, with locals uncommunicative, and the police ordering Nolan out of town.

[40] Claude Levi-Strauss, a French anthropologist, who developed the theory of structural anthropology about social organisation of tribes and is known for his structural analysis of mythology (Schmitt 1999).

“coming out of the land rather than stories that embodied some iconic or characteristic Australianness” (Sayers 2002:9). Sayers (2002) perceives the first Kelly series more as a symbolic emanation of landscape, which Sayers claims Nolan saw as the source of myth. Haese (1981) quotes Nolan’s statement that “One is always trying to put something in front of the bush in some relationship to a primeval background” (Haese 1981:279) to support his view that this Kelly series related a humanised myth to the landscape and thus is “a fundamental step in the growth of national consciousness and maturity” (Haese 1981:279). Not all saw the Kelly figure supplementing the landscape as a symbolic corollary. Lynn (1967) puts the helmeted figure of Kelly into a dominant role in these paintings relegating the landscape to the background. Lynn (1967) states that:

> In concentrating on an iconographic detail like Kelly’s helmet, Nolan forces the landscape into a contributory role and subordinates it to the saga…Kelly has been so established in these and later works as a personage that Robert Melville, the English critic, wrote that Nolan’s Kelly ‘belonged to the company of twentieth century personages which includes Picasso’s minotaur, Chirico’s mannequins, Ernst’s birdmen, Bacon’s Pope and Giacometti’s walking man’ (Lynn 1967:23).

Rosenthal (2002) asserts that these Kelly paintings are “by common consent, the most important of his entire career [and] Ned Kelly has, by a process surely unique in the history of painting, become Sidney Nolan’s image of him” (Rosenthal 2002:59). Sayers (2002) supports this view, stating that “The slotted black box that Nolan made of Kelly’s helmeted head has become an instantly recognisable icon: Nolan’s Kelly has become Ned Kelly” (Sayers 2002:17).

Nolan continued his mythical interpretations of Australian bush stories in the late 1940s, following the Kelly series with the first *Mrs Fraser* series of 1947-48, although Lynn (1967) notes that the story of a shipwrecked woman, Mrs. Fraser, rescued from Aborigines by an escaped convict, Bracefell, did not make a compelling series of works. Lynn (1967) stating the story was “too bitter a symbol for a mythical

subject, for myth tends to take the bitterness out of life" (Lynn 1967:31). However, in Rosenthal's (2002) opinion "Nolan has, as with Kelly, brilliantly communicated a nineteenth-century alienation, even a despair, in the best of his Fraser paintings" (Rosenthal 2002:111). Clark (1987) considers this series continues the Kelly theme in its subject of fugitives and outsiders and also having a

> ...wider significance—the tension of being of European origin and conquering or adapting to the antipodean environment where that origin becomes largely irrelevant. 'All this kind of thing comes into it' Nolan has explained, 'I think all these factors have played their part in the Australian character' (Clark 1987:91).

After two outback journeys in 1947/8 through Queensland and the Northern Territory, Nolan turned to "exploring a theme of human presence in the Australian landscape" (Clark 1987:95) by depicting miners and other people of the outback.[41] According to Clark (1987), Nolan again expressed an interest in the stories emanating from the hotels of the small outback towns. This series of often single outback figures standing in front of hotels, mining camps or stores were reminiscent of Drysdale's subject matter, although without Drysdale's considered design and the monumentality of his rural figures. Rosenthal (2002), considers, in this series, that Nolan produced

> ...a group of paintings whose power resonates, half a century later, with a feeling for the outback landscape and the oddity of its buildings and inhabitants, in barely subsisting settlements that is both quintessential Nolan and quintessentially Australian (Rosenthal 2002: 136).

Nolan's other major outback historical series was developed in 1948. This series concerned the explorers Burke and Wills and their ill-fated journey to the Gulf of Carpentaria. Again, as in the Kelly series according to Clark (1987), Nolan researched the subject matter thoroughly before painting this series that were not "simple illustrations of past events but *imaginings* of historical reality" (Clark 1987:95). Rosenthal (2002) also makes this point, stating that Nolan was not interested in

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[41] From this outback group of paintings, *Pretty Polly Mine* (1948) was the first Nolan purchased by the Art Gallery of New South Wales by the Director, Hal Missingham. This purchase upset the trustees greatly according to Rosenthal (2002). The painting depicted an incident at a mine near Mount Isa.

historical accuracy, but selectively took elements from the Burke and Wills story to create his own interpretations of the story. Rosenthal (2002) writes:

> Nolan turned his own selective and adaptive eyes on the essentials that mattered to him… The Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes once observed the only reality is fiction. From Nolan's take on this particular reality has emerged a vision of the two explorers that surely tell the truth about them (Rosenthal 2002:118).

Rosenthal (2002) sees this truth, interpreted through Nolan's vision, as the anti-heroic nature of the explorers. Nolan thus treated them with "compassion, pity, humour, a fascination with the terrain, an obsession with camels, a sense of the terror and madness they endured" (Rosenthal 2002:114). In Rosenthal's opinion, even though the work was visually strong in the Burke and Wills paintings, Nolan's myth making was "surprisingly weak [but] Nolan never set out either to mythologize or even to glorify" (Rosenthal 2002:114). However, Rosenthal (2002) considers that at least two of the works, *Burke and Wills Leaving Melbourne* (1950) (Pl.21) and *Burke and Wills* (1950) are two of Nolan's finest Australian iconic works, as notable as any of his Ned Kelly paintings. Rosenthal (2002) believes both are superbly painted and composed works, memorialising two explorers who by their ineptness became ironic anti-heroes of the Australian bush.

Nolan in later years returned continually to these three Australian bush narrative themes, with the Kelly subject being revisited most often, Rosenthal (2002) commenting that "Nolan can never thematically leave well enough alone" (Rosenthal (2002:108). Lynn (1967) states for his later works towards the end of the 1950s "Nolan had moved away from his earlier "icon like objects imposed on a situation" (Lynn 1967: 37) for since 1955, Nolan was influenced by travels through Greece and many other regions of the world.[42] According to Lynn (1967), Nolan's major change in the later

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[42] The sojourn in Greece in 1955-6 led to Nolan's series on Gall1poli. Rosenthal (2002) states that Nolan saw connections to the Homer heroic myths of Troy in the story of the Anzac soldiers.

1950s was in part due to a change in mediums, from the Ripolin enamel favoured by Nolan for most of his work in the 1940s to pigmented polyvinyl acetate and later oils. Lynn states that the polyvinyl acetate "is ideal for cutting through underlying surfaces and colours and it was of this quality that Nolan made revealing use" (Lynn 1967:37). This use is first evident through Nolan's *Convict and Mrs. Fraser* (1957) and *Convict In Swamp* (1958) (Pl.22) and others in the continuing of the Mrs. Fraser theme where the figures were merged through the dense vegetation rather than being in front of it. Lynn (1967) states "increasingly Nolan's explorers and Kelly himself have become shadowy denizens" (Lynn 1967:43). Nolan's continual re-inventing of his iconic figures into new aspects led away from the impact of the human figuration of his earlier works, thus perhaps lessoning the importance of his iconic figures as part of the national vision. In Rosenthal's (2002) opinion, Nolan had signalled his "considerable switch in allegiance from the human to the landscape as primary artistic motivation" (Rosenthal 2002:91) in *Kelly and Horse* (1964), which was followed closely by the *Riverbend I* (1964-5) series of panels.

Clark (1987) states, between the 1940s-1960s, Nolan developed a powerful and classic iconography of mythic and legendary figures depicting the "outsider as the representative figure in the landscape" through Kelly, Burke and Wills and Mrs. Fraser and Bracefell, the convict. Rosenthal (2002) agrees, arguing the nobility of failure was part of these works appeal to Australians, stating:

> Nolan has given us a painted set of images that will stand forever in our collective visual memory of unforgettable and unforgotten men, heroically failing in their stupendous tasks, enriching us all and creating the most enduring mythology of Australian society (Rosenthal 2002:16).

In Smile's[43] (1986) opinion, Nolan abandoned a "radical revision of the

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[43] Sam Smiles, in 1986, was Principal Lecturer in Art History in the Faculty of Arts and Education at the University of Plymouth.

landscape tradition" (Smiles 1986:148) evident in his Wimmera landscapes in the early 1940s, to continue and reinforce the Australian cultural demand for a "re-invocation of Australian icons for each generation" (Smiles 1986:148). These, Smiles (1986) states came from similar literary traditions that Drysdale's modernist imagery had, but that Nolan took the outback legendary stories into yet another aesthetic and potent imagery derived from complex overseas modernist origins. Smiles (1986) considers Nolan's effectively making the transition to Australian mythmaking from Euro-centric modernism through a " mock naive style...into a self ironic, sardonic commentary on modernism and the image of Australia" (Smiles 1986:149). Smiles (1986) states:

> It is, however, precisely this masking of sophistication that gives Nolan's work of the 1940s and early 1950s such importance for the development of subsequent Australian painting. His achievement might be characterized as having legitimised a modernist approach to art by presenting it as intrinsically home-grown (and thus free of the taint of European modernism) and also supremely capable of portraying all the Australian myths in all their complexity and ambiguity (Smiles 1986:149).

Again, as in Drysdale's case, much of the literature refers to most of these 1940s and 1950s works as landscapes even when discussing the distinctive nature and importance of Nolan's figuration of Kelly, Burke and Wills, Mrs. Fraser and Bracefell. However, again the importance and the emphasis that Nolan placed on his figures, through his considered interpretations that translated factual bush episodes into a new Australian mythology negates any facile landscape appellation.

3.3 The Mythological Bush Figure

3.3.1 Boyd and *The Bride series*

Arthur Boyd's visions of the human presence in the Australian bush differed vastly from Drysdale's outback stoic representations and Nolan's mythicising of Australian historical figures. Smiles (1986) states that Boyd, with Tucker and others of the 1940s and early 1950s were "exploiting the same rich seam of essential Australian myths" (Smiles 1986:149) that Nolan and Drysdale had used. Although of the same

generation of artists, Boyd developed a multi-layered and metaphysical imagery using the Australian bush as background that had initially little to do with Australian myths or the Australian rural presence. This presence was to be introduced only through his *Bride* series of the late 1950s. Smith (1991) notes Boyd, between 1943-1944, though changing direction from his social realist phrase to figures in landscapes, remained within the figurative tradition but developed a personal and allegoric style that was akin to Drysdale's only in the use of a sombre palette and a response to surrealistic and expressionistic influences.

Boyd's *The Hunter* series along with *The Shepherd* or *Stockman* series of 1944, marked his distinct departure from urban subjects, Philipp (1967) stating "Boyd's doomed nasty (in the Hobbesian sense) primitives find their truly primeval setting, [and] exchange their suburban habitat for the dense wilderness of the bush" (Philipp 1967:38). Pearce (1994) sees the figures in these works appearing to have

> ...some kind of metamorphic relationship to the vegetation...Their personae are pervaded by loneliness and isolation, yet under the gaze of some sentinel of nature, or human voyeur hidden in the undergrowth. Lovers witness their intimacy parodied by the copulation of beasts (Pearce 1993:16).

In Smith's (1991) opinion, through these works Boyd had developed a vision of a turbulent primordial Australian bush peopled with violent and monstrous figures, relating to medieval imaginings of supernatural apparitions that existed in the Antipodes. Smith (1991) states:

> In Boyd's paintings and ceramics this ancient vision of lusting antipodean monsters appears in a contemporary idiom [thus depicting] his own highly individual interpretations of the Australian scene (Smith 1991:285-6).

Other theorists also examine medieval influences on the development and subject matter of Boyd's work in the 1940s. Pearce (1993) considers Boyd's paintings in 1945-1947, notably *The Biblical* series reflected his research into the techniques of the old Masters, especially Pieter Bruegel (1525-1569) and Hieronymus Bosch (1450-

1516). Pearce (1993) writes that as these paintings developed, Boyd followed both compositional elements and subjects from works by Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669) and Jacopo Robusti Tintoretto (1518-1594), noticeably so in *Prodigal Son*, (1948-9) and *Saul and David*, (1946). Boyd established these appropriations of the old master themes and techniques to scenes set within the scrubby Australian bush. Hoff (1986) points to *The Expulsion* (1947-8) (Pl.23) exemplifying this transformation, stating Boyd translated these sources "into an Australian idiom: the biblical scene is set in an indigenous Australian wilderness" (Hoff 1986:43). Gunn (1985) sees this placing the common Biblical imagery into his own world, and thus using the bush as "the arena for the universal concerns of life and death and regeneration" (Gunn 1985:42). In Gunn's (1985) opinion, this reflects Boyd's need to relate the Australian setting to the European traditions in order to "create a meaningful and lasting imagery" (Gunn 1985:55). McKenzie (2000) cites a conversation with Boyd in 1990 in which he "recalled he automatically set these biblical events in the Australian bush; he felt strongly that their being Australian was central to them being valid" (McKenzie 2000:76).

Within these biblical narratives developed within the Australian wilderness, Boyd's preoccupation with certain figurative symbols that were becoming iconic to his work recurs often. Philipp (1967) says Boyd's use of metamorphic forms and themes is an "obsessive imagery [which is] traceable throughout Boyd's *oeuvre*" (Philipp 1967:38). Gunn (1985) states that "these form part of his visual code and become reflections of his logic and instincts" (Gunn 1985:13) and are essential elements of his entire pictorial narratives. Recurring elements in Boyd's work encompass levitating figures, a bird, which often is a black crow, priapic ram, dog, intertwined lovers, the voyeur whether it be human or animal, metamorphic tree and animal forms. According to Pearce (1994), Boyd in the early 1940s established a bank of specific and symbolic

images, to which he continuously referred to for the rest of his career. Pearce (1993) states that these all

> ...appear in various transmutational relationships, not as specific visual explanations of something, but rather passages that emerge and re-emerge as in the works of a musical composer, or a poet (Pearce 1994:15).

In Pearce's (1993) opinion, the emergence of the persecuted lovers theme, which played a large role in Boyd's work, especially *The Bride series* was also "seeded about this time" [the early 1940s] (Pearce 1993:16). The voyeur theme is apparent too, in *The Expulsion* and *Angel Spying on Adam and Eve* (1947). Gunn (1985) in a taped interview cites Boyd:

> I see lovers as victims...They suffer from being unprivate, watched. Love becomes guilt because it is frustrated. Pictures with an animal or another human being watching lovers are intended to give the idea of spying. A disturbance, a breaking into the moment of privacy (Boyd interview cited in Gunn 1985:60).

The subject of lovers as victims was integrated as symbolising a greater victimisation in the *Love, Marriage, and Death of a half Caste Bride* series or, as it later came to be named, *The Bride series* (1957-1959). Works within the series included *Shearers Playing for a Bride* (1957) (Pl.24), *Persecuted Lovers* (1957-8) (Pl.25) and *Mourning Bride* II (1957-*8*) (Pl.26). Departing from his biblical subjects, Boyd took Aboriginal inhabitants of outback Australia as subject for this allegorical narrative. In doing so, Boyd created a series that was now the most relevant to a rural Australian subject of all his bush figuration up to then. The works set forth his concerns over the rejected people of mixed race in outback Australia.

Gunn (1985) cites Boyd, relating his trip to the Alice Springs area in 1951, saying he was unprepared for the conditions that Aboriginals were living in, and was amazed that it was of little concern to anyone. He had seen Drysdale's painting of Aboriginals that gave these people a dignity that in reality Boyd found totally lacking. Boyd further stated:

> My contact with the Aborigines was not close at all but it was close enough to know that it was not right. I did drawings as a kind of traveller and things did not hit home until three years later, when I began to paint from some of the drawings I had done (Boyd cited in Gunn 1985:56).

Hoff (1986) points out that the paintings that resulted from these sketches "were of an entirely unprecedented nature" (Hoff 1986:49). Boyd did not approach any of Drysdale's interpretations of outback people or Nolan's historical legends. McKenzie (2000) states that Boyd

> ...has placed real rather than mythological Australian experiences in a universal context, and finds in painting common cause with his literary contemporary Patrick White... there were few others able to take up the creative challenge posed by this inherent and persistent dilemma in Australia in mid century (McKenzie 2000:100).

In this series, perhaps Boyd touched back to his years of social realism by depicting the dilemma of people on the outskirts of a bush society. Pearce (1994) noted that the subject of the Aboriginal half-caste was the "stuff of social realism [but Boyd] saw rather a race of people caught between two cultures, and the implication in it of something universal" (Pearce 1994:20). Pearce (1993) sees the series as a "kind of passion play [and] a continuation of his theme of humanity's suspension between worlds" (Pearce 1993:21). McKenzie (2000) also sees Boyd pointing out "the degree of alienation, by both white society and aboriginal tribe, of these abandoned individuals and their families" (McKenzie 2000:95).

Haebich (1999) writes "Boyd's Bride series occupies a powerful place in the history of Australian art" (Haebich 1999:1) stating that these paintings are described as the most powerful images of Australian art in the twentieth century. However, Haebich (1999) states Boyd's perceptions were moulded by the then current views on Aborigines and racial stereotypes and the social issues of the times, in conjunction with the impact of his earlier superficial impressions of the people around Alice Springs. According to Haebich (1999) this series reflected:

> Antipodean responses to the search for an 'authentic' Australian vision', combining stylistic devices of figuration and narrative with moral seriousness and the use of the most authentic Australian imagery—Aborigines and the landscape. They also reflect mid-century discourses on identity, alienation and annihilation. Like many of his colleagues, Boyd makes potent use of contemporary racialist discourse and imagery to create disturbing allegories on these 'universal' themes (Haebich 1999:6).

In Haebich's (1999) opinion, Boyd's response to the contemporary issues of the 1950s and use of highly identifiable imagery that defined the Australianness of the series established the "continuing national significance" of the work. (Haebich 1999:2). Haebich (1999) argues the significance of the series lays not as iconic imagery representing Australian nationalism but rather

> ...for the insights they provide for a reflective society into the history of the prejudices and anxieties of white Australia and its irresistible imaginings about race and the human condition (Haebich 1999:2).

Kasunic (2001) also agrees that the Bride series was created in an atmosphere in Australia of post war anxiety when there was a need to "redress issues of nationality" (Kasunic 2001:3). Although Boyd did not follow popular national mythologies, Kasunic (2001) states Boyd, with his "artistic roots firmly planted in symbolism from erotica and allegory formed by an innate appreciation of the landscape" (Kasunic 2001:1) has proceeded to create his own Australian mythology through the figure of the Aboriginal stockman and his half-caste bride. In doing so, Kasunic (2001) argues that Boyd created a new mythology for Australian culture that emerged to "become a historically significant emblem of Australian art" (Kasunic 2001:1).

Thus, it may be concluded that the images Boyd produced for his *Bride* series are regarded to be more aware of the Australian rural indigenous figure than previous rural figuration. Although perhaps unintentionally on Boyd's part, it can also be seen through Haebich's (1999) and Kasunic's (2001) arguments that the series has provided a deeper insight into national attitudes of the time regarding racial issues than any of the previous works produced in this genre.

(3.3.2 Albert Tucker and the Antipodean vision

Albert Tucker, in the 1940s, was regarded as an urban social realist producing imagery with a surreal symbolism. The series of *Images of Modern Evil,* painted between 1943-1947, used increasingly emblematic motifs, usually representing the female form to deal with the degradation of urban morality through the war years.

In this series, Tucker's interest in emblematic motifs intensified, in particular the crescent. The crescent symbol in this series often represented promiscuous sexuality of the female form and was to occur repeatedly, though not always as a promiscuous female symbol, in Tucker's later figurations of the Australian outback. The crescent form, to Tucker, was a "kind of key which unlocked an energy source" (Tucker cited in Mollison and Bonham (1981:60) and one that was to remain dominant in varying forms through much of Tucker's work.

Tucker's interest in faces as symbols rather than as portraiture also appeared at this time, perhaps precursors to his series of *Antipodean Heads*, begun in 1956, that dealt with human figuration referencing underlying forces within the Australian landscape. Discussing a series of portraits painted in 1946, including *The vaudevillian,* (1946) and *Man's Head* (1946), Tucker stated that the "face fascinated me because it was a key to social-psychological landscape. A kind of refracting prism for the human condition" (Tucker interview cited in Mollison and Bonham 1981:60).

By the early 1950s Tucker, who had left Australia in 1947, had developed an interest in primitive and metaphysical religious subjects based on Christian themes of betrayal and torment. Tucker began a series of works that contained evolving motifs and composition that would be important in the later Australian iconic works, with two of these becoming pivotal motifs in Tucker's symbolic development. Tucker, in an interview, referred to these as a squared crescent, which was a head derived from a

double-headed Etruscan axe and the other the disc head. The second one, the disc head was a result of Tucker's struggle to contain the crescent form that he felt was controlling him and his work. Tucker stated:

> It took me some years before I could control the movement of the crescent and when I finally got it vertical it emerged as the antipodean head; then it slowly became flexible and started to assert itself and generate energy like the crescent (Tucker cited in Mollison and Bonham 1981:60).

