

**Department of Art**

**Legitimate Landscapes:  
Repositioning Regional Art Production**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
of  
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## Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diana R. McGirr". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and 'M'.

Date: March, 9 2016

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines contemporary art production in the South West of Western Australia through the lens of my first-hand knowledge of the region and its art world. It responds to a perception there is a paucity of publications and critique on South West art production, and a claim the region's art scene is 'folksy' and 'not up-to speed' with what is found in metropolitan galleries around the world. Merging new ways of writing art history with methods endorsed by critical ethnography that enabled me to draw on lived experience, local knowledge and the particularities of place, I offer an alternative view that argues 'being regional' is a legitimate position in today's art world, on its own terms and as part of a growing global tendency to recognise the validity of regional contexts and perspectives. To achieve this aim, I have drawn on Terry Smith's propositions about key currents in contemporary art and writing its history, as well as other commentaries and theories on regionalism and the operations of art worlds, to discuss some recent examples of institutional practice and regional art production in the South West that illustrate how artists and artworks acquire 'artistic legitimacy' from individuals and institutions through instances of exposure and recognition. Using multiple voices to augment my account, my narrative illustrates how regional art production reflects local conditions, and relates to contemporary trends elsewhere. Consequently, my thesis contributes to the emerging history of recent art production in the South West of Western Australia, and a wider cultural discourse that endorses the value of local knowledge and significance of place.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

**Art does not acknowledge frontiers either of place or of time. Great art is truly international and it can speak to all ages, but this internationalism is a measure of the recognition that artists can achieve in their lifetime or afterwards. It can never be a condition of the origin of their art for, in another sense no matter how great it may be, in its roots all art is local. If a community has any kind of independent, intellectual and imaginative life, the production of art in the present is an integral part of the way in which it talks among itself about the things that matter to it. Such a community can be a single city, a metropolis, or a nation. Whatever its size, if it has any vitality, its members will also draw inspiration from what is being said and done elsewhere and will in turn contribute to a wider, international dialogue; but to judge the art of such a community only by its international significance is to expect a supply of exotic cut flowers without cultivating the garden or heating the greenhouse.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Duncan Macmillan, *Scottish Art in the 20th Century 1890–2001* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 2001), 9.



Figure 1 Book cover *Peter Kovacsy A Studio Practice*  
Photo: Peter Kovacsy



Figure 2 Peter Kovacsy's studio gallery in Pemberton, South West of Western Australia  
Photo: Peter Kovacsy

## POINT OF DEPARTURE: RESEARCH PREMISE

The more intrinsic the interest of the researcher in the case, the more the focus of study will be on the case's idiosyncrasy, its particular context, issues, and story.<sup>2</sup>

In 2005, Western Australian artist-craftsman Peter Kovacsy asked me to write the copy for a book about the evolution of his practice from fine wood craft to kiln-cast glass (Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> I had first encountered Kovacsy's non-functional fine wood objects on a chance visit to his studio-gallery in Pemberton in the South West of Western Australia in the mid 1990s (Figure 2). A decade later, during my two-year tenure as Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, I invited him to participate in the gallery's annual exhibition the *South West Survey* to be held in February–March 2005.<sup>4</sup> The idea for the book emerged from a subsequent conversation we had about the current status of arts writing, when he said:

I've been doing research and it is almost impossible to find any books on West Australian artists around on the book stands. I can't believe that such a huge market exists for this type of publication and no one has moved in on it ... There are a lot of outlets available for a book that can cross over the boundaries of art, travel and local art history.<sup>5</sup>

A self-professed, self-reliant perfectionist, Kovacsy supervised every aspect of the book's design and production.<sup>6</sup> He also took all the photographs, but gave me complete freedom to compose the text as I felt fit. The book situates Kovacsy within the context of Western Australia's fine woodcraft and studio glass movements. Drawing on some existing published material, his personal records and our recorded conversations, I wrote a narrative that reveals how defining moments, specific people and a sense of place shaped the development of his practice and the establishment of his studio-gallery in Pemberton in 1990. It includes a chapter that critiques his work and artistic

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<sup>2</sup> Robert E. Stake, "Qualitative Case Studies," in *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., eds., Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2005), 460 (hereafter cited as *The Sage Handbook*).

<sup>3</sup> Diana Roberts, *Peter Kovacsy A Studio Practice* (Pemberton: Peter Kovacsy, 2006). I have published as Diana Roberts and Diana de Bussy but reverted to my maiden name McGirr in 2014.

<sup>4</sup> *South West Survey 2005* (Bunbury: Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Kovacsy, e-mail message to author, August 1, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> *Peter Kovacsy A Studio Practice* was shortlisted for a national printing and publishing award by the Galley Club of Sydney. *Bunbury Herald*, June 5, 2007.

principles. Together with his website, the book plays an important part in the promotion of Kovacsy's practice to an international audience.<sup>7</sup> My involvement with Peter Kovacsy's book is relevant to this thesis because it represents the culmination of a sequence of events that led to my research inquiry. For his comment about the lack of books on Western Australian art echoed remarks I had heard from other artists, and my observation of the paucity of publications on South West art production.

I have lived and worked in the South West of Western Australia since 1994. I was lured to Australia from Scotland in 1989 by an enticing offer to manage a high-profile corporate art collection, since dispersed.<sup>8</sup> In January 2000, following a self-imposed break from the art world, I accepted a position lecturing in the School of Visual Arts at Edith Cowan University's South West Campus in Bunbury.<sup>9</sup> That role led to the offer of the post as Director at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries. In both roles, I often heard artists complain about the dearth of critical writing on regional artists and art production and the absence of any reviews in print and broadcast media. From my observation, there was plenty of 'what's on' coverage of regional arts events in local media, but in-depth analysis or critique was extremely rare. In 2002, I attempted to tackle the void by presenting an arts segment on ABC Radio South West. In a series of interviews and reviews I discussed what was happening locally and further afield, if artists from the region were involved. But this was only a twelve month project.<sup>10</sup> Then, during my tenure at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries John Stringer (1937–2007) suggested I write a South West-specific version of *Western Australian Artists in Residence*.<sup>11</sup> According to Stringer, the book featuring photographs by Richard

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<sup>7</sup> "Peter Kovacsy A Studio Practice." *Peter Kovacsy*, accessed October 17, 2013, [www.peterkovacsy.com/book.php](http://www.peterkovacsy.com/book.php).

<sup>8</sup> Diana de Bussy, *Alan Bond Collection of Australia Art* (Perth: Dallhold Investments, 1990); de Bussy, foreword to *Irises and Five Masterpieces* (Perth: Bond Corporation, 1989). After graduating in the History of Art (Edinburgh 1979) and Art Gallery and Museum Studies (Manchester 1980), I spent my early curatorial career working in collections, exhibitions and gallery management in the UK.

<sup>9</sup> During this break I worked in the corporate sector and completed a Masters in Literature and Communication at Murdoch University (1998).

<sup>10</sup> My voluntary segment on ABC Radio South West and occasional exhibition reviews for regional print media were recognised as bone fide research by Edith Cowan University's Creative Performance Index. de Bussy, "Afternoon show arts segment." *ABC Radio South West*, 2002.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Woldendorp and John Stringer, *Western Australian Artists in Residence* (West Perth: Sandpiper Press, 1995). For an obituary of John Stringer see Stuart Elliot. "John Stinger 1937–2007." *Artsource newsletter* (Summer 2007): 5.

Woldendorp aimed to capture a moment in time and give exposure to a group of sixty artists who were not adequately recognised in Western Australia, 'let alone elsewhere.'<sup>12</sup> Stringer had come to Bunbury to judge the 2004 *South West Survey* and he knew of my interest in writing about regional art production.<sup>13</sup> So by the time Peter Kovacs's book went to print in 2006, I felt the perception there is a paucity of publications and lack of critical writing on South West art production was a strong motive to investigate further. Soon after I began to scrutinise what publications existed, I read an article about the region's art scene in a widely-distributed West Australian lifestyle magazine.<sup>14</sup> A magazine of this ilk is not a customary source of considered opinion for an academic inquiry. Nevertheless, in this instance my interest was roused by the rarity of critique, and the timing was simply uncanny. The headline declared:

WA's South West region has everything a civilized person could possibly want; stunning scenery, wonderful wines and food, and a burgeoning fine arts scene.<sup>15</sup>

The author had canvassed opinions from a number of sources, but one voice prevailed throughout – that of Julian Goddard, who was then a Perth-based academic and commercial gallery owner.<sup>16</sup> He began by acknowledging some 'artists of calibre' who lived and worked in the South West during the 1950s and 60s had established a strong tradition of art production in the region, and suggested 'there are a lot of reasons why it's starting to happen down there'.<sup>17</sup> Then he added:

I don't want to be critical of it, but at the moment it's a little bit folksy. It's not up to speed with what you'd find in metropolitan galleries in cities around the world. I

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<sup>12</sup> John Stringer, introduction to *Western Australian Artists in Residence*, n.p.

<sup>13</sup> At the time John Stringer was Curator of the Kerry Stokes Collection, but I had known him since I arrived in Western Australia to take up the position as Curator of the Alan Bond collection, when he was Senior Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. No written evidence exists of our conversation. However, Anthony Gardner suggests using anecdote to describe an encounter is an acceptable strategy. Anthony Gardner, "On the 'Evental' Installation: Contemporary Art and Politics of Presence," in *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration and Convergence, Proceedings of the 32<sup>nd</sup> International Congress in the History of Art*, ed. Jaynie Anderson, (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2009), 953 (hereafter cited as *Crossing Cultures*). See also Ian Burn, *Dialogue: Writings in Art History*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 3.

<sup>14</sup> Sian Briggs, "Beyond the boundaries," *Insite Homes Antiques Art Autumn* 2006, 113–117.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>16</sup> Former Head of Curtin University's School of Design and Art and owner of Goddard de Fiddes Gallery, Julian Goddard is now Head of the School of Art at RMIT University in Melbourne.

<sup>17</sup> Julian Goddard quoted in Briggs, "Beyond the boundaries," 113.

know there's a good regional gallery in Bunbury, but Margaret River needs a good regional gallery, too.<sup>18</sup>

Renowned for its stunning coastline, spectacular surfing and world-class wine industry, the Margaret River area attracts large numbers of visitors and has more long-established commercial galleries than anywhere else in the South West. Therefore, a focus on this popular tourist area was perhaps predictable, especially since critics suggest the relationship between arts writing and marketing is growing.<sup>19</sup> However, this bias creates an impression the region's art scene is centred on a handful of galleries and all art production is market-driven. Comments from several gallery-owners and artists amplify this impression. However, others contested the 'folksy tag', including British-born artist Juliet Stone who has lived in the South West since 1985.<sup>20</sup> She responded to the appraisal by defending the depth of the region's artistic talent:

Oh, it's not folksy at all ... There are some very talented artists producing some very exciting works in the region, such as Douglas Chambers, Mary Knott and Rita Winkler. Just because we choose to live in an isolated place ... doesn't mean our work is boring or folksy, and it doesn't mean we don't keep abreast of trends.<sup>21</sup>

Gallery owners Nina and Ashley Jones have lived in Yallingup near Margaret River since 1986.<sup>22</sup> They run Gunyulgup Galleries in Yallingup, where they sell West Australian art and craftwork and occasionally host small group or solo exhibitions from the stable of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>19</sup> Luke Morgan, "Australian Art Criticism and its Discontents," *Australian Book Review* 279 (2006): 9–14.

<sup>20</sup> Briggs, "Beyond the boundaries," 114. Juliet Stone (b. 1945) trained at Sidcup Art School in Kent, England with expressionist painter Frank Auerbach (b. 1931). She lived in Chicago for a few years then moved to Perth, Western Australia in the early 1960s and became involved in the contemporary art scene. In 1985 Stone moved to a rural property in Brookhampton near Donnybrook with her late husband. Aspects of her surroundings feature habitually in her gestural, abstract oil paintings (see chapter eight, Figure 74). Stone has exhibited in Western Australia, Sydney, Adelaide, Darwin and France. Juliet Stone, in discussion with author, October 15, 2007; Diana McGirr, *The Afternoon of Extravagant Light: Juliet Stone* (Bunbury: Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, 2016); Philippa O'Brien, "Juliet Stone paintings and pastels," *Artlink* 19, no. 1 (1999), accessed October 21, 2015, <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/140/juliet-stone-paintings-and-pastels/>.