This evolving motif is exemplified in religious themed works of this period such as *Pilate* (1952) (Pl.27) and *Job* (1953). They show Tucker's adaptation of the crescent into the disc head form and demonstrate the development of the iconic antipodean head shape. Tucker later claimed the male antipodean theme had its genesis in Germany in 1951, stating "It was a male form appropriately developed in Germany - a masculine culture. It probably emerged through a kind of osmosis" (Tucker interview cited in Mollison and Bonham 1981:57). In fact, Tucker's antipodean works were also developing through his exposure to various influences from German expressionism, medieval sculptures and Etruscan artefacts.

Of similar importance to the development of Tucker's antipodean figures, was his introduction to polyvinyl paint in 1953 that allowed him to build up heavily textured surfaces, "resulting in rugged, primitive forms" (Uhl 1969:60). Tucker saw this as ideal for what he was trying to express in much of his work, for it allowed him to express the "permanent, dried up mortared effect with great tactile possibilities that are almost impossible to get with oil...I was home and away" (Tucker interview cited in Mollison and Bonham 1981:58). Although first applied to his then current religious themed work this discovery was to allow Tucker greater freedom in developing his concept of antipodean figures of "fortitude and sorrow built up from the textures of the landscape itself" (Tucker cited in Mollison and Bonham 1981:60). This creation of elemental

rawness is apparent in the eroded *Antipodean Head* (1958) (Pl.28), a painting built up from polymer and sand.

Still in Europe in 1955, and after nearly a decade away from Australia, Tucker began to develop a relationship between his symbolic visions and the figuration of the outback. Uhl (1969) sees "an Australian iconography" (Uhl 1969:62) displacing and absorbing Tucker's earlier Italian religious and primitive iconography. Unlike Nolan, Drysdale and Boyd who developed their outback figurations in Australia, Tucker began these iconic works in Italy, thence London and America. Noting at this point Tucker had never seen the Australian outback, Uhl (1969) suggests that the development of "the Australian iconography has the character of a romantic wish-fulfillment" (Uhl 1969:68) resulting from nostalgia evoked by Nolan's outback photos that Tucker saw in Rome 1954. Tucker saw his move to an Australian theme as nostalgic, stating that he was beginning to have "nostalgic memories of Australia" (Tucker interview cited in Mollison and Bonham 1981:58). Tucker was also finding his imagery had begun to connect to the mutilated faces of hospitalised soldiers he had encountered during his war service. Thus, Tucker saw his Australian imagery derived from a cross-fertilisation of his interest in European myths, history and religious doctrine and Australian memories. These, he developed into "an Australian form. I saw the bushranger as a faun or pan figure, something that came out of primal elements" (Tucker interview cited in Mollison and Bonham 1981:60).

This began Tucker's deep involvement with themes of Australian identity relating to the outback, which successfully established Tucker as an artist in Australia on his return in 1960. When Tucker followed themes of Australian myths and legends similar to Nolan especially those of the Kelly gang, for example *King Kelly and His Legions* (1957) (Pl.29) and early explorers, the work raised issues of comparison. For

example, Uhl (1969) sees Tucker's establishment of his cultural identity through the Kelly series as unconvincing, stating:

> Yet in a painter whose imagery had until then been almost entirely urban, whose treatment of the Kelly myth is first imbued with a whimsical and ironic flavour, and who had never seen the Australian Outback, this identity somehow lacks conviction (Uhl 1969:68).

In Uhl's (1969) opinion, this seeming lack of conviction caused Tucker's Kelly imagery to be overshadowed by that of Nolan's Kelly series, "the mere mention of which is sufficient nowadays to bring to mind Sidney Nolan" (Uhl 1969: 62). Yet, Sayers (1999) points out "[Tucker's] obsession with myth places him with Sidney Nolan and Arthur Boyd" (Sayers 1999:2). Further Sayers (1999) states "his commitment to a deliberately Australian subject matter was a common currency" (Sayer's 1999:2) and this links him to Drysdale, Nolan and Boyd in seeking a distinct imagery relating to the human condition of the interior. Smith (1991) sees Tucker's work differing greatly from that of Nolan, stating:

> Tucker's frontier, however, possessed neither the folksy charm of Nolan's, the pathetic heroism of Drysdale's, nor the monstrous tumult of Arthur Boyd's. It was tough, scarred, residual and humourless (Smith 1991:299).

Smiles, (1986) also agrees Tucker presented a much darker underlying side to Australian lore than Nolan though he sees a resemblance in Tucker's work to that of Boyd's for they both derived their Australian iconic imagery from European primeval myths. Smiles (1986) writes "Boyd and Tucker delve deep below the visible surface of the Australian landscape to find there the demons and forces of evil that had been exorcised from Europe" (Smiles 1986:146). However, Tucker's overseas exposure to the European elemental mythology and experimentation within its tenets resulted in a primeval imagery imbuing his Australian iconography with a fundamental authenticity. On the other hand, Boyd had developed most of his mythical bush imagery before travelling overseas.

Although Sayers (1999) states that "Tucker will probably always be thought of, and rightly so, as an urban painter" (Sayers 1999:3), he points to the importance of Tucker's Antipodean Head series of the late 1950s. These, Sayers (1999) states are generally regarded as being a high point in Tucker's career, their success due to

> ...some of the dried-up, strung-up qualities which the post war generation had found to be characteristically Australian...These are literally iconic paintings in their visual coherence, with their gashed and encrusted surfaces (Sayers 1999:2).

Australian public recognition of Tucker's work portraying a distinct national character incorporating outback qualities of human survival in a primitive harshness places Tucker's work to an iconic status within national self-imagery, and thus is crucial in the consideration of the second aim in this research. The importance of Tucker's series of works in the genre, *Antipodean Heads*, *Kelly* series and *Explorers,* within and for Australian art is also noted by Smith (1991) who states Tucker's outback imagery was more important than that of any other Australian painter working in this genre during the late 1950s in gaining recognition internationally. Smith (1991) states:

> In Rome, and later in New York the recognition of Australian art as a distinctive style based on frontier imagery has been due in large measure to Tucker's art (Smith, 1991:300).

Although immersed in a mythical sense relating to Australian history Tucker's 1950s figures of the Australian outback represent a more archaeological and emblematic view of the Australian human condition than the interpretations of Drysdale, Boyd or Nolan. Tucker's work seems to offer a dispassionate view of iconic figures that are an essence of an inhospitable outback world but at the same time, adding a human layer to the Australian primordial earth. Examples of this are *Antipodean Head* (1958), *Ned and Dan Kelly* (1958) and *Explorer* (1958) (Pl.30). In doing this, Tucker, although probably not identified as readily as Drysdale in representing a national self image, added new dimensions to the iconic figurations of the outback figurative genre.

3.4 The Significance of these Rural Visions for Australian Art

Heathcote (1995) argues that these artists were "readily placed in a distinguished line which ran from Roberts and Streeton...merging modernism with a received tradition" (Heathcote 1995:93). However, Smiles (1986) contends Drysdale, Nolan, Boyd and Tucker were not reworking the Heidelberg imagery through modernist interpretations. Their work and others like Laurence Daws (1927-) were a "deliberate selection and presentation of a new vision" (Smiles 1986:146). In Smiles view (1986), Nolan, Tucker, Boyd and Drysdale created archetypical myths within the emptiness of Australia, using a specific imagery sourced from Australian history and its discoverers, settlers and citizens. Smiles (1986) states:

> In this production of the archetypical or essential Australia these artists...chose to locate the otherness of Australia less in particular qualities of light and space than in its capacity for mythic presentation as a place of primitive imaginings, heroic gesture, [and] symbolic activities (Smiles1986: 146).

Smiles (1986) argues this involvement with Australian myths instigated a new Australian art form, aggressively modern in technique, in which the context "was resolutely Australian and demanded knowledge of that society and its history for adequate reading" (Smiles 1986:147). According to Smiles (1986), this direction was important both for the creation of an Australian art that was independent of European models and for its international recognition overseas for it set these painters apart in several important ways and from the popular abstract "isms" that were being taken up by artists world wide. In Smiles (1986) opinion, this significant achievement was to provide an "alternative that is coming to assume greater and greater importance" (Smiles 1986:147). This important alternative was the establishment of the independence and innovation of Australian artists by Nolan and Drysdale, who remained committed to "a retention of figuration" (Smiles 1986:146) in a genre reflecting a sense of identity through the treatment and creation of national myths.

According to Smiles (1986), American Abstract Expressionists often used titles that referred to known myths. These established a connection of “popular myth to an ambiguous canvas [that] was to appeal to a level of understanding that transcended such localised reading of the art work” (Smiles 1986:147). In this way Smiles (2000) sees that “notions of national style or political adherence became irrelevant” (Smiles 1986:147) to these overseas artists, further emphasising the Australian differences in interpretation and use of myths. Smiles (1986) writes:

> Australian artists, in stark contrast, used myth in quite different ways. Here the very specificity of imagery effected a vigorous relationship to the Australian Landscape and Australian history (Smiles 1986:147).

Lowenthal (1978:86) perceives this use of myth important for, in his view, it linked national origins with universal myth and was partly a manifestation of Australia’s need to compensate for the briefness of recorded history. Lowenthal (1978) maintains that the Australian search “for a useable past” (Lowenthal 1978:86) is symbolised by celebrating the primordial, to compensate for the absence of a long and documented history. This provides an antiquity as a background for “an awareness of continuity between past and present...and a desire for a more complex but truer recorded history” (Lowenthal 1978:86). Lowenthal (1978) cites Nolan’s paintings and Patrick White’s novels as prime examples of this quest, suggesting that these “humanize the Australian scene and imbue it with primordial, legendary feeling”. (Lowenthal 1978:86). Heathcote (1995) agrees that Drysdale, Nolan and their contemporaries such as Clifton Pugh (1924-1990) and Daws (1927-) transfigured myths of national identity through an “interplay of primitive forces and age old energies” (Heathcote 1995:93). Replacing the previous figurative idyllic pastoral scenes and heroic status of the rural worker Heathcote (1995) further suggests that these painters, although offering an

> ...alienated view of the bush, where humanity was surrounded on each side by hostile and disturbing elemental forces,...were still painters who conveyed an overwhelming sense of being Australian. Despite their rejection of the pastoral tradition, their works

> expressed a new sense of national identity. And it was on this basis that they captured the viewing public's imagination so quickly (Heathcote 1995:91).

Derived through European and American modernism and expressionist influences and coupled with a subject matter that sourced and mythicised both inhabitants of the Australian interior and related historical events this re-interpretation of the rural figurative vision and its relationship to a national identity established for itself an important place in the history of Australian art. Through their bush figuration Drysdale, Nolan, Boyd and Tucker helped to establish a legitimacy for Australian art within Europe and America during the 1950s that was an ambition that was never quite realised by Roberts and his contemporaries. Haese (1981) regards these artists as particularly important in obtaining recognition from an international audience that was "sympathetic and receptive" (Haese 1981:288) to Australian art. In Haese's (1981) opinion, this was a result of their exploration and development of an "art that was both Australian and modernist [and also] aesthetically ambitious" (Haese1981:288). This receptive acknowledgment led up to landmark exhibitions such as the Whitechapel exhibition in London. This was followed by other major exhibitions in Europe and America. Haese (1981) states that the result by the late 1950s and early 1960s, both at home and internationally, was that "Australian art had a potentially vital contribution to make to twentieth century art" (Haese 1981:289).

By the 1960s Drysdale's stoic outback figures, Nolan's anti-heroic bushrangers and convicts and doomed explorers, Tucker's eroded and metaphysical antipodean heads and Boyd's haunted symbolic imagery had been generally accepted for being significant icons of Australian identity. The transfiguration of the Heidelberg pastoral visions and noble heroic bush worker was complete.

It is possible that these artists were the last of Australian artists to create a popular and nationalistic vision based on the rural figurative Australian experience.

Smiles (1986) and Smith (1991) suggest that by the 1960s a pivotal point had been reached where Australia's cultural needs and concerns and the direction of Australian art were beginning to change dramatically. The cause of these changes and their impact on the rural figure in Australian art is discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

Issues of Rural Identity in Australian Art 1960 - 2000

4.0 Introduction

At the beginning of the 1960s, simultaneous changes within Australian society and within art directions were to significantly alter perceptions of established rural figuration as a creator of Australian myths and transcriber of iconic national identification. This chapter looks briefly at the influences occurring during this period that affected the genre and its position and discusses the development of a rural figuration that showed little relationship to the earlier ideals and concepts. Although Drysdale, Nolan, Tucker and others continued their visions of rural figurative imagery that were to remain important for and popular within Australian art, many of the new generation of artists from the 1960s onwards were not conceptually concerned with the genre. However, a number of emerging artists were important in continuing a form of the genre, commenting on political and social issues, particularly those concerning issues of race. In this context, the discussion will focus on works by artists such as Sam Fullbrook (1922-2004), Tracey Moffatt and Lin Onus.

During the years 1960-2000 artists have undertaken a number of complex investigations, sometimes superficially, at other times intense, through various art movements and practices, exploring issues of political activism, feminism, marginalisation, aesthetics, or elements of daily living. Sayers (2001) sees this period, through all of these changes, as a time when Australian artists were questioning the relationship between art and life and its relevance. Sayers (2001) states

> ...artists have sought to explore the relationships between visual arts, language and politics. This investigation is the constant theoretical background for Australian art in the last three decades of the twentieth century (Sayers 2001:197).

However, Smith, (1991) sees these movements as being *avant-garde*, relating more to a city culture than to the cultural awareness and needs of the wider community, and points out not all artists were involved or concerned with the movements. Smith (1999), in strongly supporting the importance of the continuing expression of national identity, neatly and rather dogmatically classifies two distinct groups emerging in Australian art. In doing so Smith (1991), perhaps quite unintentionally, positions the rural figurative genre as an Australian cultural institution. Smith (1991) states:

> It needs to be stressed that the emergence of one group dedicated to experiment, to internationalism, to a metropolitan-type culture and another group seeking national identity through art are both based upon real life situations. The one based upon a young urbanized and—in Riesman's phrase—other directed, highly mobile *élite* group, the other upon older, suburban and rural groups, the members of which expect to live out their lives in Australia, draw some cultural sustenance and a sense of identity from its legends and history (Smith 1991:352).

Although Smith (1991) sees this identification of nationality remaining from a rural background of history and legends, the genre was, as in its history, not to be maintained in a traditional role by emerging artists. Again, as before, the changing cultural climate of the times was to influence the depiction of the rural figure and its role in imparting a sense of identity.

4.1 Changes in Australian Art and Effects on Rural Figuration

Smiles (1986) views a number of factors affecting rural figuration. These include increasing urbanisation, improved communications and new immigrants arriving from other cultures. These, with changing perceptions of the land being a more fragile environment rather than that of a harsh backdrop providing for "heroic potential" (Smiles 1986:151) were all major contributors to the development of a new Australian identity and its relationship to outback figuration. Smiles (1986) states:

> And with this new identity the need has disappeared or weakened for a Dead stockman, a Kelly or an Australian Nebuchadnezzar, investing with mythic overtones feelings about the society and the land...the role model function of the heroic pioneer or outlaw has been replaced by urban values (Smiles 1986:151).

Perhaps too, the vision of a romanticised heritage of bushrangers or dependence on the image of the true Australian as bushman with attendant virtues had begun to be questioned more deeply in changing attitudes about Australia's history of colonisation.

Apart from the now changing Australian culture, more extensive and forceful changes in Australian art practise of the 1960s can be seen to be more consequential in lessoning the role of the rural figurative genre, or indeed, any form of figurative art working in traditional techniques. This transformation in Australian art came from an almost wholesale adoption of international abstract impressionism, followed closely by conceptualism. Smith (2002) points out, although abstraction had been a force in Australian art for many years, it was only in the 1960s that abstraction came to "dominate the practice of artists here" (Smith 2002:95). In Smith's (2002) view, the advent of conceptualism, an art form that created "theoretical objects or events" (Smith 2002:139) had critical implications. Burn (1991) also commented on the changes that conceptualism wrought

> ...the official styles of the 1960s deflected importance away from the physical work of art itself, giving more weight to the conception of work, the process by which it was produced, its context of display or its sheer existence (Burn 1991:111).

Smith (2002) argues "The idea that art work could be—indeed, necessarily must be—conceptual work had profoundly disruptive effects on art practice in Australia during the later 1960s" (Smith, 2002:139) although it played a defining role in Australian artists' shift to international art practice. Burn's (1991) opinion of the effects of conceptualism on Australian artists was similar, noting "a generation of young artists tended to become alienated from their own cultural specificity" (Burn 1991:111).

However, these young artists did continue to bring fresh approaches to the rural figurative genre, two of note being Ray Crooke and Sam Fullbrook. According to St. John Moore, (1995) in 1968 the visiting American critic, Clement Greenberg, regarded

at the time as the leading authority on avant-garde art, named Fullbrook and Crooke "two of the most interesting painters he has seen in Australia" (St. John Moore 1995:11).

During the late 1960s and onwards, artists like Drysdale and Tucker continued to expand on their themes relating to the peopled outback. Although, perhaps not creating the same excitement that their earlier works had, these later works maintained a high profile. Yet, other considerations, apart from visual symbolism of European identity, began to emerge in the genre. For example, the beginnings of a realisation that others, apart from Europeans, were also part of the national psyche is seen in some of Drysdale's later works. During the 1960s, a thoughtful approach to social issues pertaining to Aboriginals and the loss of culture and land began to creep into Drysdale's work. *Man in Landscape* (1963) depicts an Aboriginal stockman with his arms draped over a large boulder, signifying a "holding onto his land" (Drysdale cited in Smith 1997:168). Similar notions of Aboriginal connection or belonging with the land, and a sense of loss are also to be noted in Drysdale's *The ruins, Lake Callaboona* (1965). This sympathetic theme was to be followed by Fullbrook but from a perspective of Aboriginal and European equality and without the dramatic stage settings of Drysdale.

Fullbrook deepens this acknowledgment of Aboriginals in his inland figurative works, further representing the genre's subtle shift to indigenous concerns. However, Fullbrook's perspective was not as an outsider presenting a stage view, but rather presenting his observations of bush people through egalitarian considerations. St. John Moore (1995) sees Fullbrook's view coming from a close working association with Aboriginal people in the 1950s and a sense of social justice that enabled him to present Aboriginals from

> ...a standpoint of equality, without distortion and in genuine appreciation of their skills, affinity with the landscape and their intuitive knowledge. Fullbrook was ahead of his

> time in his respect for Aboriginal people, and his pure sensuous paintings are akin to simple acts of morality (St. John Moore 1995:3).

Fullbrook's work is almost the complete antithesis to previous artists' visions of the outback figure although his earlier themes of bush life could be said to be akin to those of Drysdale, especially in his *Death in the Afternoon* (1961) (Pl.31). Fullbrook's concepts differ from the primordial themes of Tucker, mythicised history of Boyd and iconic interpretations of Nolan portraying instead a subtle social comment through figures that are typically more emblematic than representative. In predominantly high key paintings, Fullbrook's approach often appears to be an almost casual, and often ironic, glimpse of every day rural life. In works such as *The Citizens* (1962) (Pl.32), *A game of patience* (1964), or *Old man with cod* (1963) (Pl.33) Fullbrook conveys none of the angst, saga or sense of isolation central to the works of Tucker, Nolan, or Drysdale.

A number of Fullbrook's paintings work around important issues of identity. For example *The Citizens* depicts two rather bemused Aboriginal figures holding their pieces of paper which had granted them West Australian citizenship. St. John Moore (1995) points to Fullbrook's understanding of the mockery of an Indigenous people being granted citizenship through a piece of paper. This, in St. John Moore's (1995) opinion, with its "genuine emotional force" (St John Moore 1965:3) places the work as a significant historical painting in Australian art. Other identity issues of "unconventional social content on a thematic level" (St. John Moore 1995:3) addressed by Fullbrook in this genre includes racial relations. *Luncheon on the Grass* (1962-4) (Pl.34), referencing Manet's *Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe* (1863) and the following overt painting, *River idyll* (1964)[44] alludes to mixed relationships that were socially unacceptable at the time.

[44] St. John Moore states "the original title -*Age of consent*-was changed to *River idyll* to make the imagery less explicit" (St. John Moore 1995:33).

The most recognizably iconic of Fullbrook's works for the rural figurative genre arguably is *The head stockman* (1957-60) (Pl.35), but his work is not generally regarded as iconic in their presentation as that of his predecessors working in this genre. Nontheless, Fullbrook's importance within the history of the rural figurative genre lay in his understated but complex moral and, at times sardonic approaches to issues of racial prejudice and Aboriginal identity. Fullbrook's work represents a pivotal point for the genre, between departure from old colonial frames of reference, and precursor to where rural figurative representation is included in post modernist approaches to issues of indigenous social justice.

4.2 The Ambiguous Rural Figure in Contemporary Art

By the late 1970s, a number of indigenous artists such as Lin Onus, Trevor Nickolls (1949-) and Robert Campbell (1944-1992) were augmenting a radical portrayal of Aboriginal identity and Australian history from an Aboriginal point of view. Strong political and often subversive comment on European historical interpretations, areas of conflict with Aboriginal identity and racial injustices were all issues of importance to these emerging artists. Although these concerns were considered through European art frameworks, their portrayal was often combined with symbols and designs originating from Aboriginal traditional sources, usually those of the outback. According to Kleinert (2000), the cultural ethics of using these designs was then not overly considered. In using these sources, these artists defined for themselves and others a specific cultural identity that still connected to the bush. Kleinert (2000) points out that these artists, in appropriating the traditional imagery of the interior, were aware of the loss of their own cultural heritage and "would actively seek to replace this by selectively incorporating the art of remote communities" (Kleinert 2000:28). In the 1970s, artists such as Onus were also aware that this use of Aboriginal motifs limited the acceptance of their work

as fine art by the white art world. According to Neale (2000), Onus, to be recognised as a fine artist, initially "felt compelled to work mostly in oils within the pictorial western landscape tradition, employing the language of the 'colonisers' in a kind of mimicry" (Neale 2000:16).

Smith (2001) believes that this developing contemporary Aboriginal art movement was "a hybrid formation between Western modernity in Australia and Aboriginality" (Smith 2001:638). McLean (2000), while seeing an intersection between the two art forms, argues that artists such as Lin Onus and Trevor Nickolls (1949-) belonged more to the first Australian postmodernist generation, due in part to this hybrid nature of their art. Apart from reflecting post-modern methodologies of appropriation, McLean (2000) further states:

> True to their times, their art employs typical postmodernist conventions, dealing with issues of authenticity, genius and the decentring of the subject in non-gestural hybrid styles. Their imagery seems drawn not from actual places, but from ideas of place (McLean 2000:42).

McLean (2000) states these artists developed an indigenous post-modernism through their "relationship to identity and place [that] becomes shifting hybrid, pragmatic and inclusive" (Mclean 2000:43). This was to be continued later in Moffatt's work.

Much of Onus's highly graphic work represents this post-modernist approach, in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional formats, through a sardonic and subversive commentary on European occupation of the land and relating social issues. Onus often replaced human figuration with metaphors of animals, such as the dingo, goanna, or fruit bat. One of the most important of Onus's works in the rural figurative genre was the *Musqito* (1979-82) series, a portrayal of a nineteenth century Aboriginal bushranger.

Onus produced a rural figurative series using and undermining the genre's chronology and developing national images through European historical narratives and myths. Kleinert (2000) states Onus was seeking to establish a heroic figure to "reinstate

an Aboriginal history of resistance" Kleinert (2000:30), and to provide a cultural hero that was lacking for the Aboriginal people. For this cultural symbol, Onus utilised the well-established heroic and mythic bushranger defined by Roberts, Nolan and Tucker, but adapted the theme to portray an Aboriginal version of a heroic icon.

Musqito[45] is regarded as either an early Aboriginal bushranger or a resistance fighter of the years between 1805-1824. Historical accounts vary on Musqito's actual activities, but broadly agree that he first led a group in New South Wales in skirmishes against the European settlers. Musqito was transported from New South Wales to Norfolk Island in 1805 and thence to Tasmania 1813. Musqito received a pardon for working as a tracker, but returned later to the bush where he was again a leader in bush ranging activities until his capture in 1824. He was hung for murder in 1825.

For Onus, this story of resistance and insurrection against the ruling authorities must have appeared very much akin to that of Ned Kelly. Consequently, Onus must have regarded Musqito as worthy as Kelly to be cast as an iconic figure for Australian identity, but within an Aboriginal perspective of invasion and cultural loss. Kleinert (2000) notes that Onus portrayed Musqito as "both a figure of resistance and of a contemporary image of alienation" (Kleinert 2000:30) to confront European orthodox history of Australian settlement. Interestingly, Onus used his own image as the model for Musqito, perhaps seeing himself too as confronting an unjust system.

Not only did Onus appropriate bushranger themes from his predecessors. In this series of ten paintings, Kleinert (2000) argues Onus indirectly alludes to many of the colonial landscape traditions and to the surreal qualities of Nolan and Tucker. Although Kleinert draws on some tenuous evidence for this statement, certainly Nolan's convict stripes of his *Mrs Fraser and Convict* (1947-1948) series are referenced in *Premonition*

[45] Musqito is the spelling used by Onus though the name is recorded as Musquito in nineteenth century reports and in contemporary writings on his history. Perhaps Onus saw this spelling change as important for accuracy or more to an Aboriginal meaning.

(Pl.36), *Dreams in the garden of allegation* (Pl.37), *Final Journey* (Pl.38) and *Tegg's Legacy* (Pl.39) (1979-1982)[46]. Other elements from Nolan's *Glenrowan* series (1960) can also be seen in Onus's *In Hiding* (1979-1982) (Pl.40). This series of paintings, although not becoming the iconic identity of Aboriginal nation that perhaps Onus had hoped for, were explicit in their demand for a reassessment of national identity based on recognition of indigenous history.

Moffatt's rural figurative work moves away from Onus's overt political messages. Works such as *Something More* (1989) and *Up in the Sky* (1997) (Pl.41) convey instead aspects of conflicting social relationships in an altered reality, although these still often relate to issues of race, identity and alienation. Through these series of photo-essays and short films, such as *Night Cries* (1989) (Pl.42) Moffatt uses a carefully contrived reality to create contemporary allegories encapsulating disturbing events in outback settings. As Onus did, Moffatt also alludes to past rural figurative imagery in these photo-essays, notably sourcing those of Drysdale to develop her own pictorial iconography.

Travis (2000) points to striking similarities between Moffatt and Drysdale, in choice of subject, significance of the setting and alienation, stating:

> Their work, while definitively Australian raises a subject that transcends national boundaries – life on the edge – which is really at the heart of the colonial project. Drysdale and Moffatt have each treated the subjects of small-town life, race, and family and class...Moffatt's and Drysdale's work speaks of alienation and a surreal weirdness in the Australian outback. Drysdale and Moffatt strike a balance between being identifiably Australian and international (Travis 2000:551).

According to Travis (2000), Moffatt's similarities are intentional, but intensifying and dramatising Drysdale's settings, composition and palette in *Something More* (1989). The first work in this series*, Something More 1* (Pl.43) directly references

[46] No separate dates for the paintings in this series are referred to in the catalogue for the exhibition *Urban Dingo* nor for the plates in *Urban Dingo*, *the art and life of Lin Onus 1948-1996.* Other sources also failed to give separate dates.

Drysdale's *Back verandah* (1942), but translates the existence of Drysdale's people to different and disturbing layers of meaning. Travis (2000) states "Moffatt brought something more—drama, race and desire—to the 'back verandah" (Travis 2000:553). Travis (2000) also points to Moffatt's appropriation of Drysdale's *Basketball at Broome* (1958) (Pl. 44) in *Up in the Sky* 7 and *Up in the Sky* 9 (Pl.45). Moffatt's works convey a sinister symbolism of nuns at play to evoke horrors of the stolen generation. Although explicitly and openly sourcing Drysdale, Moffat takes his definitions of rural identity to new dimensions of dramatised emotional and menacing conflicts of existence. According to Travis (2000), Moffatt's people are surviving an alien humanity, theirs and others, while Drysdale's people are surviving an alien environment and states "Moffatt's [portrayal] is the surreality of disintegration and desperation: people who don't fit in anywhere, even within themselves" (Travis 2000:555).

French (2002) considers that Moffatt's *Up in the Sky* evokes an Australian conception of identity moulded through outback environments and romanticised by urban dwellers. By remaining linked to the conventions of the rural figurative genre, French (2000) states this series could be "easily taken as a cipher of national identity" (French 2002:31). However, Moffatt changes the terms of reference for this cipher. Webb (2001) states:

> In such images, Moffatt points to the historical determinants acting upon social formation, showing there is no 'essential' or 'underlying national identity'...Moffatt challenges Australia's various stereotypes. Or better, her work plays with and against these stereotypes (Webb 2001:24).

In Webb's (2001) view, Moffatt elicits a reassessment of national identity by identifying the complex nature of Australia's cultural origins. Moffatt achieves this through a presentation of predominantly non-European identities set in the "Anglo-Australian conformity of Drysdale's paintings" (Webb 2001:25).

4.3 Consideration and Directions for Rural Figuration Today

Moffatt's use of a fictional photographic narration, to delineate rural cultural and social aspects is indicative of a trend from the late 1980s toward photographic art forms in Australian art. Hutak (2003) states artists, worldwide have "rediscovered the image—big framed photographic images at that, here was art we all could relate to" (Hutak 2003:1). The inherent figurative aspect of the rural genre sits comfortably within the framework of this photographic art form due to the perceived identification of reality and validity still generally associated with photography. Association with a created reality has been always a determinant in the public's ready acceptance of national identity of the rural image.

This seeming photographic validity set within established symbolic rural settings is also used, as Moffatt has, as a tool by other artists to present imagery of non-European heritages to have their claims to national identity recognised. For example, William Yang (1943-) in his series, *The North* 1997, couples the rural symbolism within an art-photographic context through stage performances of slides and monologues. In this presentation, Yang redefines the meaning of Australian identity through this exploration of his third generation Chinese heritage within a Dimbulah, North Queensland landscape setting. Perhaps Hou Leong (1964-) (Pl.46), in his photomontage parody *An Australian* (*Crocodile Dundee*) 1994 constructs the ultimate redefining portrayal of the iconic Australian identity, replacing the character Dundee's image with his own Chinese identity.

Although significantly different in orientation to the genre's origins, these rural figurative concepts remain situated within its original tenets through similar aims. Earlier artists, such as Roberts, were seeking to establish a distinctive Australian identity by identifying with a sense of nation through the topical concerns relative to

their contemporary society. Similarly, reconstruction of 'stereotypes' by Moffatt with Yang and Leong also may be seen to be signifying the rise of a portrayal of a modern Australian identity of otherness that is distinctive in representing the multi-cultural history and character of Australian society today. Arguably, this could be a re-establishment of the genre's importance.

Chapter Five

Defining the Case Study: Selection and Focus

5.1 Directions from the Literature

In considering approaches to a contemporary representation of the rural figure, this artist/researcher takes a macro view of the genre from the 1880s to the present. A synthesis of the literature review and research from Chapters Two, Three and Four provides the following critical observations.

Although having a long and varied history, the genre *per se* is marginalised within the literature and appears to have no acknowledgement of its distinctness as a genre in Australian art. Instead, the genre is treated as though it is indistinguishable from the landscape tradition. It is the contention of this artist/researcher that though often complex and diverse, the landscape genre is primarily an idealistic expression of land that embodies the idea of place. For example the pivotal works of the landscape tradition are those which visually reference the land, devoid of human presence or almost so. For example, this context is apparent in Streeton's *Purple Noon's Transparent Might* (1896), Albert Namatjira's (1902-1959) *Landscape* (1955) or Fred Williams (1927-1982) *Trees on Hillside II* (1964).

The rural figurative genre, although again complex and diverse in its manifestations, is primarily referencing and creating an awareness of the human condition within a relationship with a rural background to emphasise and give value to the bush ethos. It is argued here that works definitive of the rural figurative genre are exemplified by certain key works. These are Roberts's *Shearing the Rams* (1890), Drysdale's *Woman in Landscape* (1946) and Moffatt's series *Up in the Sky* (1997) although as the research chapters clearly explain, their purposes follow distinct and separate pathways.

The rural figurative genre has been characterised more by iconic rural stereotypes than engagement with the rural individual *per se*. Much of the art produced within the genre has been represented in terms of iconic symbols of Australian national identity. This perception interrelates identification with perceived characteristics and virtues attributed to those from the bush. In the course of such identification, concerns with reality are lessened, establishing stereotypical perceptions in defining bush types. This focus regarding the iconic stereotype may well be a result of the fact that, with the exception of Russell Drysdale and Sam Fullbrook, most artists working in this genre have been urban dwelling.

Over the past three decades or so the genre has, to some extent, been hijacked as a means of politicising indigenous and/or migrant concerns. Within this association of identity and the rural sector, the genre has become politicised through issues of recognition with indigenous and migrant concerns in relation to national identity. If one contemplates the genre in this way and while appreciating the evolving genre through the course of its history, there appears a need to return to its fundamental source, the rural person.

What do we mean by the rural figure? To what extent is it a fantasised, generalised bush image? Or is it an ordinary person who happens to reside in the bush? If it is the latter, it is important to establish a focus on the everyday life and reality of the rural sector and to record the essence of these people as they are, rather than creating symbolic versions of national identity or social comment. In doing so, a crucial resource is the present researcher's rural background and knowledge. Given the intent to explore the face of contemporary rural Australia with a view to reality-testing the life style and reflecting the reality individually, the study needs first to identify a focal environment.

5.2 Focussing on a Target Community: Criteria Location and Accessibility

Clearly key criteria in selecting a location are accessibility and recognised rural remoteness. Additionally familiarity with the location was desirable. In selecting the location for this study the first two criteria are met in North West Queensland and the fact it is an area significant, through long familiarity, to the artist was a bonus. Within this broad area, the selection of a focal environment and people for the practical studies needed the application of further criteria.

What characterises a rural community today, as it always has, is isolation from urban centres, interdependence with the land itself and all its climatic vagaries and a sense of self-dependence and containment. Rural communities tend to be smaller in population and thus the rural subjects are potentially more accessible. The choice of a target community location that would maximise these characteristics would also preferably be readily accessible for field studies. This researcher's knowledge and mutual acquaintance with the people of the community also aids the development of the project.

Consequentially, the key criteria are that the site must be both remote and accessible for field trips, characterised by a small community and personally accessible to the researcher. Table 5.2.1 below applies these criteria to a selection of remote rural sites in North West Queensland.

Table 5.2.1 Applying the criteria to potential sites

Community	Remoteness from		Accessibility for field work	Population	Level of personal accessibly (5=high accessibility)
	Mount Isa	Townsville			
Doomadgee	350 km	1300 km	Limited seasonal access only unsealed road	1100	1
Duchess	90 km	1150 km	Seasonal access by dirt road	Varying from 3-20	1
Mornington Island	444 km		By air or sea	1200	1
Camooweal	185 km	1185 km	Sealed road	250	3
Dajarra	155 km	1155 km	Sealed road	220	5
Urandangi	200 km	1200 km	Seasonal access by dirt road	50	5

Table 5.2.1 clarifies the suitability of each of the small communities around Mount Isa for this project. The first criterion of remoteness or isolation from main centres of population is applicable to all. Although distances by road to each of the communities are comparable, the consideration of the second criterion of accessibility for field trips becomes an important factor. While most North West Queensland roads are often cut in the wet season, sealed roads are soon opened while unsealed roads, especially in the black soil country, can remain closed for very long periods. The communities of Doomadgee, Urandangi, and Duchess are thus problematic for ongoing field trips both in access and in departure. Mornington Island presents special problems in relation to accessibility as access is only by sea or air. Moreover, the weekly barge from Karumba, the nearest port, is for freight only. Air access is daily but ongoing fares are prohibitive for the number of field trips needed. A permit is also needed to visit the

Island and must be applied for six weeks in advance. Dajarra and Camooweal are accessible by sealed road.

In terms of community size, Mornington Island and Doomadgee have reasonably large populations. However, these are characterised by transience and are therefore unsuitable in terms of continued access and coverage given the period envisaged for this project. Urandangi and Duchess have very small populations. Camooweal and Dajarra are similar in population size and stability. While both Camooweal and Dajarra meet the primary criteria, Dajarra becomes the preferred site because of the level of personal accessibility. Through the application of these criteria the small community of Dajarra fulfils the requirements for the practical component of this research.

5.3 A Profile of the Target Community

5.3.1 Dajarra: the macrocosm

Dajarra[47] (Pl.47), in North West Queensland, is situated 155 kilometres south east of Mount Isa on the Diamantina Development Road between Mount Isa and Boulia and approximately 1950 kilometres north west of Brisbane (map, Appendix 1).

Dajarra's small population of some 220 people is an ideal location for the project as its people are part of an outback environment, which plays a strong part in their daily living. The community as a whole demonstrates a unity through its acknowledgement of its people, place and history, factors important in depicting the reality of every day life.

This artist's connection with the people of Dajarra extends over many years, thus enabling a strong working relationship for the project. Staying at the pub for all the field trips adds to this relationship. The community's knowledge of this artist is likely to

[47] A word from the local Aboriginal language meaning meeting place. The area was used as a local meeting spot for various tribal groups from the Diamantina and Georgina river systems.

result in acceptance of the project and will thus militate against sense of invasion both on their and the artist's part. Further, knowing the community and the people also is important in depicting an intrinsic essence of character essential to the aims of the project that would otherwise not be obtainable.

5.3.2 Dajarra: the microcosm

After selecting Dajarra as community, a further clarification of focus was needed to consider how to encapsulate the broad quintessence of its people, without specifically targeting individuals. Although there is a local community hall, store, primary school, health clinic, police station and various Aboriginal organisations, the focal point of all of the community is the local hotel. Hence, a focus on the clientele and residents of this hotel as a microsm of the community provided a logical way of accessing the community.

Much of the fabric of the community is woven around the Dajarra Hotel (Pls.48-52) for it is used not just for social activities, but also for a wider range of undertakings. These include a meeting place for various community activities, such as morning teas for pensioners, community aid programs, mining functions, Royal Flying Doctor's Service fund raising, social events and as an information centre for tourists. Visiting politicians, shire councillors, various government bodies, local station people, miners and trades people use the hotel as a base for meetings, social functions, or as a place to stay when working in the area. Local news[48] is disseminated through the bar (Pl.48). Parties and social gatherings draw people from some hundreds of kilometres away, while those who have worked in the town such as teachers, police and health workers often return for these events.

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[48] The term local is used to cover an area ranging from the Northern Territory border some 150k to the west, to Boulia 155km to the south, to Camooweal some 300k to the north and to Cloncurry some 150k to the west by the short cut. Although large cattle stations cover most of this area the population is small and thus well know to each other.

As often is the case with outback pubs, the pub is a family business with a very long association with the district. One of the publicans, Bull, is the local Justice of the Peace, and administrator of the Community Justice program, while the other, Hooter, Dajarra's ex-postmaster and local historian, is also the founder and curator of the local museum. The housekeeper (Bull's mother) is now known as Grandma throughout the district, and is a very well known identity throughout much of North West Queensland. Betty, Bull's wife has served on the Cloncurry Shire Council and remains committed to Federal and State issues relating to the district.

The regular clientele is comprised of nearby station people and local town people, who are predominantly Aboriginal, although not all come from the original local groups. There seem to be few problems with integration. The community is relatively prosperous with people working at the nearby Phosphate Hill mine, or for the shire council, government agencies and station activities. Others who make the pub their base to interact within the community are the local police, health workers, and schoolteachers. Although these people usually only have postings for a couple of years, almost without exception, they become very involved in the community's activities.

These individuals are central to the essential qualities needed for this artist's exposition of a particular contemporary aspect of the outback character and as a case study for the exegesis's examination of the Australian rural figurative genre. To this artist there is a need to portray these people in such a way that would establish the "engagement with the significance of the subject" (Astbury 1985:133), rather than a symbolised or stereotyped version of identity. This approach also supports this artist's aim in re-establishing the focus on the everyday life and reality of the rural sector, claimed to be followed by Roberts, McCubbin and Ashton, and later followed by Drysdale and Crooke.

5.4 Aims of the Creative Visualisations

The aims for the project are to give a particular visual perception of the people of Dajarra by encapsulating and conveying a sense of contemporary outback culture, to be interpretive of the actuality of outback individuality and similarly to develop the central importance of rural character and events. To achieve these aims the visual work will develop from observations of life and people in Dajarra.

5.5 Conceptual Approaches in Developing the Imagery

When considering conceptual approaches to this project, this artist evaluated the concerns and approaches of artists, such as Roberts, McCubbin, Ashton, Drysdale, Fulbrook and Crooke, who developed concepts emphasising the importance of the unpretentious rural individual in their own time and place. Similar concepts are applied to this case study, drawing on interpretations of Dajarra individuals, to convey a perception of rural people today. Although degrees of likenesses are to be seen in the work, this series is not intended as factual portraits, but as depicting ordinary and anonymous people of their present and own time and place while recording of a way of life that is largely mythical for urban dwellers. Although each identity is positioned within the local focal point, it could also be stated that they are representative of many in outback Australia.

5.6 Collecting the Source Material – Field Trips

Aims of field trips are to gather source material for work in the studio, rather than develop a body of work in the field. As stated in Chapter One, the subject matter of this body of work is predominately interpreted by lithographs, which necessitates a great deal of studio based processes. Resource gathering includes drawings and thumbnail sketches in journals (Appendix 2), photographs and journal notes recording

other data useful to the project. Financial considerations limit the number of field trips to four.

Table 5.6 outlines the dates, scope of the field trips and works resulting from each trip.