<sup>21</sup> Juliet Stone quoted in Briggs, "Beyond the boundaries," 114.

<sup>22</sup> Nina Jones, email to author, September 29, 2013. Ashley Jones (b. Perth, 1951) specialises in hyper-realistic images of objects and every-day scenes. He has exhibited widely and his work is represented in several prominent collections in Western Australia. See *Ashley Jones 'To Be Seen Again': Selected Paintings and drawings 1975–2002*, Gunyulgup Galleries, 1 October–1 November 2015; *Sunrise Bluebird: City of Fremantle Art Collection*, City of Fremantle Art Collection Gallery, May 31–July 17, 2014.



artists they represent. According to Nina Jones, the art scene has grown steadily over the years, contributing to the area's reputation for quality:

It's about cultural richness. Not just the wine and art and food, but other events like the Leeuwin [Estate] concerts. You can't discount the natural beauty of the area, either.<sup>23</sup>

Yet despite acknowledging the contribution such activities make to the area and conceding the future looks bright, Goddard maintained his stance, which, as the article's author suggested, was bound to 'raise plenty of heckles' [sic]:<sup>24</sup>

There's a lot of money being spent down there ... But I still think that the work needs to lift its game a bit.<sup>25</sup>

## **RESEARCH AIM, SCOPE & SIGNIFICANCE**

Initially, I had considered the dearth of publications on South West art production a sound motive for a research inquiry per se – a vacuum corroborated by my literature search and acknowledged by others during the course of my investigation.<sup>26</sup> However, the timely appearance of this appraisal provided an added incentive. For although its placement in a popular magazine designed to promote products and destinations suggests the intent was not profound, it illustrates how my attention was drawn to the issue of artistic validation and the implications of regional positioning. As my inquiry progressed I became increasingly interested in the role institutions and individuals play in the endorsement of artists and artworks, and the concept of 'artistic legitimacy'.<sup>27</sup> I grew enthused by recent discourse about contemporary art and new ways of writing art history that endorse new fields and forms of inquiry, and devised the following research question:<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Jones quoted in "Beyond the boundaries," 115.

<sup>24</sup> Briggs, "Beyond the boundaries," 117.

<sup>25</sup> Goddard quoted in "Beyond the boundaries," 117.

<sup>26</sup> David Bromfield, "Survey 2010 Blog," *Brown Art Consultants*, July 26, 2009, accessed between August 6 and October 12, 2009, <http://brownart.com.au>; David Bromfield and Pippa Tandy, *Over There: Survey 2010 Art in the South West* (Perth: Brown Art Consultants, 2010), v (hereafter cited as *Over There*).

<sup>27</sup> Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> Recent discourse on contemporary art and writing its history is discussed in chapter five.

- What evidence exists to show that contemporary art production in the South West of Western Australia reflects local conditions and relates to contemporary trends elsewhere?

This overarching question led to three subsidiary questions:

- Who has the authority to validate art and artists, and how?
- What significant opportunities exist in the South West other than the marketplace where artists and artworks can acquire artistic legitimacy through instances of exposure and endorsement by curators, critics and collectors?
- What do artists have to say about the advantages, drawbacks or challenges they face of being regionally-based?

Therefore, my thesis aims to offer an alternative view of South West art production by arguing that 'being regional' is a legitimate position in today's art world, on its own terms and as part of a globalising tendency that recognises the validity of regional contexts and perspectives.

To achieve this aim, I have drawn upon my first-hand familiarity with the South West region and its art world, and a number of scholarly sources. They include recent discourse about contemporary art and new ways of writing art history, as well as theories about regionalism and the operations of art worlds.<sup>29</sup> In particular, I have drawn upon Terry Smith's ideas about contemporary art and writing its history. Although I discuss Smith's ideas in association with other commentaries, I have privileged his writing because he is recognised as a leading authority in the theory of contemporary art.<sup>30</sup> Following a series of articles on 'provincialism' and 'regionalism', Smith first articulated his ideas about contemporary art at a forum in Sydney in 2001.<sup>31</sup> Since then he has explored this subject in several books and essays, including *What is*

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<sup>29</sup> The concepts of 'region' and 'art world' and theories about regionalism are discussed in chapter two.

<sup>30</sup> "Guest Author of December 2010," *Global Art and the Museum*, accessed November 1, 2014, [http://globalartmuseum.de/site/guest\\_author/298](http://globalartmuseum.de/site/guest_author/298).

<sup>31</sup> Smith published articles on provincialism and regionalism between 1971 and 1999–2000 (see chapter two). He claims his ideas on contemporary art had been brewing for some time but they first came together in a lecture delivered in Sydney in 2001. Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), xi. I discuss Smith's ideas about contemporary art and writing its history in chapter five.

*Contemporary Art?* and *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, published in 2009 and 2011 respectively.<sup>32</sup>

I was introduced to Smith's theories about contemporary art and writing its history at the 32<sup>nd</sup> International Congress in the History of Art held in Melbourne in 2008, where he proposed several possible lines of inquiry to 'show what, how and why art, ideas, cultural practices and values have recently taken and currently take the forms they do within the conditions of contemporaneity'.<sup>33</sup> This statement is one of three propositions Smith offers as an approach to examine various shifts that have taken place in the art world since the 1950s. He claims successive groups of artists, critics, dealers, curators and collectors have tried to figure out what is going on in art as it has been happening, and now it is the historian's turn to trace the appearance and unfolding of the contemporary in art.<sup>34</sup> Smith distinguishes between the use of 'contemporary' and 'contemporaneous' as everyday terms for what is happening now or up-to-date and simultaneous or contemporaneous from a deeper sense of the many different ways we co-exist in time, which is more than simply embracing the present. His second proposition suggests contemporaneity is the fundamental condition of our times, manifest in everyday life, human interactions with the geo-political, social and natural environment, a multitude of cultures and individual subjectivity. In a fragile and rapidly-changing world:<sup>35</sup>

... we must write its history, as it is happening, otherwise it will elude us ...<sup>36</sup>

Smith's third proposition is implicit in the first two: 'Contemporaneity itself has many histories, and histories within the histories of art.'<sup>37</sup> In essence, he is saying that art production is now so diverse in form, content, meaning and function that multiple art histories co-exist simultaneously across the world, responding to particular concerns,

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<sup>32</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*; Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Smith, "Writing the History of Contemporary Art," in *Crossing Cultures*, 918–921. See Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 254–259.

<sup>34</sup> Smith, "Writing the History of Contemporary Art," 918.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, "Writing the History of Contemporary Art," 918–919; Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 1–6, 254–255.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, "Writing the History of Contemporary Art," 919; Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 255.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, "Writing the History of Contemporary Art," 919; Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 256.

conditions and contexts as they occur in each locality. But despite this diversity, Smith claims three major currents have emerged, shaping various aspects of contemporary art production, including art itself, exhibition sites, the art market and discourse.<sup>38</sup>

In summary, he identifies the first major current as an 'aesthetic of globalisation' manifest in a range of artistic practices and institutions that adhere to modernist ideals of avant-garde innovation – 'retro-sensationalism', 'relentless re-modernism' and 'spectacle' – including installation, sculpture, photography and architecture and the establishment of institutions of modern art.<sup>39</sup> He proposes the second current emerges from the 'postcolonial turn' following the process of decolonisation in many parts of the world when countries gained independence from colonial governance, and the geopolitical landscape altered radically after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. According to Smith, the postcolonial turn has generated an abundance of art shaped by all sorts of values – local, national, independent, anti-colonial. It circulates globally via the art market and exhibitions, especially biennales, creating a constant dialogue between local and international values.<sup>40</sup> Smith suggests the 'postcolonial turn' has no common form. Critique of the impact and aftermath of colonisation is not confined to colonised parts of the world, and the effects of decolonisation preoccupy artists everywhere, prompting scholars to examine what is happening in different regions across the world, in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Central Europe, the Middle East, Oceania and Australasia.<sup>41</sup>

Smith proposes that the third major current in contemporary art reflects generational change. It attracts young artists engaged with the 'image economy' who use electronic media and interactive technology to explore ideas about temporality, place-making, identity and mediated experience. They work individually and collectively, in informal spaces, pop-up exhibitions and artist-run initiatives.<sup>42</sup> According to Smith, these three

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<sup>38</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 264–269; Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 10–11.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 7, 264–265; Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 11.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 7–8, 266–268; Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 11.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 166–169, 187, 210, 259; See Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Smith, preface to *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, eds., Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008), xv.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 8, 267–268; Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 11, 256.

currents exist simultaneously in institutions and art practice. They crossover, compete and circulate throughout the world as part of a globalising culture industry.

Consequently, he suggests 'Contemporary Art' has been institutionalised by a burgeoning global network of museums, galleries, art fairs, biennale exhibitions, magazines and websites. He claims it is what we say it is, what we do, what we show, promote and buy, interpret and publish – a 'dazzling, entrancing' self-defining art scene that is grounded in art practice.<sup>43</sup>

Naturally, it was beyond the scope and intent of this thesis to embrace Smith's ideas and possible lines of inquiry precisely. For example, for reasons that will become clear as my thesis unfolds, electronic media and interactive technology have not been adopted widely in the South West. Nevertheless, some of his propositions are particularly pertinent to my research inquiry, for they resonate with conditions and trends in the region. For instance, out of six possible lines of inquiry he recommends for writing a history of contemporary art, I have drawn on two:

- the 'postcolonial turn' has generated a need for narratives written from local, regional and global perspectives to help us understand art as it is produced and circulates; and
- outlining the role the art world plays in highlighting what counts as current art to reveal its increasing diversity.<sup>44</sup>

I have also drawn on Smith's proposition that the abundance of art generated by the 'postcolonial turn' which circulates in landmark exhibitions and biennales includes art that explores sustainable relationships with specific social and natural environments within the framework of ecological values.<sup>45</sup>

Although I have privileged Smith's writing I discuss his ideas in association with other commentaries on contemporary art and new ways of writing art history, as well as

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<sup>43</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 9–10, 241–244, 268.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 258–259; Smith, "Writing the History of Contemporary Art," 920–921.

<sup>45</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 266. In *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, Smith articulates a growing concern for the environment and the natural world as a contemporary trend. Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 274–295.

theories about regionalism and the operations of art worlds (see chapters two and five). Combining these ideas provided a theoretical framework to investigate instances of art production in the South West that reflect local conditions and contemporary trends. These investigations occurred within an area defined by Western Australian legislation as the 'South West region' (see regional profile in chapter three).<sup>46</sup>

Thereafter, I selected five case studies to illustrate two key themes:

- the concept of artistic legitimacy manifest in the validation of artists and artworks by institutions and individuals through instances of exposure and recognition, such as inclusion in a significant exhibition or catalogue, or acquisition by a major collection; and
- the continuing significance of landscape as a contemporary subject.

Dealing with living subjects and events as they happen, as well as 'live' scholarly discourse, was an intrinsic part of my research process. For this to occur in an appropriate and relevant manner, I devised a research strategy that enabled me to integrate theory with fieldwork and use methods endorsed by critical ethnography to draw on lived experience, local knowledge, multiple voices and the particularities of place. This approach enabled me to augment and 'crystallise' my narrative with alternative views, respond to circumstances as they arose, and use an accessible style of writing, which makes my thesis more reflexive, collaborative, engaging and relevant.<sup>47</sup>

German art historian and founder of the web-based platform *Global Art and the Museum* Hans Belting suggests that through migration and the globalisation of the art world a notion of 'post-ethnicity' has emerged, leading non-Western artists to reject labels laden with racial bias.<sup>48</sup> For example, he claims that it is 'post-ethnic' to be an 'artist

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<sup>46</sup> "Western Australian Legislation: Regional Development Commissions Act 1993," *Government of Western Australia Department of the Premier and Cabinet, State Law Publisher*, accessed March 6, 2016. [https://www.slp.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/main\\_mrtitle\\_815\\_homepage.html](https://www.slp.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/main_mrtitle_815_homepage.html); "All about regions," *Government of Western Australia*, accessed May 18, 2011, <http://wa.gov.au/governmentservices/regions/allaboutregions/>.

<sup>47</sup> Douglas Foley and Angela Valenzuela, "Critical Ethnography: The Politics of Collaboration," in *The Sage Handbook*, 217–234. See Laura Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, "Writing," in *The Sage Handbook*, 959–979.

<sup>48</sup> Hans Belting, "Contemporary Art as a Global Art: A Critical Estimate," in *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets and Museums*, eds., Hans Belting and Andrea Bussendieg (Karlsruhe: ZKM, 2009),

from Africa' rather than an 'African artist'.<sup>49</sup> The issue of Western or non-Western ethnicity is not a central concern of my thesis, but adopting a 'post-ethnic' stance suggests my subjects are artists from the South West rather South West artists. Moreover, mobility suggests that labelling people as 'regional' can also be problematic and provisional. Nevertheless, for the sake of linguistic simplicity, I refer to people who live and work in the South West region as South West artists, and people who live and work outside the Perth metropolitan area as regional.<sup>50</sup>

Consequently, the significance of my thesis is two-fold. Firstly, it contributes new material and analysis to the emerging history of recent art production in the South West of Western Australia, which helps to raise its profile and fill a gap in knowledge and understanding about the South West art world. Secondly, tapping into recent debates about contemporary art and new ways of writing art history, and notions of regionalism that endorse the value of local knowledge and significance of place, contextualises my thesis within a 'wider, international dialogue'. Therefore, it draws on what is being said and done locally as well as elsewhere, and it contributes to this discourse.

## **OVERVIEW OF THESIS STRUCTURE**

Following this introduction, my thesis unfolds in eleven chapters beginning with chapter two, where I examine the significance of place and position in the production of art and the question of who has authority to validate art and artists, and how. I begin by defining the concept of an 'art world' and establish the difference between a belief in art production as an autonomous or context-related activity. This leads to a discussion about the operations of art worlds to reveal how they function as 'sites of struggle' where artistic legitimacy is conferred on artists and artworks by individuals and institutions through

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accessed January 10, 2010, <http://globalartmuseum.de/site/publication/91> (hereafter cited as *The Global Art World*).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> According to the Australian Government Ministry for the Arts, the 'Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia' (ARIA) codes identify all the places outside the Perth metropolitan area that I refer to as 'inner regional', 'outer regional' or remote'. See "Remoteness areas," *Australian Government Department of Communication and the Arts*, accessed October 9, 2015, <http://arts.gov.au/regional/aria>.

instances of exposure and recognition. Then focusing on essays written by Terry Smith and Ian Burn (1939–1993) between 1971 and 2000, I examine evolving attitudes to ‘provincialism’ and ‘regionalism’ to reveal how cultural hierarchies have been imagined and contested in discourse about the centre-periphery relationships. I conclude that notions of regionalism that endorse the value of local knowledge and significance of place provide a reliable platform to argue that ‘being regional’ is a legitimate position.

Chapter three provides a sense of time and place by describing the specific context of my study – the South West region and its art world. I begin by defining the South West as a region and describe some of its features. Then I describe some of the key institutions and sites that provide venues for the exhibition or sale of artworks in the region. This profile provides a backdrop for future chapters where I discuss some specific instances of institutional practice and forms of art production (making and validation) that occur in the region. It also helps to contextualise the description that spurred my inquiry, and the literature review that follows in chapter four. In this review I address the perception there is a paucity of publications on South West art production and a lack of critique. I reveal what had been written about art production in the South West when I began my inquiry. I discuss the implications and examine a perception that Western Australian art has been overlooked in national histories of Australian art. This review positions my thesis as the first academically-framed study of South West art production from an art historical perspective.

Chapter five contextualises my thesis within a wider, international dialogue that endorses regional positioning, by reviewing some of the recent discourse on contemporary art and art history that recognises the validity of regional contexts and perspectives. I begin by examining how the globalisation of the art world is generating debate about new ways of writing art history that recognise its ‘new geographies’. This leads to a review of some recent commentary on contemporary art, where I consider Terry Smith’s ideas about current trends and his propositions for writing its history, culminating in a critique of his books *What*



is *Contemporary Art?* and *Contemporary Art: World Currents*. I conclude chapter five by explaining how some of Smith's theories provide a useful framework to draw upon to investigate instances of institutional practice and recent art production in the South West of Western Australia that reflect local conditions and contemporary trends, when coupled with ideas drawn from other commentaries and theories about regionalism.

Chapter six describes the approach I took to integrate this theoretical framework with methods endorsed by critical ethnography to devise a research strategy that enabled me to draw on lived experience, local knowledge, multiple voices and the particularities of place. This approach enabled me to augment and 'crystallise' my narrative with alternative views, respond to circumstances as they arose, and use an accessible style of writing. I begin by explaining how critical ethnography supports the notion of cultural critique as a situated, collaborative and reflexive process, and clarify my position as researcher in the field. Next I describe my selection of case study subjects and the methods I used to gather evidence and insight from sources in the field and elsewhere. Then I explain how I drew on this material to compose five case study chapters that illustrate how regional art production (making and validation) reflects local conditions and relates to contemporary trends, structured around the two key themes that drove my investigation: the concept of artistic legitimacy, and the continuing significance of landscape as a contemporary subject.

Chapter seven is the first of two chapters that draw on theories about the operations of art worlds and recent discourse that claims biennales and landmark exhibitions play a major role in the validation and institutionalisation of contemporary art and artists. I begin with the *Bunbury Biennale* established in 1993 to help build the City of Bunbury collection through the acquisition of contemporary Western Australian art. For more than two decades this event hosted by Bunbury Regional Art Galleries has been giving artists who live and work anywhere in the State an opportunity for exposure and recognition through their selection, and possible acquisition by the City of Bunbury. Through this example, I discuss how a particular instance of institutional practice in the

South West emulates and differs from similar recurring exhibitions that occur in other metropolitan and regional art worlds.

In chapter eight I examine another recurring exhibition that Bunbury Regional Art Galleries hosts – the *South West Survey*, established in 1987 to showcase regional art practice. Since then this event has given artists who live and work in the region an opportunity to gain exposure and recognition through their selection, and possible acquisition by the City of Bunbury collection. In 2009 the gallery appointed Perth-based critic-curator David Bromfield to produce the 2010 exhibition and a complementary catalogue documenting current art practice in the region. Following an outline of the *Survey*'s history, this chapter explores this particular landmark exhibition. I discuss Bromfield's impressions of the South West art scene when he toured through the region to gather ideas and material for the exhibition and catalogue, and consider the themes he suggests characterise art production in the region.

Chapter nine takes a lead from comments Bromfield made about the significance of landscape to artists in the South West, the scarcity of Indigenous art in the 'commonplace' profile of the region's contemporary art scene, and his unexplained remark that Indigenous artists paint landscape in the Carrolup style. Drawing on Smith's proposition that the 'postcolonial turn' has generated an abundance of art shaped by all sorts of values, including anti-colonial sentiments, I examine how the Carrolup style of landscape painting can be considered a legitimate form of contemporary art. To contextualise my argument, I begin with a brief history of the emergence of the Carrolup art movement at an Aboriginal settlement in Katanning in the late 1940s and 50s. Then I examine how a series of exhibitions that took place in Western Australia and elsewhere in the 1990s and 2000s has generated renewed interest in the Carrolup style, and calls for it to be integrated into the history of Australian Aboriginal art. I embrace recent discourse to discuss the terminology that is commonly used to describe Aboriginal art and the familiar dot painting technique that pervades the public imagination of what it is authentic. I discuss the role Bunbury Regional Art Galleries has played in the process of validation through its involvement with a government-sponsored Indigenous arts development program, a series of

exhibitions and its links with some of the artists who continue the Carrolup style. Throughout my account I draw on discussion and dialogue recorded in exhibition catalogues, to support my proposal that the continuation of the Carrolup style is a legitimate form of contemporary art on its own terms, with particular significance to Noongar artists and people.

The next two chapters examine how two individual artists based in the South West have responded to specific regional environments. Both case studies draw on Smith's proposition that exploring sustainable relationships with specific social and natural environments is a key trend in contemporary art. To augment my account I enlist the artist's voice in each narrative, drawing on interview dialogue, email correspondence and excerpts from artist's statements that express their intentions. In chapter ten I discuss the work of Katherine Hall, a well-travelled and accomplished artist and educator who specialises in drawing as a process of investigation and self-discovery. Katherine is interested in connections between people and landscapes and cross-cultural collaboration.<sup>51</sup> In 2000 she moved from Melbourne to the small coastal community of Gracetown near Margaret River to focus on her art practice. I explore the evolution of her work from observation to conceptualised mark-making through a process she calls 'letting go' in response to cross-cultural encounters with Aboriginal people and their country. The chapter concludes with an epilogue about a recent collaborative project and her current thoughts about her practice now that she is in a period of transition.

Chapter eleven examines the work of Tony Windberg, a multi-award-winning artist who specialises in realistic landscape paintings, drawings and mixed-media works that explore the theme of 'man versus nature'. I explore how Tony interprets the concept of nature as awe-inspiring yet foreboding to produce a contemporary response to specific environments and the issue of land use in regional Western Australia. Now immersed in the South West locality of Northcliffe, his life-long affinity with nature has matured into a critical reflection on changing land use in this particular setting.

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<sup>51</sup> I refer to Katherine Hall and Tony Windberg by first name in each case study to reflect our dialogic, intersubjective relationship. See Foley and Valenzuela, "Critical Ethnography: The Politics of Collaboration."

Chapter twelve brings my thesis to a close by drawing together the evidence and insight I have used in my discussion to achieve my aim. In this final chapter I summarise the five case studies presented as illustrative examples of contemporary art production in the South West that reflect local conditions and relate to contemporary trends elsewhere. I reassert my proposition that ‘being regional’ is a legitimate position in today’s art world, on its own terms and as part of a globalising tendency, and recommend that recognising the particularities of place and benefits of regional positioning offers a sound basis to acknowledge the South West as a ‘zone of exchange and possibility’ for contemporary art production.<sup>52</sup> I conclude my thesis with some suggestions for possible publications on South West art production that could begin to remedy the gap in published material and critique that initiated my inquiry.

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<sup>52</sup> Terry Smith, “Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?,” *Periphery* 40, no. 41 (1999–2000): 5.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLACE AND POSITION IN THE PRODUCTION OF ART: ART WORLDS AND REGIONALISM

**If the hierarchies remain in place ... will there not always be a traffic from the regions to the centres and then internationally? Not necessarily, because there are important possibilities of traffic *between* these nodal points, along these *lateral* lines as well.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, "Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?," 8.

## INTRODUCTION

In chapter one I revealed that a respected source had described the South West art scene as ‘folksy’ and ‘not-up-to-speed’ with what is found in metropolitan galleries around the world.<sup>2</sup> I suggest this is a reductive description that infers the region’s art scene is an unsophisticated homogeneous entity. It also implies a pecking-order of artistic legitimacy exists between metropolitan and regional art scenes and forms of practice. Coupled with a perceived paucity of publications and scarcity of critical writing, I propose the documentation and analysis of recent art production in the South West of Western Australia is a neglected field. Consequently, my thesis aims to offer an alternative view of contemporary art production in the South West by arguing that ‘being regional’ is a legitimate position in today’s art world, both on its own terms and as part of a globalising tendency that recognises the validity of regional contexts and perspectives.

Before I describe the specific context of my study – the South West region and its art world – and review the literature on South West art production, in chapters three and four, this chapter examines the significance of place and position in the production of art and the question of who has authority to validate art and artists, and how. I begin by defining the concept of an ‘art world’ and establish the difference between a belief in art production as an autonomous or context-related activity. This leads to a discussion about the operations of art worlds to reveal how they function as ‘sites of struggle’ where artistic legitimacy is conferred on artists and artworks by individuals and institutions through instances of exposure and recognition. Then focusing on essays by Terry Smith and Ian Burn written between 1971 and 1999, I examine evolving attitudes to ‘provincialism’ and ‘regionalism’ to reveal how cultural hierarchies have been imagined and contested in discourse about centre-periphery relationships. I conclude that notions of regionalism that endorse the value of local knowledge and significance of place provide a reliable basis to argue that ‘being regional’ is a legitimate position.