Table 5.6 Field Trip Data

Field Trip	**Developmental material gathered**	**Focus**	**Outcome**
1.May 2001	Developmental drawings, notes and photographs. Focus on general background material.	People in bar, Sandy Anderson, bar party, people in beer garden, card players, bush picnic.	*The Boreman* (2003), *Dajarra Afternoon* (2003), *Study for the Boreman* (2003), *The Policeman's Farewell* (2003), *The Farewell* (2003), *Dajarra Beer Garden* II (2003), *Dajarra Beer Garden* III (2003), *Observation* (2003).
2.September 2001	Sketches, photographs and conversational notes.	People: at morning tea people/bar street activities, party in bar, Joe Clark.	*Morning Sitting* (2003), *Of Time* (2003) *The Westerner* (2003), *The Joke* (2003), *Night Play* (2003), *Different Drummer* (2003), *The Play* (2003), *Study for Night Play* (2003).
3.July 2002	Sketches, photographs and conversational notes.	Vi, Joe, bar and beer garden activities, street movement.	*Morning Light* (2003) *Man of Many Tongues* (2003), *Man of Many Rivers* (2003), *Bar Duty* (20), *Fall of the Cards* (2003), *Morning on Mark Street* (2003), *On the Line* (2003).
4.September 2002	Sketches, photographs and conversational notes.	Jeremy, bar studies, street studies, card players.	*Friday Afternoon* (2003) *Jeremy* (2003), *To Be or Not to Be* (2003), *The Play* (2003), *The Customer* (2003), *Dajarra Street Study* (2003).

As seen in table 5.6 source drawings and photographs as visual aids for the development of the artworks come from four field trips to Dajarra. The material gathered from the first trip is used to develop some initial working drawings and monotypes that were useful in early concept development and experimental work in lithography. Material gathered during the further field trips became more selective for as the project progressed objectives were clarified, thus establishing events and people for later consideration of the evolving imagery.

Staying at the pub during the field trips enabled access to people, while just listening to conversations in the bar provided insights to life styles, events and people. These were recorded soon after with journal notes, thumbnail and quick sketches in

order to recreate and recall. Listening and talking to people attending pensioner and other morning tea or lunch functions in the garden setting at the rear of the pub provided much background material from life stories, current events and town gossip. This information is vital to give authorship to this artist's interpretations. Social functions also provided much visual source material. Preference is given to these methods of recording rather than completing detailed sittings for the works. As previously stated, these are not intended as portraits but as studies of people and are thus presented as detached observations that signified the essential qualities of the subject and moment. For this artist, this could only come through considering and reflecting on the gathered visual material integrated with elements of absorbed memories. Thus, these field trips explored and established the essential basis of the project but it was in the studio where these sources were to develop into the final artwork.

5.7 Choice of Medium

Important to this project's concept development is the choice of medium. Printmaking is a medium that well suits this artist's graphic approach to developing imagery. Thus, the choice of developing predominantly monochromatic and figurative images in lithography, monotype[49] and some etching reflects a continuing enthusiasm for printmaking and drawing from a strong background of study in these areas. Processes of fine art printmaking and drawing continue to be of significant contemporary relevance not withstanding extensive moves towards digital processes that have expanded or replaced traditional technical skills. Although there was some experimentation with Adobe Photoshop in the evolution of images, the imagery seemed

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[49] The term monotype refers to:

...one image (mono) painted or drawn with oil paint, water-based paint or printer's ink directly on a plate and then transferred to paper...Museum terminology today restricts the term monotype printing of an image from a clean un-worked surface containing no scratching and carving [The term monoprint refers rather to] a special, often one of a kind , wiping or printing ...onto an already worked ...plate (Ross et al 1990:245).

to become too static, lacking character and feeling, and without challenge for this artist. The stimulating challenge for this artist is to be found in using traditional and hands on printmaking techniques and materials for realising the concept. These techniques and means for expressing ideas and concepts became more demanding as the images developed. The characteristics of the lithographic process grants the freedom of direct drawing to encapsulate the quintessence of the subject, while allowing great capacity for using marks that no other medium can reproduce.

Much time was spent investigating techniques and the properties of materials and referencing other printmakers' procedures, in order to gain knowledge and evaluate their usefulness, for this artist has a strong curiosity about how things work. This research led to experimenting with interesting processes, some almost forgotten in modern printmaking, and exploration of others mentioned in technical literature that had been untried by this artist. Over the period of the project's development, two master printmakers, Fred Genis[50] and Peter Lancaster[51], held several intensive lithographic workshops in the print studio at James Cook University. These, too, were invaluable in furthering technical development, and built on knowledge gained through four years of undergraduate studies.

It may also be noted that in this study of the rural figure in Australian art, although most artists researched had worked at some in printmaking, their most notable works in the genre were paintings, so for this artist/researcher a series in lithography and other printmaking methods would create a different approach.

Monochromatic images became the preferred choice for most of the final imagery. A great number of lithographs, etchings, monotypes and drawings are often

[50] Fred Genis is a master lithographer, trained in Europe, who has printed for many well known American and Australian artists over the last thirty years.
[51] Peter Lancaster is a professional master printer, and owns Lancaster Press, a professional lithographic print workshop. Lancaster trained as a master lithographer at the Tamarind Institute in New Mexico, now works with and prints for many professional artists.

monochromatic and this artist/researcher chose this approach for most of the imagery in this project. This personal preference offers a more undeviating and meaningful observation, moving away from the distraction of colour. Divested of colour, the construction of an image is dependant on fundamentals of composition, line, and tone to convey the essence of character and mood, evoking dramatic or subtle nuances and atmosphere.

Although most of the project's imagery is monochromatic, two of the exhibited monotypes made use of colour, a means to convey a specific atmosphere. This process is discussed in the next chapter, which focuses on the technical and conceptual development of the works.

Chapter Six

Dajarra: Process towards Product

6.0 Evolution

Preliminary work began after the first field trip. This work consisted of compositional thumbnails, A4 to A1 drawings, monotypes and lithographs. The drawings were mainly ink or charcoal, very loose and mainly used as problem solving. Initially, the monoprints and small editions of lithographs were also exploratory, researching techniques, compositional ideas and concepts. Although not intended as potentional for the final exhibition these investigative works were important for its development. The focus of this work was more on small figures in detailed interiors, although as the experimentation progressed the focus turned more to figures dominating the imagery, with the background playing a lesser role in most cases. These investigative processes expanded and clarified concepts to explore possibilities of conceptual direction and to develop a familiarity with the project. The simultaneous research into treatment of the rural figure in Australian art was also assisting in the development of an awareness of differing concepts and approaches.

6.1 Technical stages for the Lithographs

6.1.1 Developing experimental works: Lithographs

An early stage in 2001 marks more lithographic experiments and trialling various methods. Some lithographs were also editioned. Some experiments in transferring monotypes to lithography stones led to some interesting results. Lithographs from this stage were included in *(W)ink*, a group exhibition of six women printmakers held at Perc Tucker Gallery, February to April 2002, and later in October 2002 in *Cultural Capers* at Julia Creek. These works were *The Temporary Cook* (2002) (Pl.53), *Pub Dialogue*, (2001), *The Gathering* (2002) (Pl.54), *Dajarra Interior*, (2002)

and *The Preparation* (2001). Two of these, *The Gathering* and *Dajarra Interior*, were monotype transfers onto stone. This method was used as both were intended to be atmospheric and slightly dramatic night scenes. *The Temporary Cook* was also another piece exploring light and dark, but this was achieved through dark tuche washes. *Pub Dialogue* was drawn on a lithographic plate using experimental wash and drawing techniques taught by the visiting lithographer, Peter Lancaster. *The Preparation* was the only lithograph in the project, which was successfully editioned in four colours, on the suggestion by Fred Genis, but as with all of these early works, was not exhibited in the final exhibition. Nevertheless, all were important in the projects development for the experiments used here were to determine the course of the exhibition works. In the case of the monotype transfers, these were to be discarded, as they tended to be technically unstable. The very dark moody tones were generally to be discarded too though a few more test pieces were to be tried. Other techniques explored for plate lithography were to be used for the exhibition imagery.

6.1.2 Further lithographic technical development

By the end of 2001, it was decided to keep most of the lithographic images in a set size, approximately 50 x 36 cm for two reasons. A very practical one is that in using the preferred choice of lithographic stones, these needed to be fairly easily manoeuvred while working in a solo situation, for although lithographic plates are very easy to handle, to this artist, stones still present a more empathic surface to work on. The second reason was to present a uniform and aesthetic feel to the body of work.

As can be seen in Table 6.3 (p. 127) the works are predominantly lithographs, printed from plate or stone. Most lithographs were developed through initial drawings, taken from original sketches or composed from photographic references. These were often redrawn a number of times until the final image was resolved. The images, *Friday*

Afternoon [52] (Pl.69) and *Morning on Mark Street* (Pl.70), were worked in small versions on plate or stone to resolve the final image, and as test pieces to try various techniques. In the case of *Morning on Mark Street*, the small image was scanned into and developed in Photoshop, then redrawn and resolved on the stone. Further variations were made as the drawing progressed to get the feeling of the street with the morning movement of emerging people. Some images were difficult to resolve. For example *Observation* (Pl.57), *Friday Afternoon* and *The Joke* (Pl.65) were redrawn on stones and plates a number of times and worked and thought over a great deal. Other images such as *Different Drummer* (Pl.66), *The Westerner* (Pl.67) and *Man Of Many Tongues* (Pl.72) were taken briskly from an initial rough drawing to a loosely resolved larger drawing to work through compositional ideas but then were directly resolved on the plate or stone. Some works were developed through preparatory monotypes, although *Man of Many Rivers* (Pl.80) already conveyed the required feeling and ambience of the subject matter, rather than the developed lithographs, so became the completed exhibition choice. Some of these preparatory studies, such as *Study for Night Play* (Pl.75), were also to feature in the final exhibition, to demonstrate some of the developmental processes.

In the lithographs, techniques noted in Table 6.3 page 111 varied for each image. All stones were grained to a #220 finish. Plates were grained to the standard grade. In most cases the images were lightly drawn up, with little detail, in conté pencil to establish composition and placement. At this point, it was easy to make adjustments before proceeding with final greasy drawing materials. Parts were gummed out that were to remain white, either by brush for line or flicked with a toothbrush in controlled patterns, before using crayon, washes or inks. This method was used to create a rhythm of light play or to emphasise line. Images such as *The Joke*, *Friday Afternoon*,

[52] Dates for each of these works are shown in Table 5.6 page 104

Observation, *Night play* and *Morning Sitting* (Pl.56) are exemplifiers of the technique. Water and turps washes were often used to develop abstract areas that augmented figurative components. This approach was used in *Different Drummer*, *Bar Duty* (Pl.59) and the *Westerner*. For works such as *Morning Sitting*, *The Postmaster* (Pl.64) and *Dajarra Afternoon* (Pl.60), only lithographic drawing materials, tuche, crayon, or lithographic pencil, were used. Different techniques were chosen to portray each individual or individuals, the choice resulting from fieldwork, drawings and experiments. Each subject dictated its execution rather than the technical application becoming more important than the subject.

6.1.3 Technical developments for the monotypes

The monotypes were drawn by reduction methods. The preferred method of working is to fully roll the smooth back of a used lithographic aluminium plate up with lithographic black inks, very slightly thinned with turps. These are then removed by usual methods of wiping with rags, turps, cotton buds, dry brush, etc. to achieve interplay of dramatic and subtle tonal effects. These were printed through an etching press on dampened Magnani rag paper or Kent acid free cartridge. A number of colour monotypes were also experimental works. The exhibition pieces *Dajarra Beer Garden Party II* (Pl. 78) and *Dajarra Beer Garden Party III* (Pl.79) were first rolled up in three or four colours across the plate, wiped back as above, then added colour was drawn in by brush or rag. The use of colour was a concious decision for these pieces to convey the movement of lights and fire and the atmospheric feeling of a winter's night party.

6.1.4 Techniques and experiments for intaglio works

Two large etchings, *To be or Not to be* (Pl. 63) and *Morning Light* (Pl.71) are included in the body of work for exhibition. A number of drawings and monotypes led to the resolution of *To be or Not to be*; although first considered as a plate lithograph, it

seemed to call for a different approach. Both used deep line etching and aquatints to achieve the desired concept. *Morning light*, in particular was a demanding subject to determine the ambience of early morning light in the ironing figure's milieu. This image went through various stages, starting life as a three-colour lithograph that was unsatisfactory in both treatment and composition. An initial etching was also discarded before the final satisfactory result.

Four small intaglio works use vellum as a support. *Jeremy* (Pl.83), *On the Line* (Pl.81) *The Play* (Pl.84) and *The Farewell* (Pl.82) resulted from some fascinating research and challenging experiments in 2002-3. Printing on vellum seems to be a lost process, mentioned rarely in technical printmaking literature, although according to the Grolier Club (1998) vellum is the "aristocrat of printing surfaces" (Grolier Club 2003:1). Curiosity was aroused about printing possibilities through having the opportunity to obtain some vellum pieces from England. The original intention was to print this support with relief techniques. After some email dialogue (Appendix 3) with a Dutch printmaking technical master, Ad Stijnman, the decision was made to print using intaglio on vellum. For this method of working the subject needs to be considered in its relationship to vellum's inherent characteristics and variations of slight transparency, hardness, pore textures, and slightly oily feel. *The Play* demonstrates the successful use of deep line etching, fine rosin and salt aquatints on copper plate. Sepia etching inks were more suited than black, given the off white or cream skin colour, although Stijnman (2003) indicated, in his emails, that fine aquatints were hard to obtain on vellum, these seemed to be quite successfully resolved in *Jeremy, The Play* and *The Farewell*. The presented work was on goat vellum. Apart from being very suited to the etching process, goat vellum also had an underlying connection to the project for goats

had been part of the lives of many of the Dajarra people, and indeed much of outback settlement history.

6.2 Context and Concept for the Developing Works

6.2.0 Introduction

Each work portrays interpretations of Dajarra individuals and life styles. These studies are intended to be considerations of unpretentious people going about their daily life and segments of the Dajarra way of living.

The portrayal of the inherent dignity, individuality and perhaps stateliness of the present day western people is particularly sought in works like *Morning Sitting*, *Man of Many Tongues, Of Time* (Pl.58), *Man of Many Rivers, The Post Master, The Westerner* and *The Boreman* (Pl.62). To this artist, these people epitomize the strength and quality of character found in those who have been part of the outback environment all their lives. Studies of the pub's bar activities move from the tranquilly of *Friday Afternoon* to a recorded moment of hilarity with *The Joke* and a crowded *The Policeman's Farewell* (Pl.55). Other works sourced from incidents in the bar are *The Farewell, To be or Not to Be* and *The Customer* (Pl. 77). Further studies of social gatherings within the pub's setting are encapsulated in *Observation*, *Dajarra Beer Garden Party II* and *Dajarra Beer Garden Party III*. Impressions of street life are seen in *Morning on Mark Street* and *Dajarra Street Study* (Pl.74) while various people at play or work are observed in *Night Play* (Pl.61), *Fall of the Cards* (Pl.68), *Morning Light, Bar Duty* and *Dajarra Afternoon* (Pl.60). *Jeremy*, *On the line* and *The Play* are small vignettes of people in the pub environment.

Beginning with *The Boreman*, *Study for the Boreman* and *Dajarra Afternoon* several of these works are discussed in depth to give some understanding of the history, methods, structure and concepts involved throughout the progress of each of the works.

This discussion is continued with *Morning Sitting*, *Of Time, The Westerner*, *Man of Many Tongues* and *Man of Many Rivers*. Other works are more succinctly overviewed but a similar exploration of character concepts and approaches to the above underpin their development.

It must be noted that, although elucidation of varying aspects of concept and interpretations of these works is given, some of the intrinsic and significant characteristics of these portrayals are without verbal translation. These remain deep within this artist's underlying perceptions and memories of the people of Dajarra. However, the works themselves are there to provide this translation for the viewer's personal discovery and to provide a path by which some deeper perception of these works can be understood.

6.2.1 The Man of the Georgina River

Three of the works reference a man of the Georgina River area, Sandy Anderson, who lived for the latter part of his life at the Dajarra Pub. These works are *Study for The Boreman*, a monotype and two lithographs, *The Boreman* and *Dajarra Afternoon.* Sandy was the partner of the housekeeper, working at the pub as a yardman when not working on bores or care-taking stations. He could well have been one of the bush characters who fascinated Drysdale[53] with his stories, way of moving, bush ethos and speaking the language of bush camps. Drysdale admired and responded to these traits in the bushmen in his paintings. In his early days, Sandy was one of the wilder characters of the bush, with cattle duffing[54] one of his favourite pastimes. When finally caught and sent to trial the Cloncurry jury, all being mates, found him innocent but this event, according to Sandy, somewhat curbed his enthusiasm for duffing. Later, Sandy

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[53] See 3.1 for Drysdale's thoughts on the bush people he portrayed.
[54] Stealing livestock

became highly respected as a cattleman and boreman[55] and became known as one of the best boremen in the district. At Sandy's eulogy in 2002, it was stated that the almighty must have a drought in heaven because all the great boremen of the Georgina were being gathered up. Sandy was a great raconteur of yarns, often stating he always told the truth where a lie would not fit in. He could be said to typify many of the old bushmen and was unquestionably an essential subject. It took little persuasion for Sandy to be part of this project as he had been the subject of an earlier portrait painted by this artist and was very pleased to be approached again. In fact, at the time of the initial portrait, Sandy claimed it was the first time his portrait wasn't on a wanted poster.

Most of the documentation for *The Boreman* took part in the first field trip to Dajarra in 2001, as he was away most of the time on the second trip, and had died by the time of the third. Vi, his partner wanted the work to be continued. Therefore, apart from two photos and thumbnail sketches, most of the work was created through consultations with Vi and personal memories of his stories, mannerisms and singular character.

In deciding how to portray Sandy, thought was given to two approaches. Consideration was given as to whether the portrayal should be indicative of the outback character rather than a more personal representation of the man himself. On reflection, the focus of each was indistinguishable. During 2001, a number of experimental drawings were made, moving around a pose very characteristic of him but trying to avoid the conventions of clichéd imagery of outback characters. It was decided to allow the figure to dominate the composition, without any background in keeping with the significance of the character and to depict Sandy in a typical pose. A number of mannerisms typified Sandy's character and were important inclusions in any portrayal.

[55] A boreman maintains and services windmills, pump, and tanks on station properties.

Thus, in this drawing the pose included the figure wearing a sleeveless shirt, for Sandy always tore the sleeves out of his shirts saying they were comfortable that way, sitting on a drum rolling a smoke and about to begin a story. This was then drawn up in an experimental lithograph, and a small edition completed. However, as the image seemed to lack the feeling of Sandy, it was abandoned. Soon after this was finished, Sandy died and this thread in the work was put aside until late 2002. Returning then to the topic, a monotype, *Study for the Boreman* (Pl.76), was made using the same pose of the discarded work, but in a much looser way. An aluminium lithographic plate was rolled up with modified lithographic ink, the image emerging through wiping with rag, cotton buds, wet and dry brushes plus mineral turps. Background was added to give an abstracted indication of Sandy's outback environment. Sandy's longer hair became a little wilder than in the first image, perhaps recollecting his youthful exploits while something of the softer side of his nature emerged in this state for like many bushies, Sandy was decidedly sentimental. This image was then redrawn on a litho stone with litho crayons and editioned. This lithographic image, *The Boreman*, although similar in intent and image to the monotype, developed nuances of its own, due in part to the mark making by differing material and losing some of the immediacy of the original.

A second image, *Dajarra Afternoon* completed in 2003, also referenced Sandy, but in another setting. This image is indicative of Sandy who played patience in his latter years at a particular table of an afternoon, with a beer in his hand and smokes handy. This was his place of retreat from the busy pub life and was known as Sandy's spot. When he died, his son had a pack of cards, smokes and a bottle of rum buried with him. The print was composed from two separate images, one a drawing of the room and one a photograph and aided by memory. The aim was to position this man in his familiar environment at the Pub, and to construe a type of narrative that relates to him

but also to others of his kind who are used to spending much time alone in the bush and still need to have a quiet space. A few sketches brought the idea of the image together but the main development was on the stone. This work was more carefully drawn than either *Study for the Boreman* or *The Boreman* but still aimed to use an expressive and realistic approach. It could be said that these three works are more subjective than most of the other works, except for those of the housekeeper, due to the fact that these two people had been part of this artist's life for a long time. However, they remain within the aims of presenting an interpretation of the outback individual of today and convey the importance of the outback character.

6.2.2 Studies developed from a Dajarra morning gathering

Three studies of women in this series are developed from sketches, photographs and conversational notes of a morning tea function held in the Pub's beer garden in September 2001.These studies are *Morning Sitting*, *Of Time* and *The Westerner* and are all lithographs.

This morning tea is an ongoing event arranged by one of the community aid groups in Mount Isa who visit Dajarra each month to provide the morning tea and to listen to and follow up any concerns the elderly people may have. This occasion provided an opportunity to gather substantial material for a particular focus on Dajarra women. These people were quite happy to take part in the project, especially when it was explained that the work was not intended to be portraits as such but rather to be emblematic and significant representations of outback women. In conversations with these ladies, it soon became apparent they all had absorbing histories and backgrounds. Like Drysdale's and McCubbin's women, they are resilient, independent, capable, calm and seem to be structured from their environment. Each one of the three people in this series was to provide a different challenge of translating these qualities in a way that

gave some idea of the strength of each of their personalities while still embodying the distinct outback individuality.

Morning Sitting references a woman who is of the southern Arunta or Arrernte people of the Northern Territory, but came to Dajarra years ago with her husband, both working on local stations. Retired now, she was sitting enjoying the morning sun and speaking about these years spent cooking and raising a family. Her main concern was whether she had bought the right type of Barbie doll for her granddaughter's birthday.