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<sup>2</sup> Goddard quoted in Briggs, “Beyond the boundaries,” 113.

## ART WORLDS AND ARTISTIC LEGITIMACY

The term 'art world' was first used by philosopher Arthur Danto in 1964 to describe the 'matrix' of people, processes and places that defines an object as a work of art through a belief in 'artistic identification'. According to Danto (1924–2013), an object is considered an 'artwork' because it is identified as such by the system of artists, collectors, galleries, exhibitions, style theories and histories of art, etcetera that constitutes an art world.<sup>3</sup> In 1975 George Dickie drew on Danto's definition to devise an 'institutional theory of art', describing the art world as a limitless bundle of systems and subsystems where groups of people including museum directors, critics and art historians confer status on objects.<sup>4</sup> More recently Sarah Thornton described the contemporary art world as:

...a loose network of overlapping subcultures held together by a belief in art ... a 'symbolic economy' where people swap thoughts and cultural worth is debated rather than determined by brute wealth ... It's structured around nebulous and often contradictory hierarchies of fame, credibility, imagined historical importance, institutional affiliation, education, perceived intelligence, wealth ...<sup>5</sup>

Thornton goes on to suggest that it is worth examining art's contexts and evaluation processes to understand how it comes to be considered worthy of exposure, circulation, collection and critical attention.<sup>6</sup> Her book *Seven Days in the Art World* contributes to the mounting stock of literature and discourse that claims institutions and their support structures play a key role in the production and evaluation of contemporary art across the globe. Prior to the emergence of new approaches to art history in the 1970s and 80s, scrutiny of the conditions and cultural practices associated with art production was minimal. To understand this transition and the role that art worlds play in the validation of art and artists, it helps to consider the difference between a belief in art production as an autonomous or a context-related activity.

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<sup>3</sup> Arthur Danto, "The Artworld", *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (October 15, 1964): 571–584.

<sup>4</sup> George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic: An Institutional Analysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 33–36.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World* (London: Granta Books 2008), xi–xiii.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

A belief that the material production and symbolic valuing of art is linked to its context or conditions of production differs fundamentally from the belief it is a discrete or autonomous activity. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) devised a ‘theory of autonomy’ as a belief in freedom or independence from any causal conditions that occur in the known world, which leads to a belief in universal principles and values that transcend individual experience or subjective response.<sup>7</sup> In his *Critique of Judgement* published in 1790, Kant used these ideas to explain the nature of ‘aesthetic judgement’ as an act of ‘disinterested reflection’ of universally-agreed characteristics or ideals of beauty and form in nature and art, which is distinct from a response based on feelings of pleasure or dislike.<sup>8</sup> In the early twentieth century, English critics Roger Fry (1866–1934) and Clive Bell (1881–1964) developed these ideas further to articulate a stance on newly emergent abstract art. Fry saw art as an expression of the imagination, which is separate from actual life. He saw a distinction between ‘disinterested contemplation’ of an artwork’s visual properties and the emotional affect it arouses.<sup>9</sup> Bell claimed the relationship between lines and colours in space is the one common quality all works of art share. He called this ‘significant form’, and said that appreciating a work of art involves nothing but a sense of colour and form which awakens feelings that transcend time and place.<sup>10</sup>

Belief that works of art can be appreciated for their visual or ‘formal’ properties alone rather than their content or meaning was an on-going subject of discourse in the mid twentieth century through the writing of influential American art critic Clement Greenberg (1909–1994). Greenberg considered abstract painting to be the epitome of avant-garde modern art. He articulated his views in two influential essays published in 1939 and 1960 respectively – ‘Avant-Garde and Kitsch’ and ‘Modernist Painting’.<sup>11</sup> In

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<sup>7</sup> Ted Honderich, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 437.

<sup>8</sup> Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 9, 438; Immanuel Kant, “Critique of Judgement,” in *Art in Theory 1648–1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds., Charles Harrison, Paul Wood and Jason Gaiger (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 779–788.

<sup>9</sup> Roger Fry, “An Essay in Aesthetics,” in *Art in Theory 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds., Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1992), 78–86 (hereafter cited as *Art in Theory 1900–1990*).

<sup>10</sup> Clive Bell, “The Aesthetic Hypothesis,” in *Art in Theory 1900–1990*, 113–116.

<sup>11</sup> Clement Greenberg, “Avant–Garde and Kitsch,” in *Art in Theory 1900–1990*, 529–541; Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” in *Art in Theory 1900–1990*, 754–60.



the first of these two essays, Greenberg claims the aesthetic validity of non-representational or abstract art is determined by the composition of shapes, colours, space and surface to the exclusion of everything else – ‘content dissolves into form’ and art becomes ‘valid solely on its own terms’ without any reference to subject matter, socio-political context or meaning.<sup>12</sup> According to his terms of evaluation, avant-garde art was the pinnacle of aesthetic validity, whereas popular art produced for mass consumption was the opposite and the epitome of ‘kitsch’.<sup>13</sup> ‘Modernist Painting’ builds on this stance. In this essay Greenberg endorses abstraction as the epitome of ‘high’ art and suggests that painting should be a purely optical experience without any need to represent objects or create an illusion of three-dimensional reality. He also claims the methods used to critique the visual properties of an artwork – its pigment, surface, composition and colour – originate in Kant’s principle of universal values.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the lingering influence of Greenberg’s ideas about ‘formalism’, his stance on the autonomy of art and pre-eminence of abstract expressionism began to lose authority when alternative modes of critique adopted from other schools of thought, such as literary theory, begat new ways of writing art history, theory and criticism.<sup>15</sup> In 1972 former Greenberg advocate Rosalind Krauss published an essay that questioned the alleged objectivity of modernist criticism and its failure to see the suppression of meaning, temporality and its own history as a perspective.<sup>16</sup> At the same time Michael Baxandall (1933–2008) published his seminal book *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, where he linked the evolution of styles of painting to the social and economic conditions of their production.<sup>17</sup> According to Baxandall, Italian artists and their patrons operated within a set of institutional conventions that were influenced by

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 531–532.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 531–534, 536.

<sup>14</sup> Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” 754–758.

<sup>15</sup> New approaches to art history that evolved in the 1970s and 80s were also referred to as ‘radical’ or ‘critical’. New forms of critical analysis included feminist critique, psychoanalysis, post-structuralism, postcolonialism and postmodernism. Jonathan Harris, “Introduction” and “Radical Art History: back to its future?” in *The New Art History: A critical introduction* (London: Routledge, 2001), 1–34, 35–61.

<sup>16</sup> Rosalind Krauss, “A View of Modernism,” in *Art in Theory 1900–1990*, 953–956.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).

the commercial, religious and political preoccupations of the era.<sup>18</sup> Baxandall was not the first art historian to address the socio-political conditions of art production, but his approach marks a shift from conventional art history which privileged the impartial study of symbols and subject matter (iconography), stylistic evaluation and progressive movements towards increasing consideration of the significance of context.<sup>19</sup> In a discussion of nineteenth century French painting published in 1973, social art historian T.J. Clark challenged the treatment of art production as a discrete practice without any consideration of its historical contexts.<sup>20</sup> According to Clark, a social history of art deals with the complex relationships that exist between artists, art forms, systems of visual representation, historical structures, current theories of art and other ideologies, and the specific conditions in which they all occur. His proposal that art production is a series of transactions, experiences and events within a historically-situated social reality is the antithesis of Greenberg's approach.<sup>21</sup>

This transformative era also generated a number of studies of art production as a socially-situated activity from a sociological perspective, including influential investigations by Howard Becker and Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002). American sociologist Howard Becker began writing about art worlds and art as a collective action in two American journals in the mid 1970s.<sup>22</sup> This led to his book *Art Worlds*, first published in 1982 and re-issued in 2008.<sup>23</sup> Becker describes an art world as a network of people whose co-operative activity produces work that world defines as art. He claims these networks are centred round artists because they perform the core activity

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 1, 15–16, 27, 151.

<sup>19</sup> Although he professed his initial interest in art was influenced by formalism, Hungarian art historian Arnold Hauser (1892–1978) claimed the work he undertook in the 1940s and 50s for *The Social History of Art* (first published in 1951) and *The Philosophy of Art History* (1958) made him aware of the sociohistorical conditions of art production. According to Hauser, these publications led to *The Sociology of Art* (published in German in 1974 and in English in 1982), which was the first comprehensive discussion of the sociology of art. Arnold Hauser, preface to *The Sociology of Art (Routledge Revivals)*, trans. Kenneth J. Northcott (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2012), xvii–xx. Taylor and Francis e-book.

<sup>20</sup> T.J. Clark, "On the Social History of Art," in *Image of Power: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 9–20.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 10–13, 17.

<sup>22</sup> Bourdieu, notes in *The Field of Cultural Production*, 273. According to Bourdieu, Becker wrote about art as a collective action and art worlds in *American Sociological Review* and *American Behavioural Scientist* in 1974 and 1976 respectively.

<sup>23</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*.

– making art – but art worlds include all the people and activities involved in the production, circulation, evaluation and consumption of artworks – its producers, distributors, suppliers and audiences.<sup>24</sup> Becker acknowledges Danto and Dickie’s philosophical considerations on the subject, but suggests empirically-based observation coupled with analysis deepens our understanding of how art worlds operate.<sup>25</sup> His interest was social organisation and how art world activities affect the production and consumption of art works, rather than specific groups of artists or evaluating art for its artistic merit. According to Becker, artists’ reputations are made and lost by the choices curators, critics, gallery directors, dealers and collectors make to expose, preserve, circulate and endorse their work in activities such as exhibitions, collections, publications and histories.<sup>26</sup>

We see that art world officials have the power to legitimate work as art, but that power is often disputed ... We see, too, that in principle any object can be legitimated as art, but that in practice every art world has procedures and rules governing legitimation which, while not clear-cut or foolproof, nevertheless make the success of some candidates for the status of art very unlikely. Those procedures and rules are contained in the conventions and patterns of cooperation by which art worlds carry on their routine activities.<sup>27</sup>

Becker suggests art worlds are in a constant state of flux and new ones are generated by artistic innovation, fresh ideas and conventions, new forms of distribution and new audiences; thus, new histories are constructed from a conviction that what is being produced in an art world is now considered legitimate.<sup>28</sup> His views have many parallels with Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the ‘field of cultural production’. Indeed, Becker acknowledges the work of the French sociologist in his own writing, particularly Bourdieu’s theory that different groups in society respond to artworks according to their perception and knowledge of art, which relates to their social circumstances.<sup>29</sup> According to Bourdieu, an individual’s perception or taste in art is based on their disposition or ‘habitus’ combined with an accumulation of ‘cultural capital’ – their social

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., xxiv, 24–25, 34–35.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., ix, xxiii–xxiv, 148–153.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., xxiv, 1, 39, 42, 46, 150–153, 214, 220–224, 351–352, 360, 367.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 59, 61, 300, 304–305, 312–314, 325, 330, 339, 367.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., xx, 214, 348.

origins, education, and familiarisation with cultural activities and the codes or ‘rules’ of each ‘hierarchically-structured’ artistic field.<sup>30</sup> Clearly Bourdieu and Becker knew of each other’s theories, for Bourdieu also acknowledges Becker in his seminal work *The Field of Cultural Production*, first published in 1983.<sup>31</sup> However, Bourdieu insists his theory of field breaks radically from Becker’s idea of an art world as a collection of ‘tacit’ actions. He also insists it is radically different from a belief that art production (its making and validation) is an autonomous activity that occurs without reference to its social or historical context.<sup>32</sup> Bourdieu claims his theory of field takes account of everything that constitutes an artwork – its material production, the social conditions of its production, and the production of belief in its symbolic meaning and value by a set of ‘agents’ whose cultural capital and habitus is part of the process:<sup>33</sup>

In short, it is a question of understanding works of art as a manifestation of the field as a whole, in which all the powers of the field, and all the determinisms inherent in its structure and functioning, are concentrated.<sup>34</sup>