In approaching this subject, several compositional and experimental drawings were drawn from sketches and a photographic reference between 2001-2002. A small stone was drawn up and editioned to give some more direction to the concept. From these experiments, in 2003, it was finally decided to portray this person listening alertly and sitting outside in the beer garden with the pub's wall in the background to indicate the environment of pub events. Within this setting, it was also decided that the play of morning light was to be emphasised to focus attention on the strength, alertness and dignified bearing of the subject. This concept and composition was then drawn up on the stone where the image was fully developed incorporating these elements.

Light became an even more important compositional element in *Of Time.* This work took as subject an elderly woman of mixed heritage, born near Dajarra and living in the district most of her life. She had a large family, but it seemed most had moved away to Mount Isa. This person had an appearance of calm acceptance and seemed to embody much of the bush characteristics of tolerance and endurance. However, she also presented a feeling of underlying energy. She seemed ideal to represent another facet of outback people. During 2002, various ideas were worked through experimental drawings and a small lithograph. The final work interprets the figure and the background through a more abstract use of light and dark than the more careful

definition of the figure in *Morning Sitting*. These elements of light provide an interweaving of rhythm to suggest vitality through the relaxed pose of the sitting figure.
The Westerner also came from studies made at this function. This woman spoke of leaving the Burketown[56] area some years ago, to settle in Dajarra for family reasons. She was rather proud that, because of her mixed heritage, Chinese, Aboriginal and European and the areas of the North West she had lived in, she was, without doubt, a Western Queenslander. She regarded herself as neither belonging to nor owning the land but integrated with it. It seemed, from this dialogue, that her portrayal should contain elements of her pride, her environs and something of the earth itself that she felt connected to.

Thus, when considering approaches to this subject, Tucker's use of texture to develop primordial figures relating to the Australian landscape came to mind. Although not seeking to depict either primal angst or elemental antediluvian figures, this melding of earth-like textures within the figure seemed to suggest the interweaving of person and place, very appropriate to this person. Instead of the sitting pose used for *Of Time* and *Morning Sitting*, this work became a head and shoulders portrayal dominating the picture to make a clear statement of identity, almost as if she is saying "*this is me and this is what I identify as*". The implied outback background again enforces this person's oneness with her environment. This work evolved directly on the plate during 2002 with only the initial fieldwork as reference material. It was editioned in 2003.

6.2.3 Studies of a stockman

Two studies reference Joe, a well-known identity of Dajarra. These are *Man of Many Tongues* a lithograph and *Man of Many Rivers* a monotype. The intent of these

[56] Burketown in the Gulf country of North West Queensland

works is to present a person who, while very representative of many, has his own unique character.

Joe originates from the Gulf Country[57], spending most his life working as a stockman and drover in the Northern Territory and North West Queensland before retiring with his family in Dajarra. Joe claims to speak seven Aboriginal languages and the rudiments of several others, these being dialects of the McArthur and Roper River areas in the Northern Territory and around Burketown and the Gregory River in Queensland. He also proudly states that his great grandfather, who came to the Burketown area in the 1880s, was the second son of an English earl. Today, Joe teaches Aboriginal lore to the local children, makes artefacts and entertains tourists. Journal notes, quick sketches and photographs relating to Joe were gathered in a field trip in September 2001, with further notes being made in July 2002. Several working and experimental drawings evolved from these during 2002 with various approaches considered. Small head studies as lithographs were also editioned during 2002. From these exploratory works, two approaches to the subject were decided, with one being a head study, *Man of Many Rivers*, and one full stance, *Man of Many Tongues*.

When determining how to portray *Man of Many Tongues* the direct and uncomplicated mode of Drysdale's pen and ink drawings of bush people, especially *Old Tom* (1967), was considered. It seemed too that this subject aptly fitted Drysdale's description of the bush people having a "peculiar dignity and grace...the way in which a man comports himself in an environment which is his and has been his and his alone, he's at ease in it" (Drysdale cited in Dutton 1964:101). Thus, the decision was made to treat this subject in a similar manner, with tusche washes to give a loosely defined

[57] The area near the Gulf of Carpentaria.

portrayal depicting an innate dignity and significant presence. This too was a depiction of the remarkable attributes and durability of the bush workers.

Man of Many Rivers is the result of much deliberation over approaches to get a specific awareness of the subject to arrive at a more pertinent defining of the man himself. A number of head studies, mentioned above, during 2001-2003 sought to decipher the strength and alertness of Joe's character and to indicate some of the relationships he had with his environment. The use of a head study was decided as the most effective way to portray these characteristics for all of these elements are to be seen in his face and in the way he held his head. The final work, a monotype, seemed to achieve the desired outcomes. The process of wiping light areas allowed the creation of marks suggesting topographical features in forming a strong and energetic head study, while the eye contact with the viewer suggests a canny alertness. Again, while more of an individual and recognisable portrayal of Joe than *Man of Many Tongues*, this work too is an evocation of the outback stockman.

6.2.4 From the bar

Many of the artworks for this project centre on activities in the Pub's bar. These portrayals of everyday Pub affairs are observations sourced from journal notes, sketches and photographs gathered on each of the field trips. Lithographic works include *The Joke*, *Friday Afternoon*, *Bar Duty*, *The Postmaster* and *The Policeman's Farewell.* Etchings are *To Be or Not to Be*, *The Farewell*, *Jeremy,* two monotypes, *Study For To be or Not to Be* and *The Customer* completing this group of work. Although it is not the intention of this artist to provide a detailed analysis of each of these works, several are discussed as examples of this group. This series of works also points to the existence of those who do not work or live with the land but still identify just as strongly with this region as those who do.

The Joke originates from sketches and photographs from the second field trip in 2001. The final study evolved in 2003 after some preliminary drawings stemming from the fieldwork and an experimental lithograph in 2002. It is of a moment of mirth between two very good friends of long standing who enjoy bantering each other. This study moves away from the quiet approach for most of the other studies and highlights the humour found in the bush. In reflecting on the works reviewed in this research, this is an element missing in most bush figuration and yet humour is very much part of the bush life. Much use is made of the light play to focus attention on the figures, to emphasise the affinity between them and to endow a kinetic feel through the study to enhance the obvious enjoyment.

Friday Afternoon, on the other hand, records a tranquil time in the bar when just the barman and a passing traveller chat over a beer. This work came from thumbnail sketches and photographs taken in the last field trip in 2002 and progressed through a series of steps from a small photographic transfer lithographic study to the larger work. Again the placement of light is used to suggest the glimmering intensity of the afternoon light and to interact this with the figures but the pervading mood is that of calmness, almost that of timelessness. To achieve this the architecture of the bar setting becomes an essential part of the composition suggesting an untroubled sphere where the figures become integrated into the whole. This use of light and moody darks perhaps relates to this artist's passion for the peopled interior works of the Northern European artists of the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries[58].

The Policeman's Farewell is also set in the pub's bar and portrays a social function in May 2001 to farewell a very popular Dajarra policeman. People came from up to 1200 kilometres away to attend. The image seeks to give a tangible vision of the

[58] The subject of this artist/researchers Honours research.

companionship and communication that was decidedly evident on that extremely cold night in this crowded bar. The focus is on the centre figures, contained within a conversation but still encompassed within the gathering. The drawing seeks to keep a feeling of the ebb and flow of the room through expressive strokes and elements of moving light.

6.2.5 The card players

A number of studies centre on card playing, a pastime that appears to be rather popular with the Dajarra people. Amongst drawings and photographs obtained in each of the field trips there were always some that included references to somebody playing cards. For this particular pictorial theme, neither one person nor a particular setting was the subject of close study, but instead each image is built on extracts from both visual material and memory. The subject has been previously used in the bush genre, two notable works being Fullbrook's sleazy bush cardsharp from *A game of patience* (1964) and Tucker's eroded and gloomy *Gamblers* (1972) playing under a dim light bulb. However, the portrayals of the Dajarra card players differ in intent, aiming to present scenes that empathise the normalcy and universality of life activities that exists in bush circles that is often unrealised by an urban based audience. None the less, the subject matter also imparts a suggestion of subtle narratives that are left open to the viewers' interpretation. Works in this group include lithographs *A Different Drummer Night Play, Fall of the Cards*, an etching *The Play* and a monotype *Study for Night Play* (Pl.73).

6.2.6 Studies from a garden party May 2001

A social gathering held in the pub's beer garden provided some studies in the social structure of the Pub's world. Segments taken from drawings and photographs of this event result in two colour monotypes, *Dajarra Beer Garden Party II* and *Beer*

Garden Party III. The use of colour is rare amongst this project's works but to capture the feeling of camaraderie that is contained with a community such as this it became necessary to use the swirl of warm colours to capture the ambience and affinity of the night.

This setting also provided the source material for *Observation.* This work was finally resolved through many stages of preliminary work to extract the nuances sought to describe visually the essence of friendship and respect for each other's way of life, a common attribute in this area. This is a study of two people sitting watching the party while commenting on various aspects of life. Both come from differing heritages but have a commonality in having their origins and core deeply imbedded in the west. The engagement of repeated light delineates and connects the figures while the placement of the relaxed figures contained within the entire picture space is to enhance the rapport between the two people.

6.2.7 Depictions of the street

Two works, *Morning on Mark Street* and *Dajarra Street Study* are of the street outside the pub and depict segments of the wider aspect of community life. Street scenes were often used as a backdrop by Drysdale, and occasionally by Nolan but usually as background for a static portrayal of people. However, these two works are more concerned with the continuous movement in the street. The street never seems to be empty, with people striding purposely or dawdling with small children in tow from the community hall or the pub at one end to the community store at the other end. Elements from drawings and photographs accrued over the field trips are referenced to create these two works suggesting this continually changing scene.

6.2.8 The domestic vision

The etching *Morning Light* is an exploration of the Pub's domestic domain. This work is a reminder that the ordinary domestic routine plays a role within the everyday reality of the outback. This work records a quiet daily occurrence when Vi, the housekeeper, does the day's ironing in the dining room while watching the activities in the street for entertainment. The clear and intense winter light coming through the doors and window in the room highlighting the figure has been a familiar and recurring sight for this artist over several years. It may be said that this work reflects, as in *Friday Afternoon,* this artist's enjoyment of depicting the dramatic use of light and dark within a peopled interior.

6.2.9 Legacy of these interpretations

These interpretative visual responses to the unique people of Dajarra have resulted from a correlation of investigative research, printmaking experimentation and conceptual consideration. In this project, this artist/researcher has endeavoured to offer an awareness of the contemporary rural person in an exhibition that conveys a narrative of unique individuality and the actuality of rural existence. The presentation of these works in the exhibition Dajarra, Pub and People is discussed in Chapter Seven.

6.3 Summary of Editioning and Techniques for Exhibited Works

The following table sets out plate numbers, dates, editioning details, print medium, drawing, etching methods, inks and supports for the body of work completed for the exhibition *Dajarra, Pub and People*.

Table 6.3

Plate No.	Title Date	Size	No. in Edition	Print Medium	Methods of application	Printing Inks	Paper/ Support
55	*The Policeman's Farewell* 2003	49 x 38 cm	15	Plate Lithograph	Litho crayon, and pencil rubbing ink	Graphic Chemicals 85% Sepia and 15% deep red	Magnani litho 1310 310gsm cotton-alpha

56	*Morning Sitting* 2003	49 x 36 cm	11	Stone Lithograph	Litho pencil, rubbing ink, crayon, gum highlights	Graphic Chemicals Crayon Black modified with no.4 varnish	Magnani litho 1310 310gsm cotton-alpha
57	*Observation* 2003	49 x 36 cm	8	Stone Lithograph	Litho pencil crayon, rubbing inks and gum highlights	Graphic Chemicals 50/50 crayon black roll up Black	Magnani litho 1310 310gsm cotton-alpha
58	*Of Time* 2003	49 x 36 cm	13	Stone Lithograph	Litho pencil, crayon, rubbing inks and gum highlights	Graphic Chemicals Crayon Black modified with no.4 varnish	Magnani litho 1310 310gsm cotton-alpha
59	*Bar Duty*	49 x 36.5 cm	15	Plate Lithograph	Litho washes and inks	Graphic chemicals Crayon Black modified with no.4 varnish	Magnani litho 1310 310gsm cotton-alpha
60	*Dajarra Afternoon* 2003	36 x 49 cm	12	Stone Lithograph	Litho pencil, crayon, rubbing inks and gum highlights	Graphic Chemicals Crayon Black modified with no.4 varnish	Magnani litho 1310 310gsm cotton-alpha
61	*Night Play* 2003	49 x 37 cm	15	Plate Lithograph	Litho crayon and gum highlights	Graphic Chemicals 50/50 crayon black roll up Black	Magnani litho 1310 310gsm cotton-alpha
62	*The Boreman* 2003	49 x 36 cm	7	Stone Lithograph	Litho crayon and gum highlights	Graphic Chemicals 50/50 crayon black roll up Black	Magnani Incisioni 650 310gsm
63	*To Be or Not to Be* 2003	43 x 29 cm	15	Intaglio	Deep line etching, salt aquatint	Charbonnel 55985 Black + 20% RSR	Magnani Incisioni 650 310gsm
64	*The Postmaster*	40 x 38cm	7	two Plate lithograph	Litho pencil and crayon	Graphic Chemicals Senefelders grey and Burnt Umber	Magnani Incisioni 650 310gsm
65	*The Joke* 2003	49x 38cm	11	Stone Lithograph	Water washes, tuche turps washes, rubbing inks and gum highlights	Graphic Chemicals Crayon Black modified with no.4 varnish	Magnani litho 1310 310gsm
66	*Different*	49 x	15	Plate	Water and	Graphic	Magnani

	Drummer 2003	38 cm		Lithograph	spirit washes, Turps washes crayon	Chemicals 50/50 crayon black roll up Black	litho 1310 310gsm
67	*The Westerner* 2003	50 x 36 cm	15	Plate Lithograph	Crayon, tuche, water and spirit washes. Tuche splatter	Graphic Chemicals Crayon Black modified with no.4 varnish	Magnani Incisioni 650 310gsm
68	*Fall of the Cards* 2003	49 x 35 cm	15	Plate Lithograph	Litho crayon and pencil, gum block outs	Graphic Chemicals Crayon Black modified with no.4 varnish	Magnani litho 1310 310gsm
69	*Friday Afternoon* 2003	49 x 35 cm	10	Stone Lithograph	Gum splatter, water washes, litho crayon and pencil	Graphic Chemicals 50/50 Crayon black roll up Black	Magnani Incisioni 650 310gsm
70	*Morning on Mark Street* 2003	42 x 31 cm	9	Stone Lithograph	Litho crayon, gum and tuche splatter	Graphic Chemicals Crayon Black modified with no.4 varnish	Magnani Incisioni 650 310gsm
71	*Morning light* 2003	33 x 44 cm	15	Intaglio	Deep line etching, deep aquatint on copper plate	Charbonnel Black 55985 + 20% RSR	Magnani Incisioni 650 310gsm
72	*Man of Many Tongues* 2003	55 x 43 cm	6	Stone Lithograph	Tuche, water washes	Graphic Chemicals 50/50 crayon black roll up Black	Magnani litho 1310 310gsm
73	*Study for Night Play* 2003	42.5 x 32 cm.	1	Monotype	Negative method. Rag wiping, cotton buds, turps, dry and wet brush	Graphic Chemicals Lithograph Editioning black 1796	Kent acid free 190gsm
74	*Dajarra Street Study* 2003	32 x 41.5 cm	1	Monotype	Negative Method. Rag wiping, cotton buds, turps, dry and wet brush	Graphic Chemicals Lithograph Editioning black 1796	Kent Acid free 190gsm
75	*Study for To be or Not to Be* 2003	42 x 32.5	1	Monotype	Negative method. Rag wiping, cotton buds, turps, dry	Graphic Chemicals Lithograph Editioning black 1796	Kent acid free 190gsm

					and wet brush		
76	*Study for the Boreman* 2003	56 x 43 cm	1	Monotype	Negative and positive method. Turps, cotton buds, rag wiping dry and wet brush	Lithographic Inks, blue, sienna	Somerset Textured 300gsm
77	*The Customer* 2003	43 x 32.5 cm	1	Monotype	Negative method. Rag wiping, cotton buds, turps, dry and wet brush	Lithographic Editioning Black 1796	Magnani Incisioni 650 310gsm
78	*Dajarra Beer Garden Party II* 2003	37 x 49 cm	1	Monotype	Negative and positive method. Rag wiping, turps cotton buds, dry and wet brush	Lithographic and relief inks, various colours	Magnani Incisioni 650 310gsm
79	*Dajarra Beer Garden Party III* 2003	37 x 49 cm	1	Monotype	Negative and positive method. Rag wiping, turps, cotton buds, dry and wet brush	Lithographic and relief inks, various colours	Magnani Incisioni 650 310gsm
80	*Man of Many Rivers* 2003	49 x 37 cm	1	Monotype	Negative method. Rag wiping, turps, cotton buds, dry and wet brush	Lithographic Editioning Black 1796	Magnani Incisioni 650 310gsm
81	*On the Line* 2003	9 x 7.5	10	Intaglio	Deep Line etching on copper plate	Charbonnel Sepia	Goat Skin Vellum
82	*The Farewell* 2003	8 x 6 cm	10	Intaglio	Line etching dark aquatint on copper plate	Charbonnel Sepia	Goat Skin Vellum
83	*Jeremy* 2003	7.5 x 6 cm	10	Intaglio	Line etching, aquatint on copper plate	Charbonnel Sepia	Goat skin Vellum
84	*The Play* 2003	8 x 6 cm	10	Intaglio Aquatint	Deep line etching / aquatint and light salt aquatint on copper plate	Charbonnel Sepia	Goat skin Vellum

Chapter Seven

Presenting the Exhibition

7.0 The Exhibition

The exhibition *Dajarra, Pub and People* produced by this artist researcher was installed at Pinnacles Gallery, Thuringowa from 29th May to 21st June 2003. Anne Lord, as this candidate's supervisor, was consulted though out the development of the work for the exhibition. With this association and knowledge of the work and in keeping with James Cook University's research goals, it was important to have Lord's involvement as curator for the exhibition.

7.1 Choice of Venue

The venue chosen for presenting the exhibition *Dajarra Pub and People* was Pinnacles Gallery, a regional gallery[59] of Queensland operated by the Thuringowa City Council. Pinnacles Gallery was chosen for the following reasons.

Pinnacles Gallery conforms to quality gallery standards with professional lighting and ample running space for the planned exhibition and offers professional support in mounting and manning exhibitions. The Gallery also offers financial support towards costs of printing invitations, didactics, catalogue, and mail out of invitations. There are no charges for the use of the space and no commission on sales. The Gallery arranges all advertising and press releases. Added to these considerations was a familiarity with the ambience of the space through exhibiting there previously. Other gallery spaces considered did not have the range of features that made this gallery suitable for a solo exhibition while financial considerations and the excellent gallery support made the choice a simple one. A submission was made to the Gallery Advisory Committee in mid 2001 and approval to exhibit was granted in late 2001.

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[59] Recognised as such by Regional Galleries Association of Queensland

7.2 Description of the Gallery

Gallery Staff consists of Director Robert Barton, Exhibitions Officer Anthony Edwards and Education Officer, Anne Donahue. The exhibition program is inclusive of touring exhibitions, but its main role is to support exhibitions by local artists and community educational art programs. According to the Gallery web site, the Gallery's role is defined as offering an "exciting and diverse exhibition program with a strong community focus" (Thuringowa City Council 2003:1). The Gallery Advisory Committee decides selection for the exhibition program.

Being part of the city council complex and situated next to the public library it offers easy public access. The main gallery has fifty running metres of hanging space. It has an unusual curved wall for the main running space (Pl.85). Other hanging areas are on the back wall and sidewall near the main entrance (Pl.86). Large glass areas and doors are opposite the main wall, with short runs of hanging rails on each side.

7.3 The Framing

In planning for the mounting and framing of the works in the exhibition the aim was to present a professional presentation of artwork that met gallery standards. Thus, this artist determined a design that would allow a quiet and subtle presentation of the artwork conveying only the essential qualities of the portrayals without the distraction of ornate matting and moulding.

This artist worked as a professional framer, in Mount Isa between 1992-1996 so attaining a professional and quality standard to the framing of the artwork was achievable. All frames were of quandong timber moulding with a selected box profile designed by this artist. These were cut from the raw timber lengths, limed washed, varnished and assembled. The artworks were then single-matted using acid free and archival Crescent 3297 mat board, a slightly warm white that complemented the work.

Hinging tapes and foam core backing met the same museum and archival conservation criteria. Three-millimetre perspex was used for glazing. The thirty works were thus uniformly framed with most being of similar size. This is a professional gallery standard used by national and state galleries. No other framing alternatives were considered.

The choice achieves three objectives. Firstly to allow the artwork to be the focus of the presentation without any distraction or discord from the framing, and secondly to present a uniform aesthetic feel to the layout of the exhibition. The third objective is to have a professional and archival standard of framing.

7.4 Invitations and Catalogue

Invitations and catalogue (Appendix 4) were designed in consultation with Adrian Cerutti, a graphic designer. The decision was made to produce these in black and white for artworks were mostly black and white. Using images from the project for both the invitation and cover design of the catalogue explained clearly the essence of the exhibition to the viewer. Approximately eight hundred double-sided invitations were printed, as Pinnacles Gallery has an extensive mailing list. Invitations were also mailed or given to friends and relatives living out of Townsville and James Cook University staff and students. A hundred and fifty catalogues were printed that included an artist's statement, list of works, brief curriculum vitae, curator's contribution from Anne Lord, several images of the works and acknowledgements. Pinnacles Gallery also set up a web page to promote the exhibition (Appendix 5).

7.5 Installation of the Exhibition

The exhibition was installed on Monday 26th May and opened to the public on the 27th. The presentation of the exhibition as a cohesive whole depended on an aesthetic placement of the works and so this placement was made in consultation with the director, Robert Barton. After overviewing the works as a whole, it was felt that the

main decisions to be made were those of relationships amongst the groups of works. Many of the works had been developed in series and this consideration was to play a deciding role in their placement. Reasons and examples of the main groupings are described below.

Amongst the key works of the project are three lithographs, *The Westerner*, *Morning Sitting* and *Of Time.* Although each work is an individual and distinct portrayal, it was conceptually developed to be part of a series to acknowledge the exceptional qualities and presence of the western woman. It was thus decided that this group presentation and their position as pivotal works necessitated a prominent setting separate to the main body of work and so were hung together on a short feature wall near the main entrance.

The other lithographic works were hung on the gallery's main curved wall and were hung in linked groupings (Pls.87-88). The Director and this artist/researcher decided to place the works, using the curve of the wall to suggest a narrative element to the works. Portrayals of card players, *Fall of the Cards* and *Night Play*, were placed together because of the similarity of pub activity. A small group of works depicting people in the Pub communicating in different ways were similarly grouped. These included *Different Drummer*, *The Joke*, *Observation, The Policeman's Farewell* and *Friday Afternoon.* Single portrayals were also grouped together.

Most of the monotypes, except *Man of Many Rivers*, were hung opposite the main curved wall. *Man of Many Rivers* was hung next to *Man of Many Tongues*, a lithograph, on the curved wall because of their related subject, the retired stockman Joe. Although differing in technical approach, hanging the two studies together was to give the distinctive nature of the character, described in Chapter Six, more emphasis.

Two coloured monotypes, *Dajarra Beer Garden II* and *Dajarra Beer Garden III*, were hung separately on a short wall because of their colourful disparity with the main body of monochromatic work. Five monotypes were mostly preparatory studies for the main body of works and were selected for two reasons. Firstly, to show some of the developmental stages for finalised works and secondly because these were also viable artworks that contributed to the overall sense of this exhibition.

Four miniature intaglio works, were given a small focal area on the back wall of the gallery. It was decided that these too needed to be hung as a suite separate to the main body of works for these were all small intimate studies of people of the pub printed on vellum. Signage for the exhibition was placed at the beginning of the curved wall, next to the gallery entrance from the library (Pl.89). A plan of the gallery is included in Appendix 6.

7.6 Further exhibitions of *Dajarra, Pub and People*

After demounting at Pinnacles Gallery, this exhibition then travelled to Mount Isa Civic Centre, exhibiting there from 31st June – 31st July 2003. This exhibition was by request of the director of the Mount Isa Civic Centre, Jean MacTaggert. A slightly revised version of the catalogue was presented at this show. Although, not personally attending, feedback through verbal responses indicated that it was well attended and well received. A newspaper article in the local paper, the *North West Star* briefly mentioned the show, but the reporter was more interested in reclaiming this artist as a local than reporting on the works. Five of the images, *The Westerner*, *Observation*, *Friday Afternoon*, *Different Drummer* and *Morning Sitting* were also exhibited as part of a group exhibition with Anne Lord and several Chinese artists in Lin Fen, Shanxi Province, North West China in October 2004 (Pl.90). Several other prints from the project were also taken as cultural exchanges during this exhibition.

7.7 Reviews and Artist talk

A review, *Dajarra dreaming* written by Mandy Wildeheart appeared in *The Townsville Bulletin,* 6th June 2003 (Appendix 7). A further review *Dajarra interpretations of rural identity* written by Anne Lord appeared in *Imprint* Spring Volume 38 (Appendix 8). This artist gave two artist talks at Pinnacles Gallery, outlining the works' processes and concepts during the course of the exhibition. One talk, held on Tuesday 3rd June 2003, was specifically for TAFE Diploma of Visual Art students. This was followed by a talk for the public on Friday 6th June 2003.

7.8 Responses to the exhibition

In evaluating public acknowledgement of the exhibition *Dajarra, Pub and People* responses through published reviews, a review of artist's talks and visitor's comments will help to give an objective overview. Wildeheart, in her review stated that the imagery was strong and expressive, completely capturing the essence of rural character. Wildeheart also stated that the work showed "careful consideration of tone, composition and expressive mark making" (Wildeheart 2003:26). Lord's review noted this body of work "provided a new visual identity to people from the outback...O'Sullivan's characters approach the epitome of Australian bush icons" (Lord 2003:9) This review also recognised the contribution of the historical and ideological research towards the aims of the exhibition.

The floor talks gave opportunities to explain purposes of conceptual development, to elaborate on processes and history of fine art printmaking and to give this artist some direct insight on viewers' perceptions of the works. As the talks were directed to distinct groups of people the orientation of questions and comments were quite different. For example, fine art students and tutors from the TAFE College were very interested in technical and conceptual processes used and the work's relationship to

the history of rural figuration. Favourable comment was made on the primary use of monochromatic imagery, with a general feeling that it underpinned the overall impact of the main body of works. This was noted too by the Galley Director who stated the exhibition would be very suitable to tour. Those who came to the public floor talk were less investigative in their enquiries, preferring to hear the stories behind each of the works, though the process of lithography intrigued quite a few.

Of interest are appraisals by people attending the floor talks, comments in the visitors' book and from personal conversations with those visiting *Dajarra, Pub and People.* Most interpretations and perceptions of the body of work seemed to be related to peoples' backgrounds. Those who originated from western areas stated that the works captured the ambience of the outback character and place or brought back memories of bush communities. There also seemed to be a degree of appreciation that the exhibition had considered the significance of outback people for example, Ralph Wanchap's comment that this artist/researcher had "got it right". Similar comments came from verbal reports on comments made by those who visited the exhibition in Mount Isa, especially those from Dajarra. People from urban backgrounds seem to view the show as depictions of character, or as one commentator put it "humanness". This of course in part is what this artist/ researcher sought to express in displaying these works. The concept was built on an underlying reality of character to encapsulate human qualities and the nature of existence shaped by a particular environment.

Chapter Eight

Reflection and Conclusion: The Rural Figure in Australian Art

8.0 The Research: Considerations and Approaches

This study has considered the rural figurative genre in two ways. Firstly, by theoretical research to establish the complexity of its history, place and significance within Australian art and secondly as a practical study to present contemporary visualisations of the rural figure. Both interact in acknowledging the rural figurative vision and the importance of its representation in defining aspects of Australian identity.

In addressing the aims of the research the discourse has been organised through a unifying continuum informed by the art itself, relevant literature and approaches governed by the significant historical context of society combined with influential art movements. The genre, in all its diversity, has been interlocked with changing aspects of Australian society since its inception and this has been a major focus of the study.

In turn, the practical studies visualising segments of contemporary Australian bush society has also been informed by the research in terms of new conceptual approaches. The research, underpinned by the history of the genre's development, verifies the stature and continuation of its ideology and position in Australian art. This has resulted in a defining of the genre's actuality and has provided an authentic basis for this artist/researcher's particular visual interpretations.

8.1 Reflections on the Representation of the Rural Identity

8.1.1 The unique rural identity

This thesis has as its starting point the emergence of a number of artists, working in Australia who sought to establish an Australian school of fine art in the 1880s. These artists made much use of the rural figure sourced directly from what was seen to be a way of life unique to Australia. Portraying this Australian rural uniqueness was

regarded as an important tool in separating the subject matter of Australian art from its European roots and thus establishing its authenticity within Australian and European eyes. This representation was quickly coupled with emerging nationalistic ideals that referenced the perceived virtues of the bush people, as model for nation. Chapter Two discussed in depth reasons for the emergence of this perception and the following transference of the heroic bush type to idealised portrayals of the Australian type fighting in the First World War. Using the outback environment as backdrop to the nobility of human activities has proved a popular combination contributing towards a diverse selection of characters whether noble pioneer, luckless explorer, mythological being, outlaw or political and social protester. Artists have pursued this ideology of independence, intrepidness or nobleness through unlimited convolutions of meaning and translations to produce a consistency of characterisation through the genre.

8.1.2 The heroic rural figure

The depiction of the rural person as heroic, albeit in differing guises and treatment has extended from Robert's noble rural workers and McCubbin's stalwart pioneers, thence Drysdale's "towers" to Moffatt's cultural victims. Nolan took Ned Kelly and re-enforced his status of legendary hero, while Boyd brought Aboriginals into heroic mould with his doomed Bridegroom battling against racial bigotry. Tucker's doughty rural exemplars took on the attributes of the enduring geology of the Australian outback while Fulbrook added worthiness and respect to his portrayal of Aboriginals. Onus and Moffatt used the rural heroic directions of earlier artists as a political tool to re-invent the Australian identity while addressing Aboriginal issues and inequalities. The intrepid nature of these characterisations has remained a strong feature of the genre in all its manifestations. Apart from Kelly and his gang and early explorers, artists generally have represented anonymous or unpretentious people of the bush with the

focus placed on what they are or represent. Yet, this genre has supplied the best-known iconic images of Australian identity.

8.1.3 Iconic identification

It was thus almost inevitable that many works in the genre would come to be regarded as iconic identifications of nation, given this nation's sustained veneration of the bush archetype and its perceived values. Political nuances of the genre have also been evident throughout the genre's history with its association with nationalistic claims, war propaganda visions and protests against the status quo. These combined factors have determined that the genre would acquire an iconic status almost from its inception. Although not leaders in claiming a distinct Australian identity in the 1880s Roberts, Ashton and McCubbin and other leading artists certainly responded to and furthered this cultural ideology through their works. These artists' concerns at the time lay more with creating an Australian school of fine art using subject matter that pertained only to Australia. While embracing and developing the new techniques from Europe, these artists considered the rural figure to be a very useful subject to establishing credibility as definably Australian fine artists. The romanticised versions of bush life were seen to be demonstrably Australian, appealing more to popular taste than versions of town life.

Arguably, these early artist's contributions to rising national sentiment with their visual forms of symbolic identification partly fulfilled the colonial need to assert the Australian uniqueness and independence of character to the outer world. This could also be seen as a form of self-assurance that its short history could sustain such a claim. It may be further argued that this symbolic need of self assertion was to continue through much of the twentieth century, albeit in greatly differing modes of treatment, and explain in part why the imagery of Nolan and Drysdale and, to a lessor extent, Boyd and

Tucker was readily accepted as iconic. Less sentimental in approach than their predecessors, their work continued to project a shared association with the rural sector that expressed Australia's subliminal vision of its heritage and character.

Drysdale, in particular, humanised the outback with iconic images of earthy and unpretentious individuals, an approach that continued to be characteristic of the legendary unique Australian bush character. Tucker's rough-hewn outback people were often constructed from the geology of the land itself giving rise to a total identification with the land. However, of all the iconic signifiers in the genre's history relating to Australian identity Nolan's development of the iconic Kelly's helmet, with its connation of anti-hero status and convict ethos has become the most outstanding in the Australian psyche. This researcher /artist considers that, given its constant application as symbol of Australia, it could almost claim to be to be the unofficial coat of arms. The recurrent and widely used motif influences mass media and advertising graphics in a readily identifiable stamp of nation. An example of its iconic connection to Australia's image is seen in the National Library of Australia's web site for *Picture Australia*, an image bank of the Australian way of life. Coming to life in the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics 2000 this particular icon has become a distillation of the intricate network of historical legends and myths, tenacious and unsung battling settlers, independence, convict ethos, egalitarian mateship, freethinking and anti-authoritarian elements that all relate to popular perceptions of the make up of the Australian individuality.

This time honoured romance with bush figuration and all it represented within Australian art has always provided a decodable visualisation of nation that has been almost unhesitatingly accepted. What is less accepted is its place as a separate entity in Australian art and the role it has played in the historical maturing of Australian art. The

genre while being a symbolic link to the nations social and cultural changes is also linked to periods of crucial transformation in Australian art history.

8.2 The Position and Importance of the Rural Figurative Genre: Conclusions

This research has discussed in depth the significant roles that artists working in and developing the rural figurative genre through experimental styles and techniques have had in the history of Australian art. Artists working in the genre, such as Roberts, Nolan, Tucker, Fullbrook and Moffatt have been at the forefront of innovative or radical practice, all being deeply concerned with bringing their own conceptual ideologies and fresh and exciting interpretations to that of the rural presence. As can be seen through their works discussed in the research chapters, most of these artists were also significant in adapting many of the overseas art trends in their work, from Impressionism to Post-modernism to make these peculiarly Australian in concept and expression. Paradoxically throughout this history, each new group of artists seeking an acceptance of their experimental approaches were often in conflict with the currently entrenched mainstream art, which in turn had previously developed through similar clashes with earlier traditional practices. Nevertheless, each step further imbedded the rural figurative genre as part of the development of Australian art.

This research, through the investigation of art and artists, has defined and clarified the position of a rural figurative genre in Australian art. Although, as discussed in depth in Chapters One and Five, the genre remains largely unrecognised as such in critical writings, this thesis has clearly outlined the role of the genre in Australian art as being separate to the great Australian landscape tradition of art. Most art historians and theorists such as Burn, Willis, Sayers and Smith have positioned most of the genre's prominent works, i.e. Nolan's Kelly series or Drysdale's outback people to be within this tradition although some writers have named such works as figured landscapes. Yet,

as may be noted throughout the research, these writers quite happily debated and theorised about the complexities, implications, intentions, history and importance of art depicting human presences in the bush. This artist/researcher has pointed out that artists such as Drysdale and Roberts were quite adamant that their rural figurative work focussed on the human presence in the bush environment. Clark[60] (1961) in his catalogue essay for an exhibition by Australian artists in 1961 made reference to this use of land as backdrop by Australian artists, stating "the scenery is not painted for its own sake, but as the background of a legend and a reflection of human values" (Clark 1961:4).

8. 3 Future Directions of the Genre

In today's contemporary art, the initial colonial impetus within the tenets of national identity for the development of the rural figurative genre is now questioned and devalued but in its place a new wave of meaning occurred between 1980 to the present. Discussed in Chapter Four, artists like Moffatt, Yang and others have used the genre to critically question old traditions and to establish new meanings and implications of identities, and in doing so assigned a new importance to its role. This direction may yet continue in similar ways with further influential commentary on national acceptance of otherness of identity. Future and new directions that artists will take the genre to are open to conjecture. However, given that the genre's history of reflecting change in society and culture while implementing experimental art practices, the genre will continue to be important within Australian art.

8.4 Outcomes of the Research

This research into the rural figurative genre has developed a narrative for understanding an art form that has offered visual criteria for cultural identity and a self

[60] Sir Kenneth Clark: noted British Art Historian and Theorist.

assurance of an Australian identity embedded within perceptions of a unique egalitarian rural history. The discourse has proffered insights into the genre's development since its genesis and concludes that, while diverse in interpretations, the thematic representation of the rural figure and way of life, has through its history, mirrored the society, history, myths and culture of a maturing nation. Thus, the research has established that, in creating a synthesis of reality, political comment and iconic legends, artists have produced a complex imagery that is richly diverse in form and concept. This research has also concluded, through the argument for recognition and position, that there is an extant rural figurative genre, which has provided some of the most memorable and important works in the structure of Australian art.

8.5 The Case Study – Conclusions

This artist/researcher has endeavoured to contribute to this visual pageant of the rural figurative genre through creating a visual awareness of the rural person sourced from interpretations of the people of Dajarra in a major body of work. This work has addressed and reasserted the time-honoured delineation of the rural person through the medium of fine art printmaking. This has resulted in a definitive set of images that reflects on and illuminates the actuality of the contemporary rural person. A principal outcome of this visual testimony was the mounting of the work in the exhibition *Dajarra, Pub and People* in Thuringowa and Mount Isa.

Within this study, this researcher presents the face of contemporary rural Australia to give the substantiality and reality of rural society today. The 'reflection of human values' was a major consideration in developing this body of work that responds to and develops the praxis of the rural figurative genre. The project *Dajarra, Pub and People* showcased people associated with the Dajarra pub, but it also represented more than just personification of bush characters. This visual research process focussed on a

contemporary rural identity and culture that may be seen by urban-based modern society to be slipping into obscurity. Images of the outback character are more stereotyped or politicised than accurate in many contemporary visualisations of rural persona.

The aims for this project, discussed in Chapter Five, considered these factors through the development of the works, with this artist/researcher seeking to continue the portrayal of the rural figurative genre in Australian art by recording the identity and the importance of rural people and their daily lives. Thus, in conclusion, this practical research thus presented the viewer a defining of this significance and character. This is expressed through this artist's personal interpretations of rural identity, an objective elucidation that is determined by actuality of character rather than myth. This perhaps follows the calls by Ashton in 1889 for artists to depict the life of the day around them to establish a historical portrayal of factual Australia for future generations.

Plate 1 **Charles Bayliss *Interior of Woodshed* c.1880**
Photograph 12.8cm x18.3 cm from the album *Collection of a Country Property, NSW Shearing Sheds* c.1890-97.
Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales

Plate 2 **Tom Roberts *The Golden Fleece Shearing at Newstead* 1894**
Oil on Canvas 104 X 158.7cm
Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales

Plate 3 **Julian Ashton *The Prospector* 1889**
Oil on Canvas on Board 213.4 X 116.9 cm
Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales

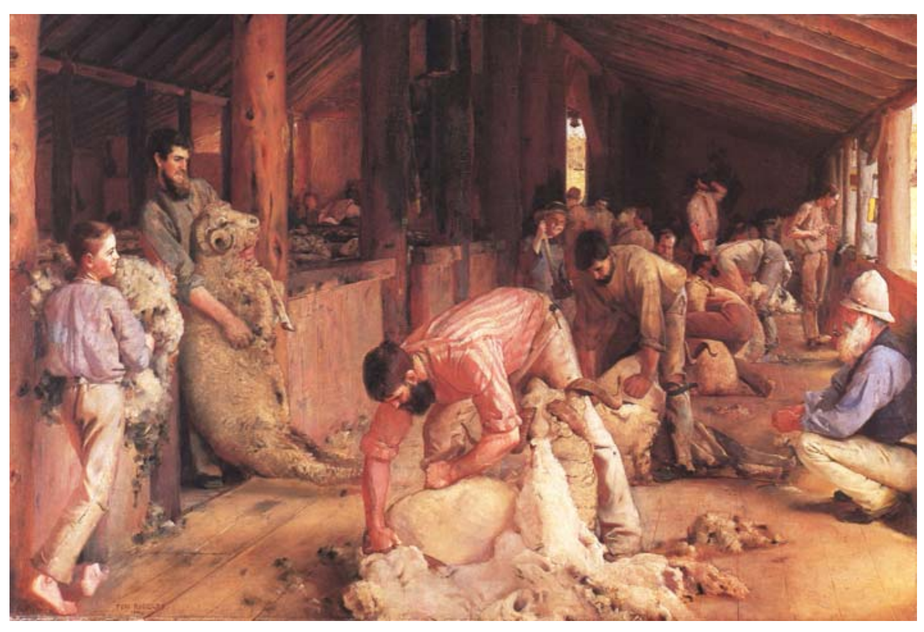


Plate 4 **Tom Roberts *Shearing the Rams* 1888-1890**
Oil on canvas on composition board 122.
Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria

Plate 5 **Frank Mahony *Rounding up a Straggler* 1889**
Oil on canvas 91.5 x 127cm
Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales

Plate 6 **John Longstaff *Breaking the News* 1887**
Oil on canvas 109.7 X 153.8 cm
Collection of the Art Gallery of Western Australia

Plate 7 **Aby Alston *Flood Sufferings* 1890**
Oil on canvas 110 x 153.5 cm
Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria

Plate 8 **Frederick McCubbin *The Pioneer* 1904**
Oil on canvas (triptych) 223.5 x 86.cm, 224 X 122.5 cm,
223.5 x 85.7 cm
Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria

Plate 9 **Frederick McCubbin *A Bush Burial* 1890**
Oil on canvas 122.5 x 224.5 cm
Collection of Geelong Art Gallery