According to Bourdieu’s theory of field, each artistic field has its own set of rules or ‘logic’ and relative autonomy, but exists within a field of power. He calls this the ‘principle of hierarchisation’, and suggests it generates struggles within and between fields for power or authority to ‘consecrate’ or endorse art and artists, and struggles for artistic legitimacy between categories of art. Consequently, each artistic field is a ‘site of struggle’ for recognition or supremacy that depends on positions held in the field and the position each field holds within a ‘hierarchy of cultural legitimacy’.<sup>35</sup> Bourdieu claims artistic legitimacy is achieved through ‘instances of legitimation’ or ‘signs of recognition’ by other cultural producers and institutions. These instances

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<sup>30</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 64, 67–68, 72, 95, 133, 137, 183–185, 189, 230, 233–234, 236, 257, 262. The “Field of Cultural Production” was first published in *Poetics* 12, no. 4–5 (1983): 311–356. Bourdieu’s ‘Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception’ in *The Field of Cultural Production* was first published in English in *International Social Science Journal* 20 (1968): 589–612. See Bourdieu, “Habitus,” in *Habitus: a sense of place*, eds., Jean Hillier and Emma Rooksby (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 43–49; Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital,” in *Education: cultural economy and society*, ed. AH Halsey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 46–58; Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>31</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 34–35, 273.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–35.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 34–37, 190–191.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 37–42, 76–78, 121–123, 131–132, 136.

include collections and exhibitions held in art museums, publications and critical reviews, and the value attributed to them depends on their position within the 'cultural hierarchy'. He suggests the struggle for artistic legitimacy within this system includes competition between art made for its own sake that is endorsed by institutions such as publicly-funded art galleries or collections, and 'bourgeois' art that is popular with mass audiences.<sup>36</sup> This particular struggle reflects Greenberg's distinction between the aesthetic validity of avant-garde abstract art and his disdain for kitsch popular culture. However, like Becker, Bourdieu suggests the field of cultural production is also a site of struggle to preserve or challenge the cultural hierarchy, and he proposes this can be achieved through the production of critical or historical discourse:<sup>37</sup>

The production of discourse (critical, historical, etc.) about the work of art is one of the conditions of production of the work. Every critical affirmation contains, on the one hand, a recognition of the value of the work which occasions it, which is thus designated as a worthy object of legitimate discourse ... and on the other hand an affirmation of its own legitimacy. All critics declare not only their judgement of the work but also their claim to the right to talk about it and judge it. In short, they take part in a struggle for the monopoly of legitimate discourse about the work of art, and consequently in the production of the value of the work of art.<sup>38</sup>

By identifying contemporary art production in the South West of Western Australia a subject worthy of critical discourse, and my right to talk about it through my first-hand knowledge of the region and its art world, my thesis becomes an 'instance of legitimation' whereby new material and analysis affirms its legitimacy. Thus, a new art history is being constructed from my conviction that what is being produced is legitimate in its own right and as part of a wider discourse that endorses the validity of regional contexts and perspectives. This 'struggle' for recognition is not a struggle for supremacy. However, it challenges the implication a predetermined hierarchy of artistic legitimacy exists between metropolitan and regional art scenes.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 50–51, 121–123, 132, 136.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 121–122, 183–185, 187.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 35–36.

## EVOLVING ATTITUDES TO PROVINCIALISM AND REGIONALISM

Bourdieu's principle of hierarchisation is manifest in the notion of 'centre-periphery' – belief in a structural relationship between advanced or metropolitan centres of power and dependent or subordinate peripheral places.<sup>39</sup> In the art world this is illustrated by Terry Smith's definition of 'provincialism' as 'an attitude of subservience to an externally imposed hierarchy of cultural values', which was epitomised in the 1970s by the projection of New York as the centre of the international art world and the simulation of its conventions elsewhere.<sup>40</sup> According to Smith, the metropolitan centre comprised a handful of powerful New York galleries and critics who influenced what was considered avant-garde. These power-brokers endorsed the careers and status of a few selected artists by giving them exposure in exhibitions or influential publications 'loaded with authority'. Smith claimed that so long as they accepted the rules and conventions established by the metropolitan centre, all other art worlds would remain provincial, and outside forces would continue to control the development of artists' reputations. This generates tension between 'reluctant recognition' of externally-determined criteria and 'defiant localism' asserting the legitimacy of art produced elsewhere, leaving artists trapped in a 'provincial bind' and faced with a choice – toe the line and continue the pattern of subservience to the perceived centre, or distance themselves and produce art that sets its own terms of validity.<sup>41</sup>

Smith's commentary on provincialism arose out of an on-going dialogue with colleagues about Australian art and its relationship with European and American art, amidst growing critique of Greenberg's theories on formalism as the pre-eminent mode of artistic validation.<sup>42</sup> In a related essay, Ian Burn challenges the 'hierarchical assumptions'

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<sup>39</sup> *Encyclopedia.com*, accessed January 1, 2016, [www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1088-centreperipherymodel.html](http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1088-centreperipherymodel.html).

<sup>40</sup> Terry Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," *Artforum* 13, no. 1 (1974): 54–59, accessed May 10, 2011. <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/smith-provincialism-problem-1974.pdf>, n.p.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Terry Smith, "Provincialism in Art," *Quadrant* 15, no. 2 (1971): 67–71, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://search.informit.com.au.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=935146856464766;res=IELLC>; Smith, "Provincialism Refigured," *Art Monthly Australia* 13, no. 1 (1988), 4; Ian Burn, "Art is what we do, culture is what we do to other artists," in *Dialogue: Writings in Art History* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991), 131 (hereafter cited as *Dialogue*). According to Geoffrey Blatchen, the essays arose out of conversations between Smith, Burn and English artist-writer Mel Ramsden in New York in the early 1970s. Geoffrey Blatchen, introduction to *Dialogue*, 216. Smith, Burn and Ramsden were all members of

of the metropolitan-centred art world (New York) by advocating the importance of understanding the particular geographic, sociological, ideological and economic contexts of art production, rather than conforming to a system whose authority was reinforced by its own rules.<sup>43</sup> Burn claims that defining a context as ‘provincial’ by factors governed by the rules and values of a different context amounts to a form of cultural imperialism. Thus, the provincial context submits to the control of the dominant context and the only ‘success’ available to provincial artists is conferred by the latter, which remains resistant to change to maintain its status and immunity from external criticism. According to Burn, this scenario lacks a sense of ‘interplay’ and cross-fertilisation between contexts; and accepting each context for what it is rather than how well it mirrors the dominant structure.<sup>44</sup>

Burn’s stance on the significance of context is evident in a subsequent essay written between 1979 and 1983 and published in 1988, where he and others reflect upon the way Australian art history has been recorded from a perspective of dependency on European and American practices.<sup>45</sup> They suggest re-examining the nature of centre-periphery relations and revaluating displaced local practices would reveal an interdependent rather than a subservient relationship, thereby enabling an alternative interpretation of twentieth century art viewed from an Australian perspective.<sup>46</sup> Their proposal to recognise regional specificities and local traditions aligned with rising interest in ‘regionalism’ in critical discourse and practice, in response to a shifting geopolitical landscape. As a postcolonial world took shape and new centres of political, economic and cultural influence emerged.<sup>47</sup> New York began to lose its status as the

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Art & Language which challenged Greenberg’s formalism and promoted conceptual art through the journal *Art-Language* (first published in Britain in 1969). Ramsden and Burn joined Art & Language in 1970. Smith joined in 1972. They collaborated on several publications. See Ian Burn, Nigel Lendon, Charles Merewether and Ann Stephen, “The Provincialism Debates”, in *The Necessity of Australian Art: An Essay About Interpretation* (Sydney, University of Sydney, 1988), 111–114 (hereafter cited as *The Necessity of Australian Art*); Burn, “Conceptual Art as Art,” in *Dialogue*, 125, 130.

<sup>43</sup> Burn, “Art is what we do, culture is what we do to other artists,” in *Dialogue*, 131–139. This essay was first published in *Duerle 11.7.73*, exhibition catalogue, Belgium (1973) and as ‘Provincialism’ in *Art Dialogue* 1, no. 1 (1973), Melbourne.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 135–138. See Smith,

<sup>45</sup> Burn et al., *The Necessity of Australian Art*.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 132–133.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, “Provincialism Refigured,” 4–6; Smith, “Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?,” 3.

centre of the art world, and the idea that Western art history was a 'grand narrative' of successive movements and avant-garde styles led by Europe then America was being challenged by alternative views of history, culture and society and multiple concurrent forms of visual expression, such as conceptual art, installation, land art, performance and new visual media. Periodisation was passé, and under the rubric of postcolonial, postmodern, poststructuralist and feminist discourse the experience of colonialism and its impact was scrutinised; new narratives of displacement, diaspora and migration articulated the diverse, hybrid nature of society and culture; systems of representation were deconstructed; and questions of identity and identification interrogated.<sup>48</sup> Growing recognition of these shifts paved the way for a new global dialogue (see chapter five) and cross-disciplinary interest in regionalism.

To understand the concept of regionalism, one needs to define the concept of a region. According to Andrew Beer et al., people and organisations create regions for social, political or economic purposes by grouping together places that share something in common. They propose three types of regions exist – administrative, functional and homogenous. An 'administrative' region is defined by institutional borders or government boundaries; a 'functional' region is an alliance of places linked together for a particular purpose; and a 'homogenous' region has one or more distinctive characteristics such as climate, environment, economic base, history or culture.<sup>49</sup> Clearly these categories are interchangeable and overlap, depending on their context or purpose. Consequently, a region is a social construct of any size or composition, ranging from a group of countries such as Asia-Pacific, to sub-national territories such as the State of Western Australia, or areas within a State such as the South West of

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<sup>48</sup> Jean François Lyotard, "Introduction to The Postmodern Condition," in *Art in Theory 1900–1990*, 998–1000. First published in French in *Critique* 419 (1982); Hans Belting, *The End of Art History?*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), PDF e-book, accessed October 6, 2016, <http://textos.pucp.edu.pe/pdf/441.pdf>; Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Abingdon, England: Routledge Classics, 1994). See Harris, *The New Art History: A critical introduction*.

<sup>49</sup> Andrew Beer, Maude Alaric and Bill Pritchard, *Developing Australia's regions: theory and practice* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2003), NetLibrary Inc. e-book (hereafter cited as *Developing Australia's regions*), 41–46, accessed October 30, 2016, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzg3NTc0XI9BTg2?sid=37cbeb1c-4810-4630-96b7-c878d83b66e8@sessionmgr4006&vid=0&format=EB&rid=1>.



Western Australia.<sup>50</sup> In Australia, regionalism is associated with discourse about political, economic and cultural relationships within global networks and domestic debate about being regional within the country. Beer et al. suggest regions include metropolitan and non-metropolitan settings but within Australia the term ‘regional’ usually refers to areas outside the State capital cities.<sup>51</sup>

Smith defines regionalism as the conscious process of identifying and evaluating the distinct conditions and features that characterise places – their ‘regionality’ – and then making comparisons between them.<sup>52</sup> His consideration of ‘regional positioning’ within Australia in the 1980s and 90s suggests ‘being regional’ was viewed both positively and negatively. The art world was devolving, but according to Smith the new cultural centres operated under the same hierarchical principles and conventions as before, which meant that centre-periphery tension within Australia was perceived as inequality between the Eastern states capital cities of Sydney and Melbourne and the rest of the country.<sup>53</sup> On the one hand, being regional was seen as making less significant art within a metro-centric hierarchy of cultural valuing. On the other, it meant being able to respond directly to landscapes and natural phenomena – a central concern for many artists.<sup>54</sup> Smith suggests a divide had emerged between those who respond conceptually to contemporary concerns and those who uphold the landscape tradition. Yet for many others, the space between landscape and conceptual art holds great fascination. Thus, Smith claims, city-country differences should be seen as ‘enabling zones of exchange’ rather than ‘antithetical divides’, and the real difference for regional artists is the paucity of critical arts writing outside the cities.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 38, 46.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, “Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?,” 3–4.

<sup>53</sup> Smith, “Provincialism Refigured,” 4–6. See Frank Moorhouse, “Regionalism Provincialism and Australian Anxieties,” *Westerly* 4 (1978): 61. According to Frank Moorhouse, a similar tension existed in the Australian literary scene in the late 1970s. He claims the dilemma of whether or not writers could make a living and realise their potential shifted from a desire to travel and work overseas to an inclination to stay in Australia, which generated a new fear of domination by Sydney.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, “Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?,” 5.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 5–6. Kim Mahood suggests dynamic art is made throughout Australia but there is a lack of critical writing about regional art production that needs to be addressed by regional writers. Kim Mahood, “About Regional Writing,” *Periphery* 23, no.1 (1995): 9–10.

According to Burn, landscape is the most enduring and popular genre in Australian art.<sup>56</sup> In an essay first published in 1982 for an exhibition of inter-war landscape paintings held at Bendigo Art Gallery in Victoria, he suggests the popular appeal of these images lay in their depiction of specific, recognisable locations which inspired a sense of belonging, and the persistent use of pastoral imagery invoking harmony between nature and rural production to symbolise a national vision of place. However, the imagery depicted non-indigenous land use and the relationship Aboriginal people have with the land had been excluded from this tradition.<sup>57</sup> Through a more considered analysis of these paintings, Burn's objective was to re-instate the significance of regional landscape imagery in accounts of Australian art, although he sensed the exhibition at Bendigo would incite derision from some quarters. He saw renewed interest in regionally-specific frameworks of art history and the inclusion of local subject matter in contemporary art as a timely opportunity to reassess why this tradition has been treated with derision by subsequent generations of art historians, which would involve a reassessment of the attitudes and values of a particular historic moment.<sup>58</sup>

According to Smith, Burn's reflections on inter-war landscape painting represent a form of 'critical regionalism' – a concept devised in the early 1980s as an architectural term or treatment whereby locally-sourced materials and features combine with international tendencies to integrate the particular with the universal.<sup>59</sup> Smith uses this concept to describe some forms of art production he encountered in the Northern Territory in 1993. He claims two types of regionalism coexist in the Territory – conventional and experimental – representing different ways of seeing the same place. The former is found in the large amount of art and crafts objects produced for the tourism market, including highly competent paintings of popular views, whilst the latter

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<sup>56</sup> Ian Burn, "Popular landscape painting between the wars," in *Dialogue*, 38; Burn, *National Life & Landscapes: Australian Painting 1900–1940* (Sydney and London: Bay Books, 1990), 7 (hereafter cited as *National Life & Landscapes*).

<sup>57</sup> Burn, "Popular landscape painting between the wars," 42–44, 47–50. See Burn, *National Life & Landscapes*, 16, 108.

<sup>58</sup> Burn, "Popular landscape painting between the wars," 38–39, 50–51.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, "Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?," 4; Kenneth Frampton, "Prospects for a Critical Regionalism," *Perspecta* 20 (1983): 147–162.

exists in more 'bravura' works and critically-engaged forms of realism.<sup>60</sup> Smith suggests the dominance of the landscape genre represents a 'restrictive' form of regionalism. However, innovative and critically-engaged work that responds to local conditions as well as broader issues, or work that employs the language of international art such as installation, represents a third kind of regionalism – a form of 'critical regionalism' that illustrates a willingness to work across centres, peripheries and cultures.<sup>61</sup>

Otherwise, regionalism is defined by that which is other than itself. That is, by the absence of an internationalist outlook on the part of local artists and their supporters, and by the overwhelming presence of tourist and popular markets for scenes of the area. These factors have enormous impact, drowning many local artists within reactionary regionalist outlooks. But they can be resisted, as we can see in the works of certain artists, white and black, from the regions.<sup>62</sup>

By the end of the 1990s, Smith was suggesting that regionalism had evolved from a problem of provincialism to a sense of positive advantage, to a puzzling uncertainty. Had the shifting attitudes of the last three decades laid the groundwork for permanent change, or was the gap between Sydney and Melbourne and the rest of the country generating dependency by sub-regions on other regional centres with their own distinctive cultures? <sup>63</sup>

If the hierarchies remain in place ... will there not always be a traffic from the regions to the centres and then internationally? Not necessarily, because there are important possibilities of traffic between these nodal points, along these lateral lines as well.<sup>64</sup>

The notion of lateral exchange corresponds to 'new regionalism' theory which dispels myths that regions are peripheral spaces, by claiming significance of place and local knowledge embodied in individuals, networks and institutions gives them 'competitive advantage' in the global market place.<sup>65</sup> Critics of new regionalism suggest it is

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<sup>60</sup> Terry Smith, "Rethinking Regionalism: Art in the Northern Territory," *Art and Australia* 31, no. 4 (1994): 469–470.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 470–471.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 471.

<sup>63</sup> Smith, "Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?," 3–4, 8.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>65</sup> Beer *et al.*, *Developing Australia's Regions*, 21, 39; Al Rainnie and Julie Grant, "The Knowledge–

disengaged with environmental, social and cultural issues and too focused on economic development.<sup>66</sup> Yet it offers a persuasive alternative to the dilemma of centre-periphery hierarchies because it promotes the intrinsic strengths and distinctive attributes of regions, such as the natural environment, cultural heritage, specialist products and local knowledge, to endorse 'placed-based' locally-driven policies for regional development.<sup>67</sup> This approach could be considered a form of 'defiant localism' asserting its own terms of validity. Alternatively, it could be seen as recognition that regions are not peripheral spaces that risk distancing themselves from the perceived centre when they assert their own legitimacy.

## CONCLUSION

Becker and Bourdieu both claimed that art worlds are in a constant state of flux and changes happen from within their structures. They proposed that cultural hierarchies are challenged by new ways of thinking; and new histories emerge from the struggle for legitimacy, authority to legitimise and the conviction that what is being produced is now considered legitimate.<sup>68</sup> Evolving attitudes to provincialism and regionalism from the 1970s to the end of the twentieth century illustrate the emergence of a shift from considering regions to be peripheral and subordinate to seeing them as zones of possibility with distinct attributes and advantages. This shift offers a sound basis for challenging the implication a hierarchy of artistic legitimacy exists between metropolitan and regional art worlds. I suggest that coupling growing acknowledgement that art production is a 'context-dependent activity' with theories of regionalism that endorse the value of local knowledge and significance of place provides a reliable basis for examining the South West of Western Australia as a zone of possibility for

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Economy, New Regionalism and the Re-emergence of Regions," in *New Regionalism in Australia*, eds., Al Rainnie and Mardelene Grobbelaar (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 3–24; Kevin Morgan, "Sustainable Regions: Governance, Innovation and Sustainability," in *New Regionalism in Australia*, 27–48.

<sup>66</sup> Rainnie and Grant, "The Knowledge–Economy, New Regionalism and the Re-emergence of Regions," 14–15, 18. See also Al Rainnie, "New Regionalism in Australia – Limits and Possibilities," (paper presented at the Social Inclusion and New Regionalism Workshop at the University of Queensland, October 11, 2002, and at 'New Regionalism' in Australia: A new model of work, organisation and regional governance?, Institute for Regional Studies, Monash University, 25–26 November 2002); Morgan, "Sustainable Regions: Governance, Innovation and Sustainability," 27–48.

<sup>67</sup> Beer et al., *Developing Australia's Regions*, 14, 35, 105, 121–122; Rainnie and Grant, "The Knowledge–Economy, New Regionalism and the Re-emergence of Regions," 20; Morgan, "Sustainable Regions: Governance, Innovation and Sustainability," 29–30, 42.

<sup>68</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 2008; Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 1993.

contemporary art production, and arguing that 'being regional' is a legitimate position in the art world today, on its own terms and as part of a globalising tendency.<sup>69</sup> I discuss these implications of shifting attitudes towards the increasing demise of centre-periphery paradigms further in chapter five, where I examine recent discourse on the globalisation of the art world and new ways of writing art history that recognise the validity of regional contexts and perspectives. But first in chapters three and four, I describe the specific context of my study to provide a sense of time and place, and address the perception of a paucity of publications and absence of critique on South West art production by reviewing the literature that existed when I began my inquiry.

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<sup>69</sup> Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," n.p.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **SENSE OF PLACE:**

### **THE SOUTH WEST REGION AND ITS ART WORLD**

**WA's South West region has everything a civilized person could possibly want; stunning scenery, wonderful wines and food, and a burgeoning fine arts scene.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Briggs, "Beyond the boundaries", 113.

## INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I examined the concept of an art world to illustrate how they operate as sites of validation where art and artists acquire artistic legitimacy from individuals and institutions through instances of exposure and recognition. I also discussed the concept of a region and regionalism. These concepts illustrate how place and position play a role in the production of art. The aim of this chapter is to describe the specific context of my study – the South West region and its art world – to provide a sense of time and place. I begin by defining the South West as a region and describe some of its features. Then I describe some of the key institutions and sites that provide venues for the exhibition or sale of artworks in the region. This regional profile acts as a backdrop for future chapters, where I discuss some specific instances of institutional practice and forms of art production (making and validation) that occur in the region. It also helps to contextualise the description of the South West art scene that spurred my inquiry, and the literature review that follows in chapter four.

## DEFINING THE SOUTH WEST AS A REGION

According to Western Australian Government legislation, the ‘South West’ is one of nine regions identified as an economic development zone by the Regional Development Commissions Act of 1993.<sup>2</sup> It spans an area of 23,970 square kilometres embracing twelve local government municipalities grouped into three sub-regions called Bunbury–Wellington, Vasse, and Warren–Blackwood (Figure 3).<sup>3</sup> These sub-regions are based on formal alliances between local government municipalities with common economic interests. Defined this way, the South West illustrates Beer et al.’s definition of an administrative and a functional region.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, Tourism Western Australian identifies ‘Australia’s South West’ as an area of 62,887 square kilometres comprising five sub-regions – Geographe, Margaret River Wine Region, Blackwood River Valley,

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<sup>2</sup> “Western Australian Legislation: Regional Development Commissions Act 1993.”

<sup>3</sup> “Our Region”, *South West Development Commission*, accessed May 18, 2011, [www.swdc.wa.gov.au/our-region.aspx](http://www.swdc.wa.gov.au/our-region.aspx). Defined as an economic development zone by State legislation, the South West includes the cities of Bunbury and Busselton and shires of Augusta–Margaret River, Bridgetown–Greenbushes, Boyup Brook, Capel, Collie, Dardanup, Donnybrook–Balingup, Harvey, Manjimup, and Nannup.

<sup>4</sup> Beer et al. *Developing Australia’s regions*, 43–45.