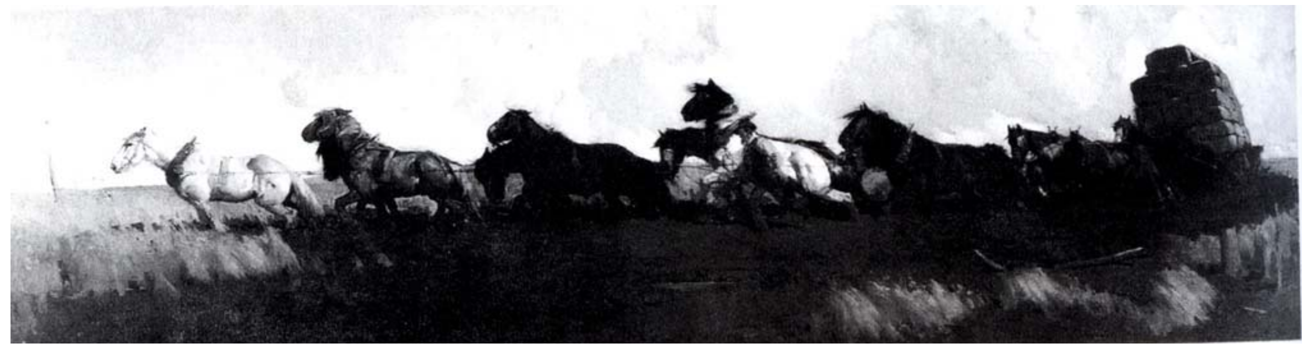


Plate 10 **George Lambert *Across the Black Soil Plains* 1899**
Oil on canvas 91.6 x 305.5cm
Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wale

Plate 11 **H. Septimus Power** ***Third Ypres, 31 July 1917:Taking the Guns through*** **1919**
Oil on canvas 123.2 X 245.1 cm
Collection of the Australian War Memorial

Plate 12 **George Lambert** ***A Sergeant of the Light Horse*** **1920**
Oil on canvas 77.0 x 62.0 cm
Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria

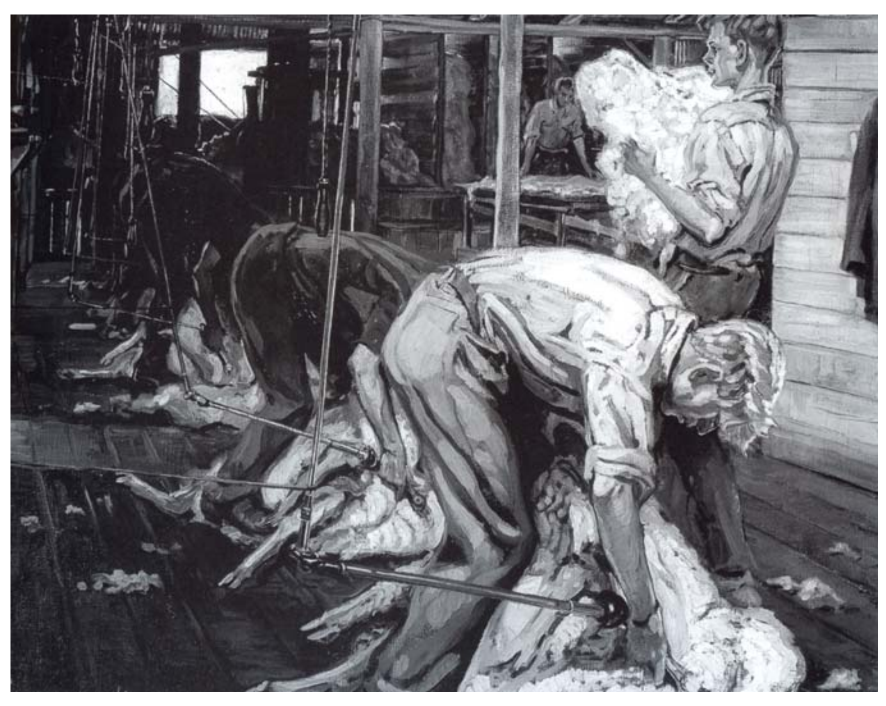


Plate 13 **Hilda Rix-Nicholas *The Shearers* 1922**
Oil on canvas 81 x 99cm
Collection of Foster's Brewing Group

Plate 14 **George Lambert *Weighing the Fleece* 1921**
Oil on canvas 71.7 X 91.8cm

Collection of the

N

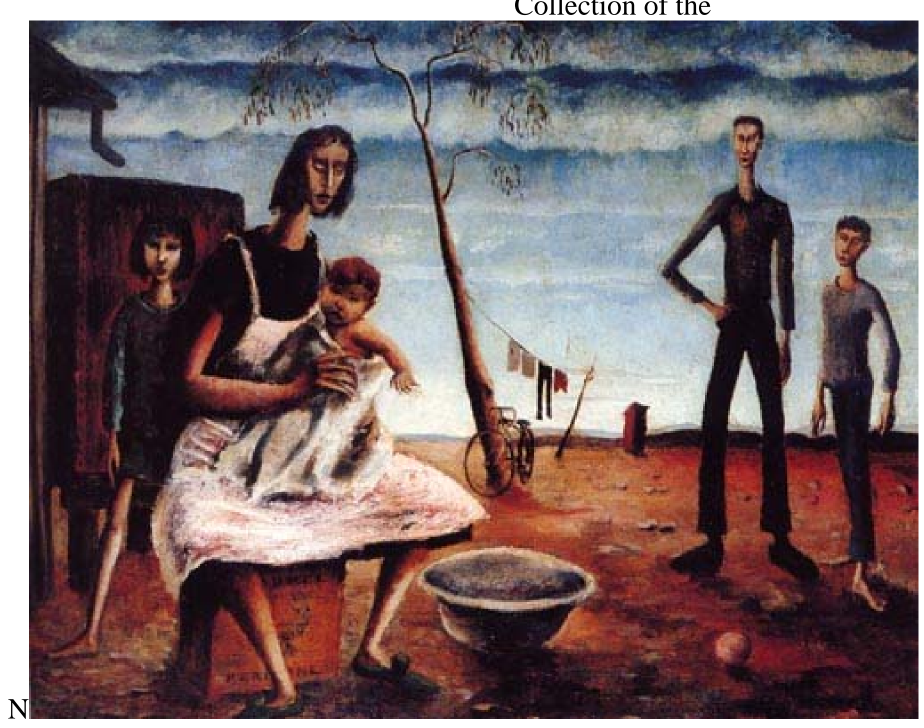


Plate 15 **Russell Drysdale *Sunday Evening* 1941**
Oil on asbestos cement sheet 60.0 X 76 cm
Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales

Plate 16 **Russell Drysdale *The Drover's Wife* 1949**
Oil on canvas 51.3 x 61.5 cm

Collection of the National Gallery of Australia

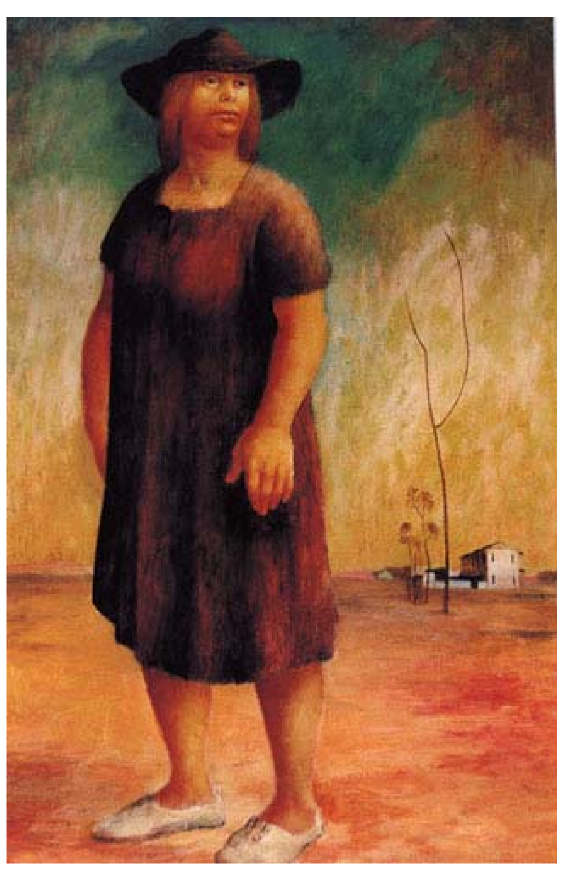


Plate 17 **Russell Drysdale *Woman in Landscape* 1949**
Oil on canvas on composition board 101 x 66.3 cm
Collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia

Plate 18 **Russell Drysdale *George Ross of Mullengandra* 1950**
Oil on canvas 71.1 x 91.5 cm
Private collection

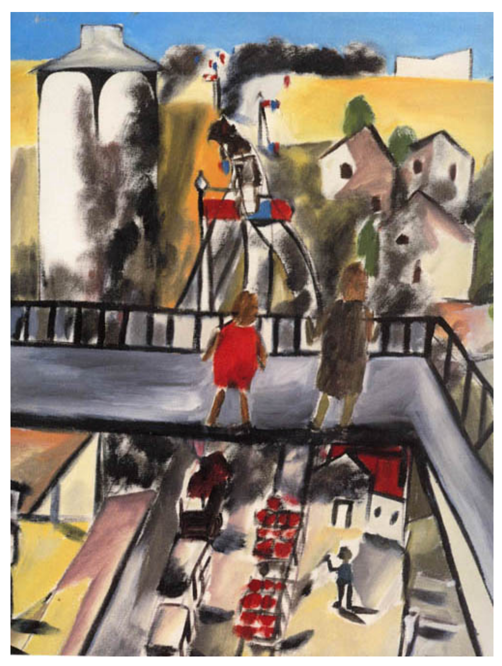


Plate 19 **Sidney Nolan *Railway Yards, Dimboola* 1943**
Ripolin enamel on canvas 77 x 64 cm
Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria

Plate 20 **Sidney Nolan *Ned Kelly* 1946**
Enamel on composition board 90.8 X 121.5 cm
Collection of the National Gallery of Australia

Plate 21 **Sidney Nolan *Burke and Wills Leaving Melbourne* 1950**
Oil and enamel on composition board 122 x 151 cm
Private collection Melbourne

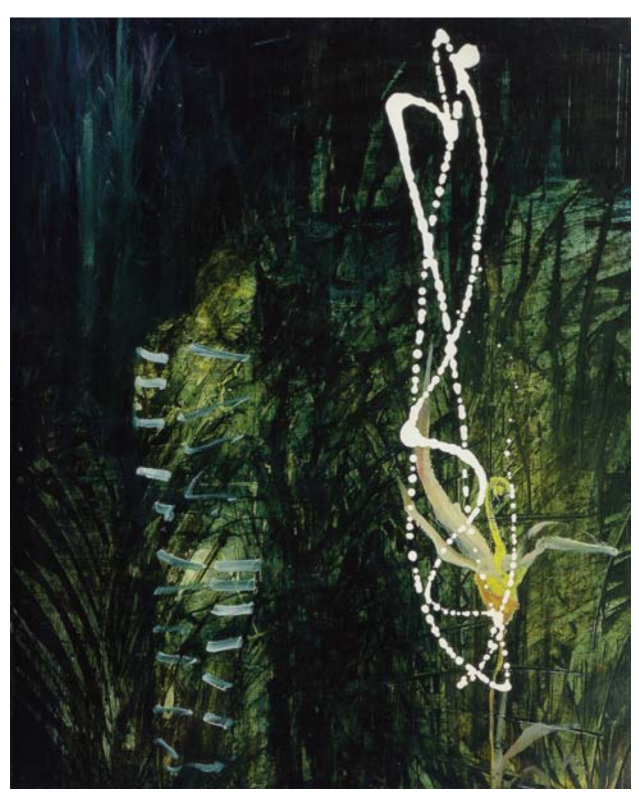


Plate 22 **Sidney Nolan *Convict in Swamp* 1958**
Polyvinyl acetate on composition board 152.5 x 125 cm

Private collection

Plate 23 **Arthur Boyd *The Expulsion* 1947-8**
Oil, tempura on composition board 101.6 x 122 cm
Collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales

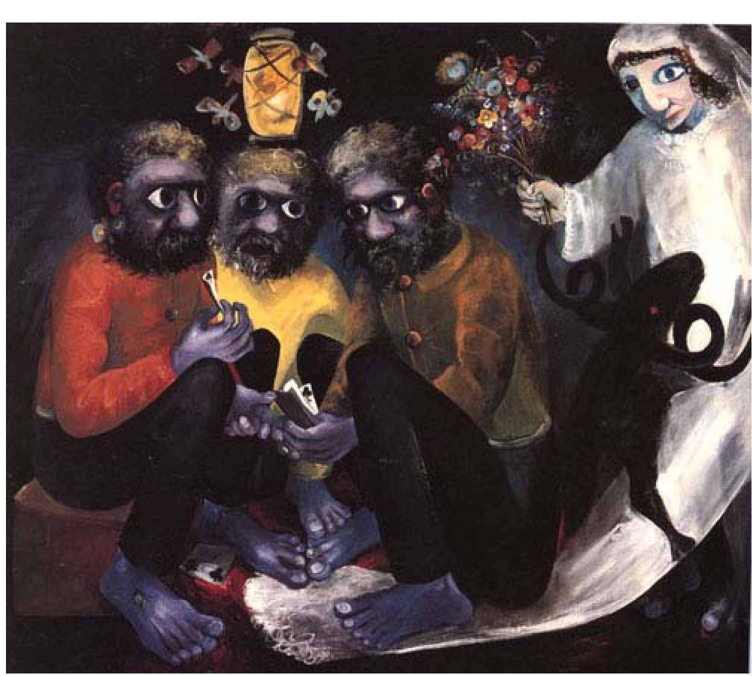


Plate 24 **Arthur Boyd *Shearers Playing for a Bride* 1957**
Oil and tempura on canvas 149.9 x 175.3 cm
Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria

Plate 25 **Arthur Boyd *Persecuted Lovers* 1957-8**
Oil and tempura on composition board 137.2 X 182.9 cm
Collection of the Art Galley of South Australia

Plate 26 **Arthur Boyd *Mourning Bride* 1957-8**
Oil and tempura on composition board 132 X 167.5 cm
Private collection

Plate 27 **Albert Tucker *Pilate* 1952**
Oil on canvas 29 x 361/4
Private collection

Plate 28 **Albert Tucker *Antipodean Head* 1958**
Synthetic polymer paint and sand on composition board 122 x 87.5 cm
Collection of the National Gallery of Australia

Plate 29 **Albert Tucker *King Kelly and His Legions* 1957**
P.V.A oil and collage on hardboard 96.5 x 129 cm
Collection of Barbara Tucker

Plate 30 **Albert Tucker *Explorer* 1958**
P.V.A on hardboard 80 x 32 in
No details available for whereabouts

Plate 31 **Sam Fulbrook** ***Death in the Afternoon*** **1961**
Oil on canvas 63.7 x 76.6 cm
Collection of the Queensland Art Gallery

Plate 32 **Sam Fullbrook** ***The Citizens*** **1962**

Oil on canvas 91.5 x 84 cm

Private collection

Plate 33 **Sam Fullbrook *Old man with cod* 1963**
Oil on canvas 68.8 x50.8 cm
Collection of the Northern Territory Art Gallery

Plate 34 **Sam Fullbrook *Luncheon on the Grass* 1962-4**
Oil on canvas 68.5 x 101.5 cm
Private collection

Plate 35 **Sam Fullbrook The *head stockman* 1957-60**
Oil on canvas 97 x 70 cm
Collection of the National Gallery of Australia

Plate 36 **Lin Onus *Premonition* 1979-82**
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 161 x 74.5 cm
Collection of the Aborigines Advancement League, Melbourne

Plate 37 **Lin Onus *Dreams in the garden of allegation* 1979-82**
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 161 x 74.5 cm
Collection of the Aborigines Advancement League, Melbourne

Plate 38 **Lin Onus *Final Journey*1979-82**
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 161 x 74.5 cm
Collection of the Aborigines Advancement League, Melbourne

Plate 39 **Lin Onus *Tegg's legacy* 1979-82**
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 161 x 74.5 cm
Collection of the Aborigines Advancement League,

Plate 40 **Lin Onus *In hiding* 1979-82**
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas 161 x 74.5 cm
Collection of the Aborigines Advancement League, Melbourne

Plate 41 **Tracey Moffatt *Up in the Sky 1* 1997**
From series of 25 offset prints 61 x 76 cm
Edition of 60

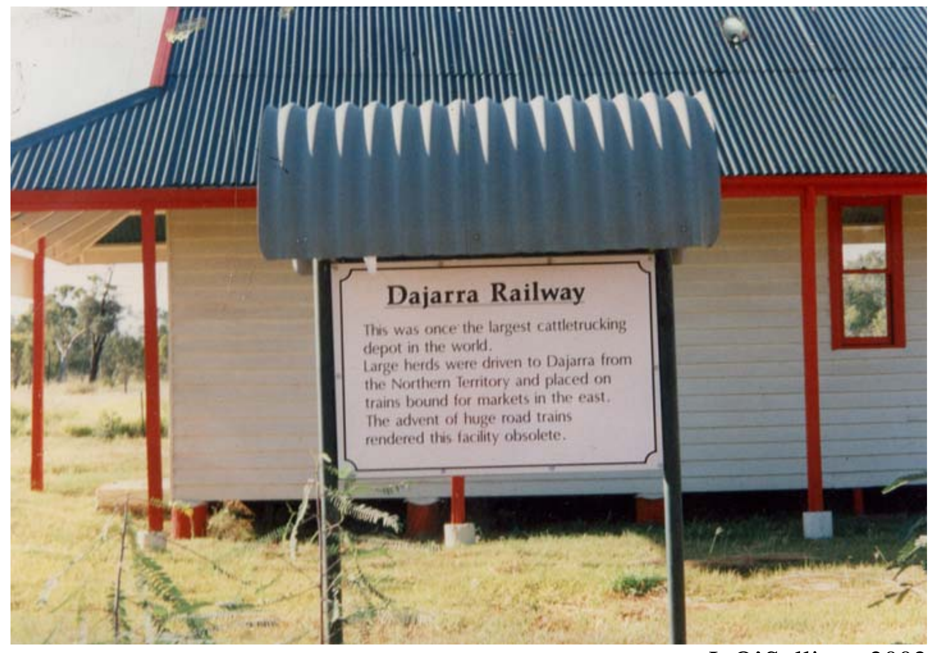
Plate 42 **Tracey Moffat *Night Cries* 1989**
Still from seventeen minute film

Plate 43 **Tracey Moffatt *Something More 1* 1989**
Edition of 30. From series of nine photographs
Cibachrome photograph 100 x 130 cm

Plate 44 **Russell Drysdale *Basketball at Broome* 1958**
Oil on canvas 73.6 X124.5
Collection of the Sussan Corporation

Plate 45 **Tracey Moffatt** ***Up in the Sky 9*** **1997**
From series of 25 offset prints 61 x 76 cm
Edition of 60

Plate 46 **Hou Leong** ***AnAustralian (Crocodile Dundee)*** **1994**
Digital photograph 70 x 50 .cm
Collection of the artist



J. O'Sullivan 2002

Plate 47 ***Restored Railway Station, Dajarra***

J. O'Sullivan 2002

Plate 48 ***Dajarra Pub Mark Street Dajarra***

J. O'Sullivan 2001

Plate 49 *Sandy and Vi in Bar, Dajarra Pub*

J. O'Sullivan 2002

Plate 50 *Pub Verandah Dajarra*

J. O'Sullivan 2002

Plate 51 ***Beer Garden, Dajarra Pub***

J. O'Sullivan 2001

Plate 52 **Morning Tea, Dajarra Pub**

Plate 53 **J. O'Sullivan *The Temporary Cook* 2002**
Lithograph Edition of 9
53 x 37.5 cm

Plate 54 **J. O'Sullivan *The Gathering* 2002**
Lithograph Edition of 6
36.5 x 46 cm

Plate 55 **J. O'Sullivan *The Policeman's Farewell* 2003**
Lithograph 49 x 38 cm
Edition of 15

Plate 56 **J. O'Sullivan *Morning Sitting* 2003**
Lithograph 49 x 36 cm
Edition of 11

Plate 57

J. O'Sullivan *Observation* 2003
Lithograph 49 x 36 cm
Edition of 8

Plate 58

J. O'Sullivan *Of Time* 2003
Lithograph 49 x 36 cm
Edition of 13

Plate 59 **J. O'Sullivan *Bar Duty* 2003**
Lithograph 49 x 36 cm
Edition of 15

Plate 60 **J. O'Sullivan *Dajarra Afternoon* 2003**
Lithograph 36 x 49 cm
Edition of 12

Plate 61

J. O'Sullivan *Night Play* 2003
Lithograph 49 x 37 cm
Edition of 15

Plate 62

J. O'Sullivan *The Boreman* 2003
Lithograph 49 x 36 cm
Edition of 7

Plate 63 **J. O'Sullivan *To Be or Not to Be* 2003**
Etching/aquatint 43 x 29 cm
Edition of 15

Plate 64 **J. O'Sullivan *The Postmaster* 2003**
Lithograph 40 x 38 cm
Edition of 7

Plate 65 **J. O'Sullivan *The Joke* 2003**
Lithograph 49 x 38 cm
Edition of 11

Plate 66 **J. O'Sullivan *Different Drummer* 2003**
Lithograph 49 x 38 cm
Edition of 15

Plate 67 **J. O'Sullivan *The Westerner* 2003**
Lithograph 50 x 38 cm
Edition of 15

Plate 68 **J. O'Sullivan *Fall of the Cards* 2003**
Lithograph 49 x 35 cm
Edition of 15

Plate 69 **J. O'Sullivan *Friday Afternoon* 2003**
Lithograph 49 x 35 cm
Edition of 10