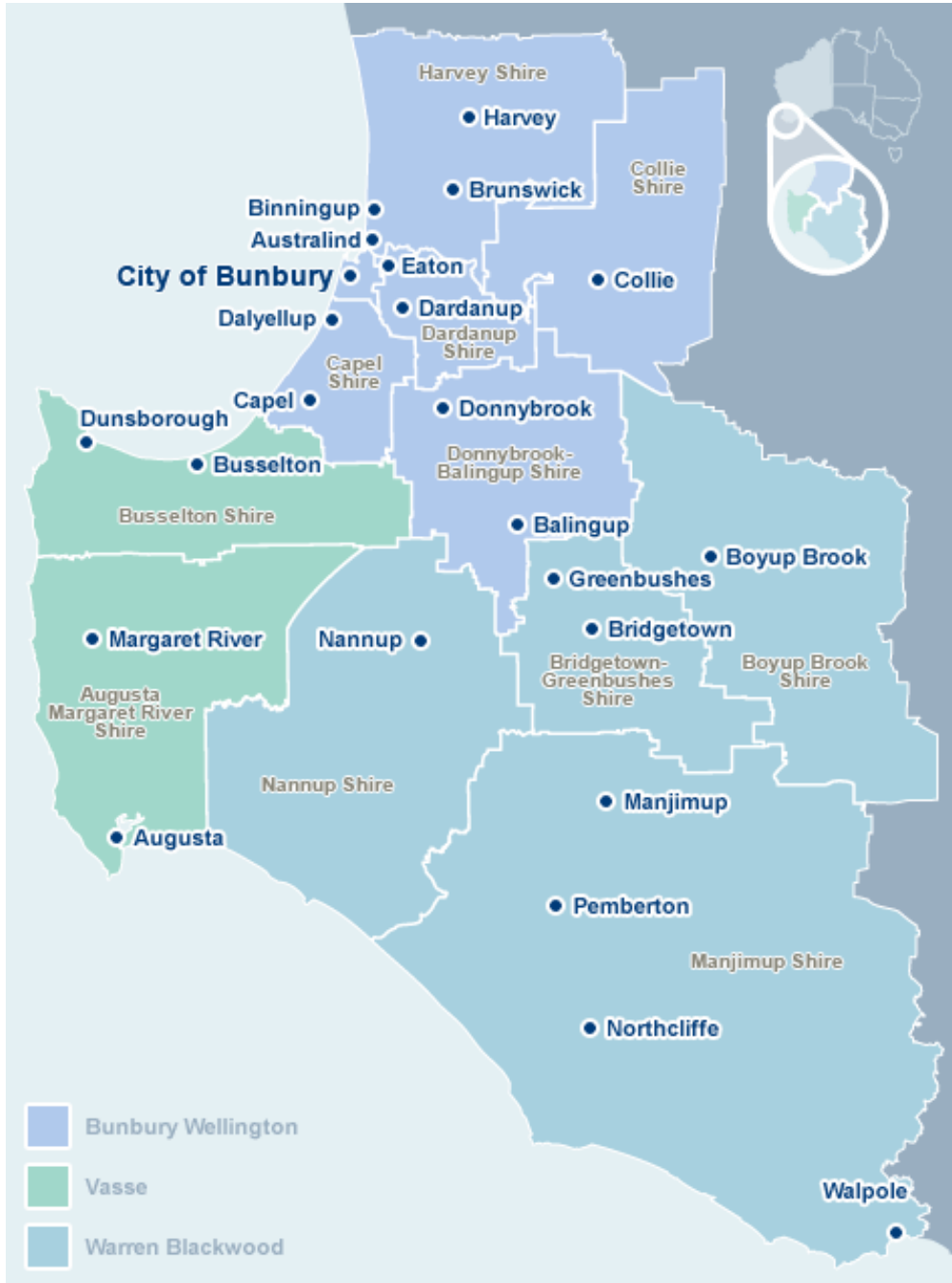


Figure 3 South West region of Western Australia comprising three sub-regions: Bunbury–Wellington, Vasse and Warren–Blackwood.  
 Source: [www.swdc.wa.gov.au/our-region.aspx](http://www.swdc.wa.gov.au/our-region.aspx).



Southern Forests and Great Southern (Figure 4). These five sub-regions are based on the imagined alignment of adjacent localities with shared features, such as a river system, native forest, or wine production. Yet according to the Regional Commissions Act, only four of these sub-regions fall within the boundary of the South West – Geographe, Margaret River Wine Region, Blackwood River Valley and Southern Forest – and the Great Southern is a separate region. The co-existence of alternative definitions of the South West illustrates that the concept of a region is a construct.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, unless otherwise stated, any reference I make to the South West region in my thesis refers to the area defined by the Regional Commissions Act (Figure 3). Focusing my research within this area both contained and informed my inquiry.

Irrespective of which official definition is used, according to the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC), the South West region is part of ‘Noongar country’ – Noongar Boodja – an area of land stretching from Geraldton to Esperance (Figure 5).<sup>6</sup> According to SWALSC, archaeological evidence shows that Noongar people have lived on this land for over 45,000 years, and they have a strong connection to their country, which means caring for the environment and places of cultural significance.<sup>7</sup> Noongar people comprise fourteen language groups that relate to specific ecological areas of land. Traditionally, they lived in harmony with their environment, sourcing food from the ocean, freshwater lakes or the Karri and Jarrah forests, harvesting according to their knowledge of six seasonal weather patterns to preserve natural resources.<sup>8</sup> In the early to mid nineteenth century, when Europeans first settled on the land that traditionally belongs to Noongar people, they derived a living from agriculture and forestry. Nowadays the economic base of the region is diverse, and the South West is the most populated region in Western Australia outside the State’s capital

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<sup>5</sup> Beer et al. *Developing Australia’s regions: theory and practice*, 46.

<sup>6</sup> “Noongar Country,” *The Noongar Story*, accessed May 18, 2011, <http://noongarcountry.mysouthwest.com.au/TheNoongarStory>. Permission to reproduce this map was received from the South West Development Commission. See “Fact Sheet,” *South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council*, accessed August 5, 2011, [www.noongar.org.au/images/pdf/facts-sheets/SWALSC\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://www.noongar.org.au/images/pdf/facts-sheets/SWALSC_Fact_Sheet.pdf). The South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC) is the native title representative body for Noongar people.

<sup>7</sup> “Connection to Country,” *Kaartdijin Noongar – Noongar Knowledge: Sharing Noongar Culture*, accessed May 22, 2015, [www.noongar.org.au/connection-to-country/](http://www.noongar.org.au/connection-to-country/).

<sup>8</sup> “Connection to Country”; “Food,” *Kaartdijin Noongar – Noongar Knowledge: Sharing Noongar Culture*, accessed May 22, 2015, [www.noongarculture.org.au/food/](http://www.noongarculture.org.au/food/).

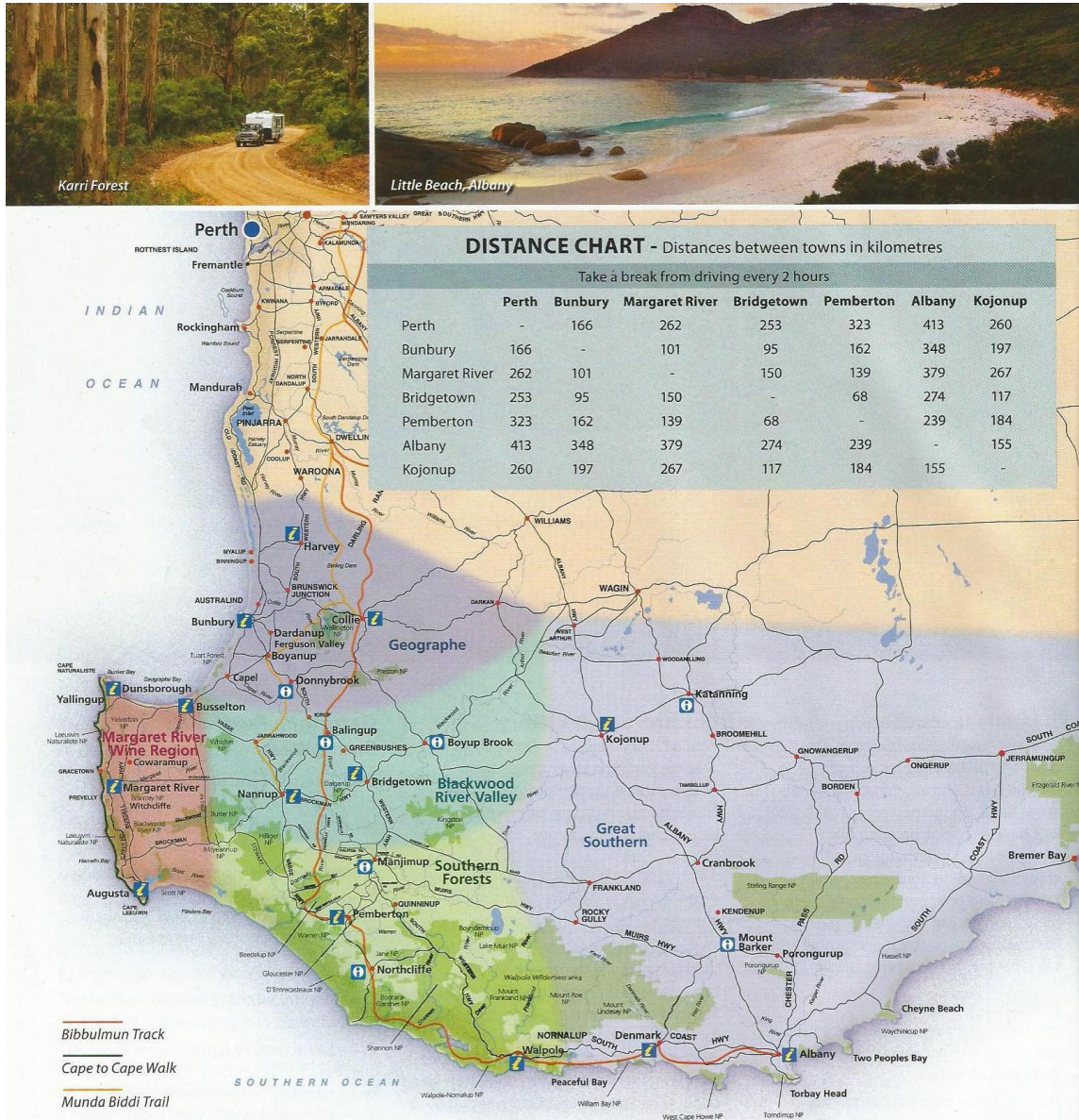


Figure 4 Australia's South West comprising five sub-regions – Geographe, Margaret River Wine Region, Blackwood River Valley, Southern Forests and Great Southern.

Source: map and images scanned from *Australia's South West Holiday Guide 2011–2012* (Bunbury: Australia's South West, 2011), 4.



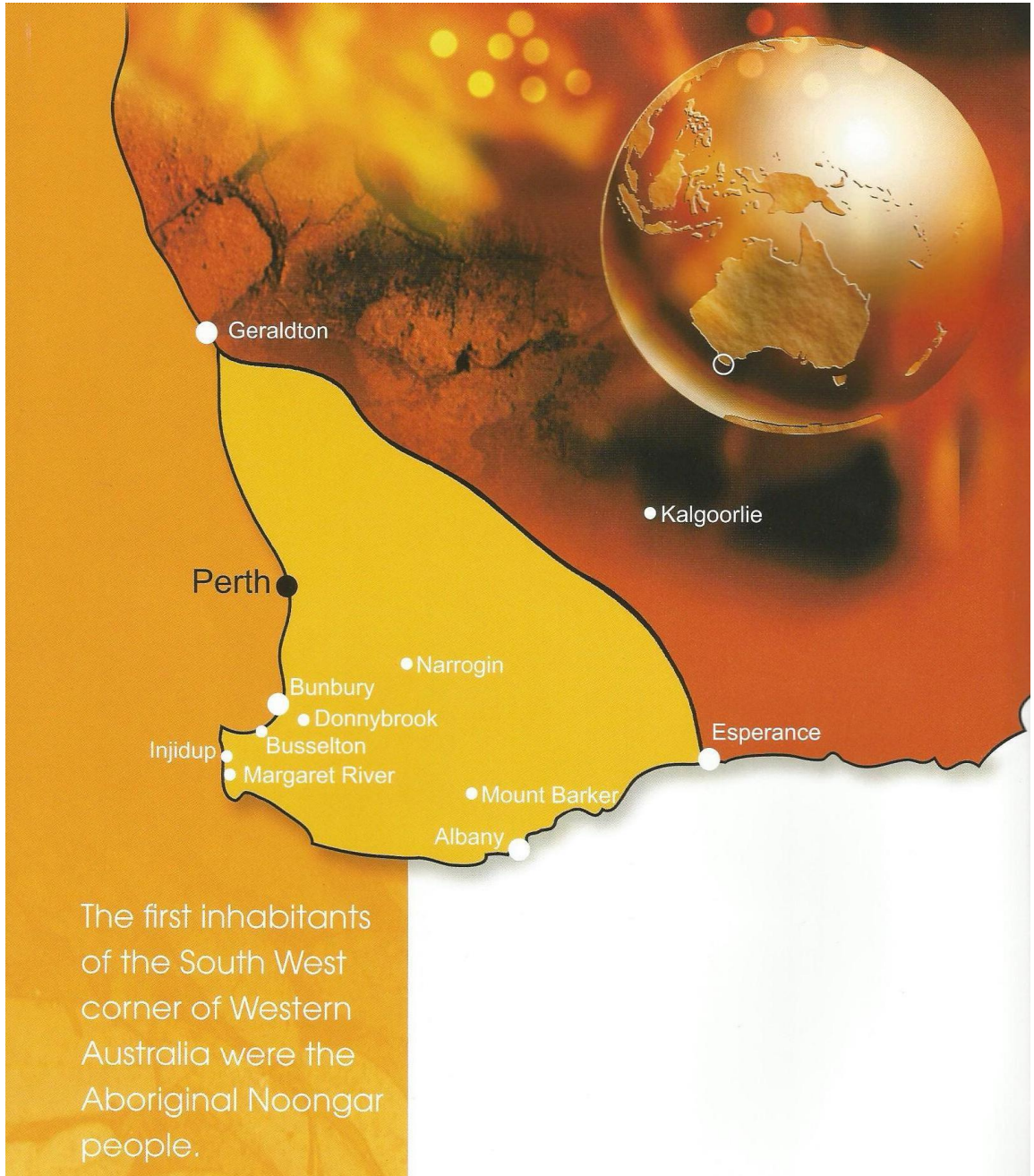


Figure 5 Noongar Country

Source: image scanned from *Noongar Country: Aboriginal Art Catalogue* (Bunbury: South West Development Commission, n.d.), inside cover.