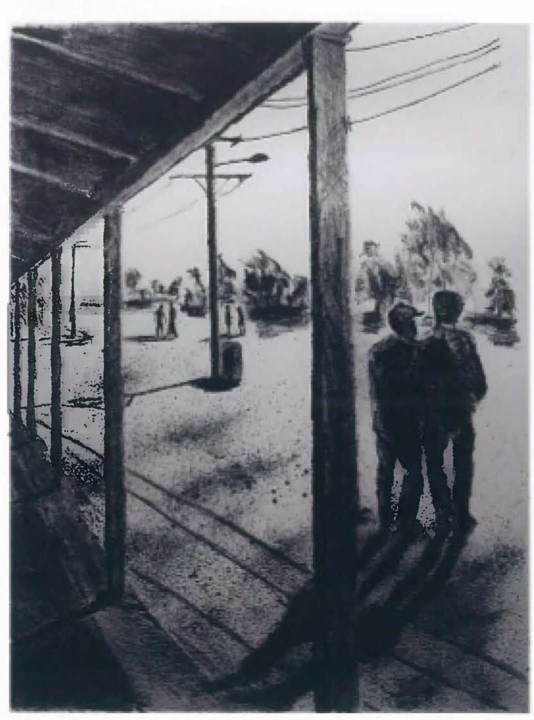


Plate 70 **J. O'Sullivan *Morning on Mark Street* 2003**
Lithograph 42 x 31 cm
Edition of 9

Plate 71 **J. O'Sullivan *Morning Light* 2003**
Etching/Aquatint 33 x 44 cm
Edition of 15

Plate 72 **J. O'Sullivan *Man of Many Tongues* 2003**
Lithograph 55 x 43 cm
Edition of 6

Plate 73 **J. O'Sullivan *Study for Night Play* 2003**
Monotype 42.5 x 32 cm

Plate 74 **J. O'Sullivan *Dajarra Street Study* 2003**
Monotype 32 x 41 cm

Plate 75 **J. O'Sullivan *Study for To Be or Not to Be* 2003**
Monotype 42 x 32.5 cm

Plate 76 **J. O'Sullivan *Study for the Boreman* 2003**
Monotype 56 x 43 cm

Plate 77 **J. O'Sullivan *The Customer* 2003**
Monotype 43 x 32 5

Plate 78 **J. O'Sullivan *Dajarra Beer Garden II* 2003**
Monotype 37 x 49 cm

Plate 79 **J. O'Sullivan *Dajarra Beer Garden III* 2003**
Monotype 37 x 49 cm

Plate 80 **J. O'Sullivan *Man of Many Rivers* 2003**
Monotype 49 x 37 cm

Plate 81 **J. O'Sullivan *On the Line* 2003**
Etching 9 x 7.5 cm
Edition of 10

Plate 82 **J. O'Sullivan *The Farewell* 2003**
Etching 8 x 6 cm
Edition of 10

Plate 83 **J. O'Sullivan *Jeremy* 2003**
Etching/aquatint 7.5 x 6 cm
Edition of 10

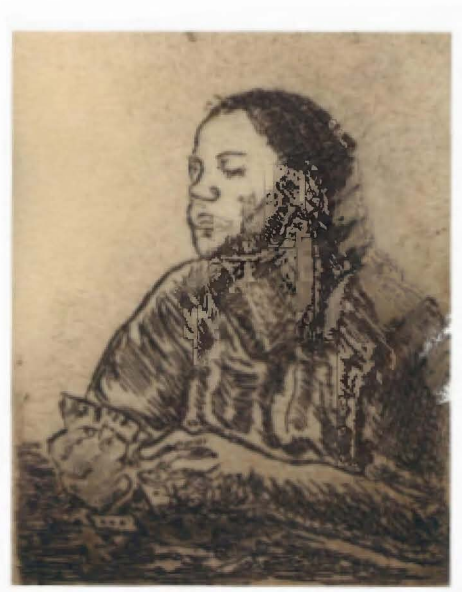


Plate 84 **J. O'Sullivan *The Play* 2003**
Etching/aquatint 8 x 6 cm
Edition of 10

J. O'Sullivan 2002

Plate 85 **Exhibition on curved wall Pinnacles Gallery**

J. O'Sullivan 2002

Plate 86 **Exhibition Pinnacles Gallery: Interior and Main Entrance**

J. O'Sullivan 2001

Plate 87 **Gallery view *Dajarra Pub and People***

J. O'Sullivan 2002

Plate 88 **Gallery View *Dajarra Pub and People***

H. Magnon 2003

Plate 89 **Exhibition Signage Pinnacles Gallery**

J. O'Sullivan 2003

Plate 90 **Work in Group Exhibition Lin Fen China**

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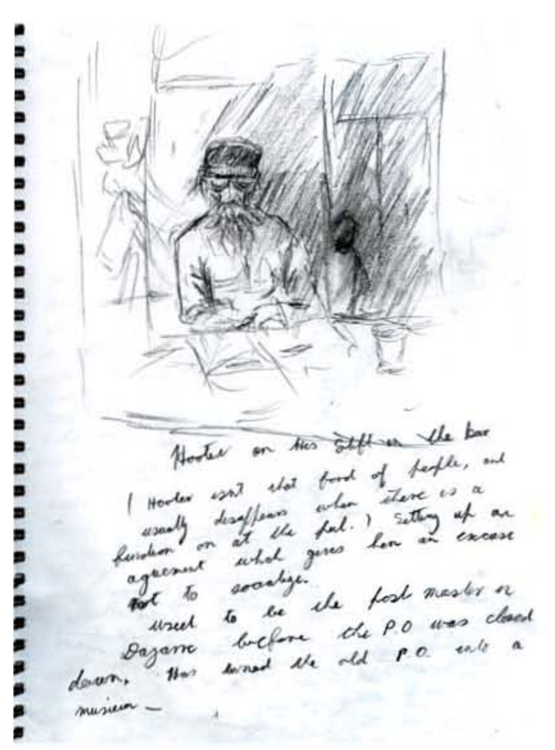
Appendix One

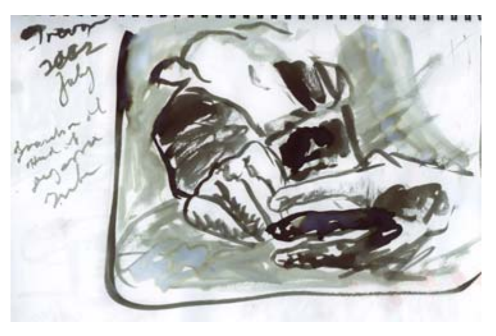
Map North West Queensland

North West Queensland
State Library of Queensland
http://www.pictureqld.slq.qld.gov.au/browse_nthwest.html

Appendix Two

Examples of Journal Notes and Sketches





LIZZIE

Appendix Three

Ad Stijnman's Email on Vellum Process

From: [redacted]

Date: Fri Mar 7, 2003 11:36 am

Subject: Re: [PrintAustralia] Re: old fashioned print making

Jill,
I printed etchings on sheep, pig and calf parchment. It is easy, looks beautiful and works like this:
- make a sandwich of dampened and dry (1 wet, 1 dry, 1 wet, 1 dry, etc. sheets of intaglio printing paper; the paper should be larger than the sheets of parchment
- let stand for one or two days wrapped in plastic sheet with a flat weight on top (glass-, zinc plates, books)
- between 3-6 hours before printing insert the parchment in between the paper sheet, one sheet of parchment between two sheets of paper
- plastic and weight back in position
- ink and wipe your plate, place on the bed of the press
- place parchment on top of the inked plate, run through the press as usual;
it could be that the pressure of your press is too high, as you need a little less pressure, so release a little
- place the printed parchment face up on a piece of plywood or thick cardboard
- pin the parchment to the plywood or board with stainless steel pushpins all around, every inch or so, can be done about 1 mm from the edge (parchment is strong stuff)
- let dry thoroughly overnight, or as long as the ink needs
- remove the pins, cut off the pinned edge
- keep the print in a pile, as a light weight prevents the parchment from curling
- the parchment will curl when kept in damp surroundings
- to flatten it, carefully dampen it as described before, place between
blotters, refresh these until the parchment is fully dried.

This technique is suited for line etching, coarse aquatint, dry point. My
experiences with mezzotint and fine aquatint are not so good, in the sense
that the parchment does take less ink than paper. Raising the nap, as described below, may have a certain effect. Mind that parchment - if not split - has a flesh and a hair side. The hair side is smooth and may be greasy, the flesh side has a nap. Try both sides and judge the

differences.
Pig is coarse in structure and thick, sheep or goat are hardly or not
distinguishable nor different in behaviour, calf is finest and what I
prefer
especially because of its tint.

> The only thing I would suggest is to make sure that your vellum is
> properly prepared. Even if comes prepared for writing from a
> manufacturer, the surface can become greasy over time (it is
leather,
> after all) Sorry, it is not leather, as it is not tanned, thus no
cross-linking of the proteins in the skin. And leather can be printed
too, same way, does curl less nor not.

> Before printing, it should be pounced to raise a slight nap and
> remove any surface grease. This can be done by first using a fine-
grade
> sandpaper in a gentle circular motion over the entire surface of the
> vellum to raise the nap. You aren't trying to sand down the surface
at
> all, just give it a bit more velvety texture. Then pour a little
finely
> powdered dental pumice (I get mine from John Neal Bookseller) onto a
> clean rag and use the same gentle circular motion to rub the pumice
into
> the vellum, which will absorb some of the surface grease. Brush off
the
> excess pumice with a soft brush, and the vellum should be ready to
print
> on.
The raised nap will be compressed again in running it through the
press. But
it may be an interesting technique on certain occasions, as it will
create a different surface structure. May also see to it that more
difficult to print
tints are taken by the parchment.
I would love to know what you end up trying. I have some 4"x6" pieces
> left over from a larger project that might be fun to experiment
with.
Start now.

Best,
Ad.

Appendix Four

Invitation and Catalogue Cover

Invite

Invite reverse

Catalogue cover

Appendix Five

Pinnacles Web Page

Exhibition - Dajarra: Interpretations of rural identity

29 May - 21 June 2003

Local printmaker Jill O'Sullivan presents drawings and prints of people and places within the rural community of Dajarra, North-West Queensland. Dajarra is a small town, 155 kilometres south of Mount Isa, with a population of around 300 people. It is a centre for the broader community that extends over thousands of square kilometres.

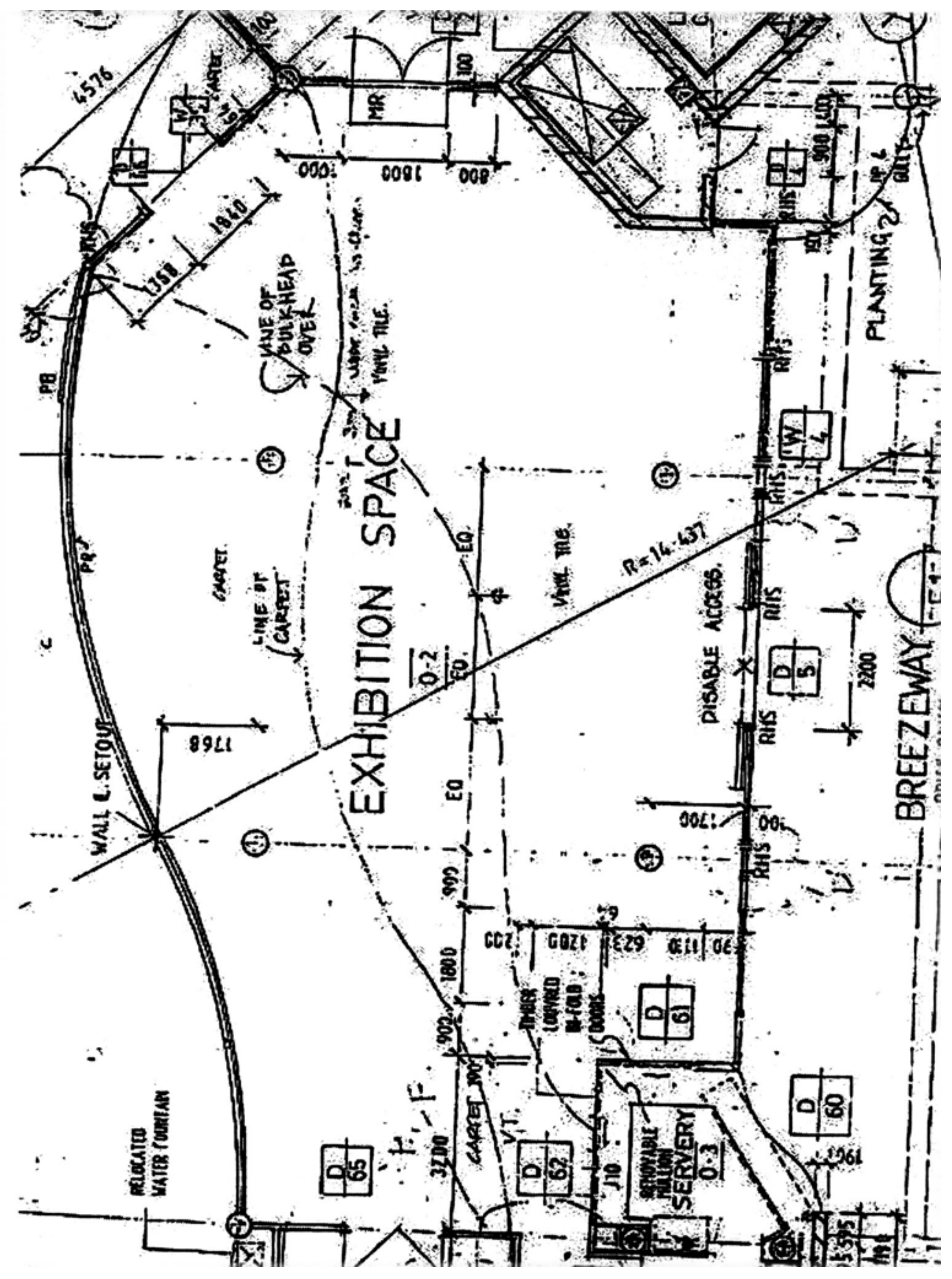
A focal point for much of Jill's artwork is the local pub, its residents, and clientele. In these works Jill captures a sense of contemporary outback culture, and questions the iconic image of the outback pub that is held by many who live within the urban fringes of coastal settlement.

This exhibition is a practical component of Jill's studies for the degree of Master of Creative Arts at James Cook University.

Image: Dajarra - overview

Appendix Six

Pinnacles Gallery Plan



Appendix Seven

Review Townville Bulletin

Dajarra dreaming

Good Guide

galleries

by MANDY WILDEHEART

LOCATION, location, location. This doesn't only apply to real estate, but to art as well.

Dajarra: pub&people by Jill O'Sullivan focuses on people and places in the location of Dajarra in northwest Queensland and greatly improves her position as an artist along the way.

On entering the gallery, viewers are greeted by a swag of Dajarra locals contained within her 30 prints that are lined up on every wall.

Jill captures their character so expressively, that viewers could probably form a fairly accurate opinion about each person.

Obviously, Jill's mature age entry into art allows her to draw on her life experience and see details in a person's demeanour that younger artists might overlook.

Her art experience basically began in 1991 with Flying Arts workshops and the McGregor Summer and Winter Schools. Both of these organisations offer wonderful short workshops for creative and fine arts. (For more details about either organisation, contact me through the *Townsville Bulletin*).

Since then, she has undertaken various tertiary art qualifications, culminating in her Masters of Creative Arts at James Cook University. Hence this exhibition.

This maturity and intense tertiary level investigation probably explains why she is able to capture the outback essence of her characters so completely. Her catalogue statement succinctly explains her choice of subject matter.

Jill says: "This exhibition seeks, through Fine Art printmaking, to continue the portrayal of the rural figure in Australian art and record their daily lives in rural centres such as Dajarra."

Her skills in fine art principles — let alone just in printmaking — shine through particularly with her careful consideration of tone, composition, and expressive mark making. When combined with her ability to portray the essential character of her studies, she produces some very pleasing and dramatic works of art.

Her expression of character can be seen in *The Joke*. This stone lithograph print focuses on two individuals caught in mid-laugh. The man on the left obviously found something very amusing and is depicted in that universally common movement of throwing the head back for a good laugh.

Man of Many Tongues is another stone lithograph with strong imagery. Comparatively stark compared to most of her fairly busy images, this one has a meek or timid looking person standing in isolation, without reference to his immediate environment.

Another image of a figure with just a passing reference to a background is the small etching and aquatint on vellum entitled *Jeremy*. Jill already uses a variety of print methods and is now exploring different surfaces to print on.

LEFT: Jill O'Sullivan's *The Joke*
TOP: Also by O'Sullivan, *Morning on Mark Street* and above, *Friday Afternoon*

This print is one of four small prints on vellum (a very thin layer of animal skin). Evidently this is goat vellum from England and Jill has plans to explore the use of kangaroo vellum.

There are a few monotypes as well, with some inked up in just one colour, while others have a few layers of colour. Jill usually recycles her old litho zinc plates and creates her image on the back surface. Her preferred method is to totally ink up the plate and then use cotton buds and rags to remove ink to form the image.

Jill has priced her works to sell, which doesn't reflect the perceived worth of her prints. By all indications, savvy art buyers should rush in to snap up a bargain that has unlimited future potential value.

Jill will be giving a floor talk this evening at 7pm at Pinnacles Gallery after the Thuringowa Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF) cheque presentation and RADF elections tonight at Pinnacles Gallery, which starts at 6pm.

Dajarra: pub&people fulfils a component of the Degree of Master of Creative Arts from James Cook University and is on display until Saturday, June 21. Save the long drive to Dajarra and just go to Pinnacles Gallery to meet the locals.

■ ANOTHER local artist, Jeanette Sellwood of Magnetic Island also has a special interest in representing the human form. However, many of her figures are part of a bigger scene and are incorporated into the immediate landscape.

Jeanette considers "the effect of light falling on a surface, its reflections and colour" as being the most important elements in her paintings. She says that they are a reflection of her love for both subject matter and atmosphere.

Get in to Michael's on Magnetic Restaurant and Art Gallery anytime on Wednesdays or during restaurant hours for the rest of the week. Visits at other times can be arranged by contacting Heather on 4758 1187.

This exhibition opens tonight at 6.30pm and is on display until July 2.

Appendix Eight

Review Imprint

Jill O'Sullivan:

Dajarra interpretations of rural identity

Mount Isa in North West Queensland has been O'Sullivan's home for many years. Life in the bush involved various occupations from milking goats to framing pictures. This was replaced by art school at James Cook University, Townsville (some call it Mount Isa by the sea), where O'Sullivan became a mentor for other students from her first year in Bachelor of Visual Arts. An Honours year led to the Silver Medal Award and Master of Creative Arts, the current all consuming occupation.

O'Sullivan works from life drawing and photographic sessions. Long days and nights of studio practice in fine art printmaking studios, specifically lithography, have contributed to the process of revealing bush icons as fine art prints. O'Sullivan creates a personal comment from a perspective gained by ideological and historical investigation into the developing Australian cultural identity to: 'encapsulate and convey a sense of a contemporary outback culture'[1].

O'Sullivan chose as a focal point or case study for her Master of Creative Arts the residents and clientele of the local pub in Dajarra, 155 kilometres south of Mount Isa. This isolated location with a town population of 203 is used to provide a new visual identity to people from the outback. Though the place O'Sullivan has drawn on is a specific one, these faces and postures could belong to numerous people from a visual register of Australian culture.

Ian Burn gives confidence to the artist in writing about the rural figure as 'a point of access to the landscape'[2] and of Russell Drysdale's use of daily life in the bush to enhance his subject matter.[3] Additionally Anne-Marie Willis' statement 'there has been little investigation into the processes by which particular works have become national favourites'[4] provides a challenge to the artist to further explore this area. Leigh Astbury's *City Bushmen*[5] has also been an important reference for O'Sullivan's Masters thesis on the rural figure in Australian art between 1880 to the present.

As a result of her extensive research into the work of artists such as Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd and Albert Tucker, and her own life experiences, O'Sullivan's characters approach the epitome of Australian bush icons. Her ability to communicate well with people is demonstrable in prints like *The Westerner*, a loosely drawn figure fitting well within the earthy marks of the lithographic process and the inland environment. The studies of people in the lithographs *Different drummer* and *Man of many tongues* come from first hand experience; they all have stories that can be related by O'Sullivan who writes that her aim is to 'record the importance of people and their daily lives'[6]. •

Jill O'Sullivan THE JOKE 2003
Stone lithograph 51 x 36 cm
Edition of 11

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Dajarra interpretations of rural identity
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Notes

1 Artist's Statement, *Dajarra interpretations of rural identity*, 2003
2 Burn, I. *National Life and Landscapes*, Bay Books, Sydney and London, 1990
3 Burn, I. *Dialogue*, Allan and Unwin, Sydney, 1991
4 Willis, A. *Illusions of Identity*, Southwood Press, Sydney, 1993, p.72
5 Astbury, L. *City Bushmen*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, Oxford, 1985
6 Artist's Statement, *Dajarra interpretations of rural identity*, 2003