Perth and its metropolitan surrounds.<sup>9</sup> Statistics show that between 2005 and 2013 the region's population increased from 139,003 to 169,682, and trends suggest it will reach 230,000 by 2026.<sup>10</sup> In recent years, rapid population growth has paralleled regional economic growth, largely attributed to employment and business opportunities in the mining and mineral processing industries.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the change-of-lifestyle trend known as the 'sea-change' phenomenon has contributed to population growth and considerable residential development, especially in coastal communities or suburbs close to the cities of Bunbury and Busselton. According to demographer Bernard Salt, in 2007 a suburb on the outskirts of Bunbury called Australind led a national list of the ten 'best' places to live in Australia, based on factors such as income levels, employment opportunities, property values, population mix, climate, access to infrastructure, cultural facilities and areas of natural beauty.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the population of inland areas of the South West remains stable.<sup>13</sup>

As well as its perceived lifestyle benefits, the South West is allegedly the leading regional tourist destination in Western Australia, attracting an average of 1.56 million visitors annually.<sup>14</sup> Tourism Western Australia claims the South West offers some of the most varied travel experiences in the State. Most of their marketing claims its attraction stems from its natural environment, opportunities for outdoor adventure and sporting activity, or its world class wine industry, boutique breweries, gourmet food products, and cultural festivals (Figure 6). In 2010 Lonely Planet voted 'Australia's

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<sup>9</sup> "Economy," *South West Development Commission*, accessed January 1, 2016, [www.swdc.wa.gov.au/economy.aspx](http://www.swdc.wa.gov.au/economy.aspx); "Population," *South West Development Commission*, accessed November 10, 2014, [www.swdc.wa.gov.au/information-centre/statistics/population.aspx](http://www.swdc.wa.gov.au/information-centre/statistics/population.aspx). The estimated population of the Peel region was 126,463 in 2013. See "Peel people," Peel Development Commission, accessed January 1, 2016, [www.peel.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PEEL-PEOPLE.pdf](http://www.peel.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PEEL-PEOPLE.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> "Population," *South West Development Commission*, accessed November 10, 2014, [www.swdc.wa.gov.au/information-centre/statistics/population.aspx](http://www.swdc.wa.gov.au/information-centre/statistics/population.aspx).

<sup>11</sup> The South West economy continued to grow during the economic downturn that began in 2008. *South West Regional Focus 2010: a Snapshot of South West Western Australia*, accessed July 22, 2010, [www.swdc.wa.gov.au/media/62998/2010\\_swsnapshot\\_web\\_2.pdf](http://www.swdc.wa.gov.au/media/62998/2010_swsnapshot_web_2.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Salt quoted in Isobel Wright, "Changing Places" in *Australian: Wish Magazine, The Seachange Issue*, February 2007, 25–27.

<sup>13</sup> "Population," *South West Development Commission*. Regions that attract people to a non-metropolitan lifestyle are often called 'sea-change regions' after a popular Australian television series broadcast from 1998 to 2000. Beer et al., *Developing Australia's regions*, 50.

<sup>14</sup> Tourism Western Australia statistics based on a five year average between 2009 and 2013. "Tourism," *South West Development Commission*, accessed November 10, 2014, [www.swdc.wa.gov.au/information-centre/statistics/tourism.aspx](http://www.swdc.wa.gov.au/information-centre/statistics/tourism.aspx).

South West' one of the world's top ten destinations, and in 2015 they nominated 'Southwest Western Australia' one of Australia's top ten family-friendly destinations.<sup>15</sup>

Understanding the implications of any claims of regional growth, prosperity or popularity falls outside the scope of this thesis. The purpose of this brief profile is to illustrate that the South West is often portrayed as picturesque and prosperous, replete with natural attributes and perceived opportunity. It reveals that the productive capacity and perceived appeal of the region largely derives from its environment and natural resources. Yet nowhere is utopia and conflict exists between the demands of economic progress and preservation of the social and natural environment. For example, the South West corner of WA is one of five Mediterranean climate zones with a 'globally-significant' eco-system that has been identified as an international bio-diversity hotspot because many of the endemic species of flora and fauna are threatened by habitat loss, disease or extinction as a result of changes in land use and the introduction of foreign plants and animals since European settlement.<sup>16</sup> Recent examples of contested land use include long-term opposition to logging native forests in national parks in the Southern Forest or Warren-Blackwood areas and resistance to coal mining in the Margaret River area. These disputes concern the affect of land-use changes on the social ecosystem as well as the protection of the natural environment. Meanwhile, the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council and the Western Australia Government continue to negotiate Native Title claims and Indigenous Land Use Agreements, including recognition of traditional ownership of Noongar country by an Act of Parliament, access to country and joint management of conservations areas.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "Australia's top 10 family-friendly destinations," *Lonely Planet*, accessed July 17, 2015. <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/australia/travel-tips-and-articles/australias-top-10-family-friendly-destinations>; *Australia's South West*, accessed July 20, 2011, [www.australiassouthwest.com/en/Destination/Pages/LonelyPlanetSays.aspx](http://www.australiassouthwest.com/en/Destination/Pages/LonelyPlanetSays.aspx).

<sup>16</sup> Cheryl Gole, *The Southwest Australia Ecoregion: Jewel of the Australian Continent*, (Perth: Southwest Australia Ecoregion Initiative, 2006), 1.

<sup>17</sup> *South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council*, accessed May 22, 2015, [www.noongar.org.au/talks-government.php](http://www.noongar.org.au/talks-government.php).



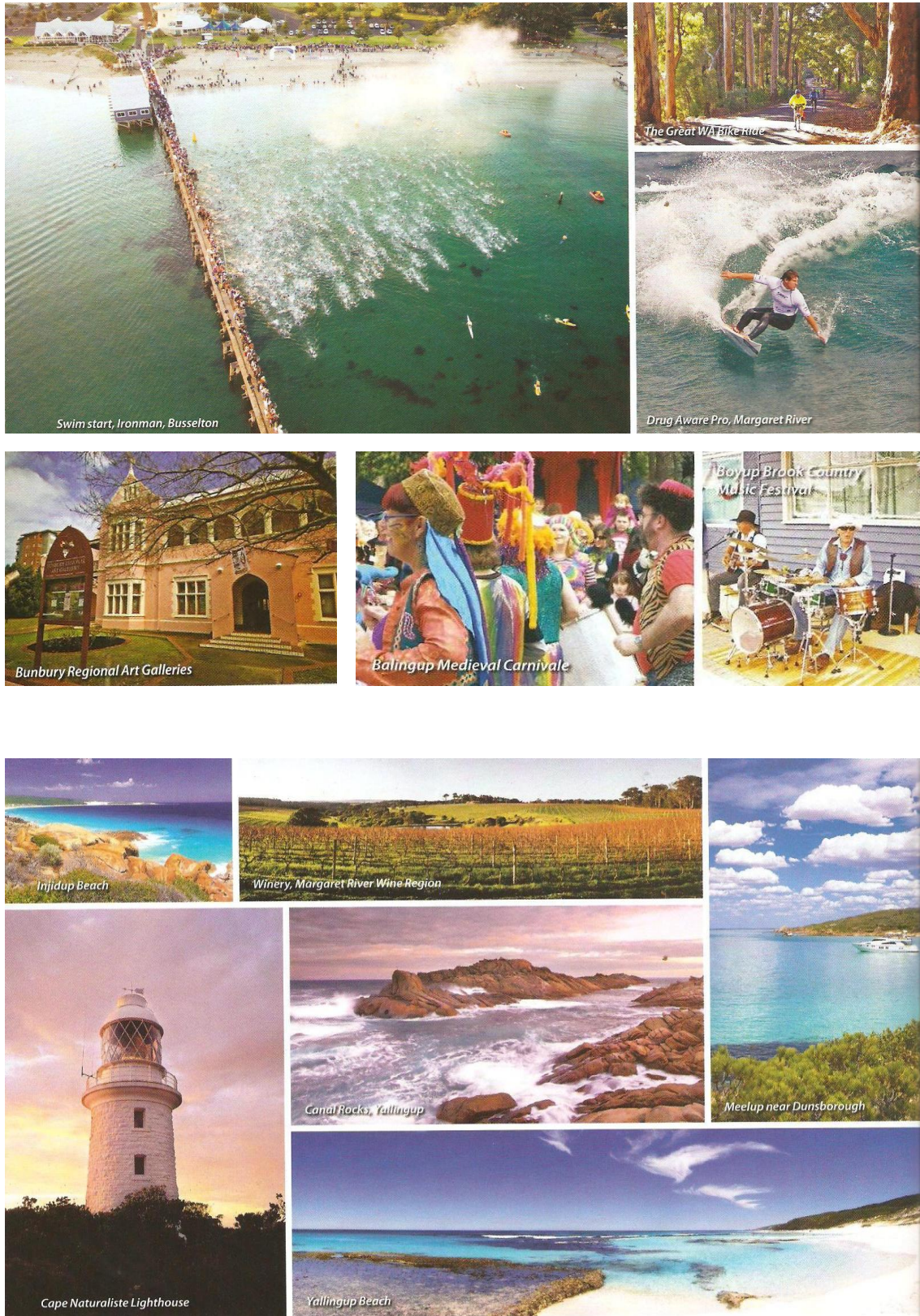


Figure 6 A selection of images scanned from *Australia's South West Holiday Guide 2011–2012*. (Bunbury: Australia's South West, 2011), 16–17, 20, 32.

## THE SOUTH WEST ART WORLD

According to Peter Wynn-Moylan, the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales has more practicing artists per capita than any other region in Australia, three regional galleries, numerous art organisations, and over a hundred arts and craft retail outlets, although for most selling art is not their core business. Wynn-Moylan claims that like most art worlds, two forms of art practice exist concurrently – traditional art that is sold in commercial galleries or at the studio door, and more conceptually-driven work that is influenced by current trends and funded through subsidies, art awards, acquisition by public collections, or supplemented by teaching.<sup>18</sup> Wynn-Moylan describes an art world that is very similar in character to the description Terry Smith gave of regional art production in the Northern Territory discussed in chapter two.<sup>19</sup> There are also parallels with the South West art world, where there are three public art galleries, countless owner-operated retail outlets selling arts and crafts including a handful of specialist commercial galleries, and a large population of ‘professional’ and ‘hobby’ artists producing artworks and craft objects motivated by commercial or conceptual intentions.<sup>20</sup> The former often fits the notion of ‘bourgeois’ art produced for popular consumption as a saleable product or commercially-driven enterprise.<sup>21</sup> The latter is more likely to be produced to make an ideological statement or for reasons other than making a dollar or decorating the living room.

Wynn-Moylan claims that artists in regional areas face the same issues as city-based artists – finding somewhere to sell their work or somewhere to gain exposure and recognition.<sup>22</sup> Comprehensively mapping the South West art world by describing every venue or activity that occurs is outside the scope and intent of this thesis. However, an

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<sup>18</sup> Peter Wynn-Moylan, “A Country Practice,” *Artlink* 19, no. 2 (1999), n.p., accessed August 2, 2007, <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles.cfm?id=99>.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, “Rethinking Regionalism: Art in the Northern Territory”.

<sup>20</sup> The Australian Tax Office defines a ‘professional’ artist as someone with a registered Australian Business Number who creates art in a systematic and business-like manner, and a ‘hobbyist’ as someone for whom it is a pastime. “Taxation Ruling TR 2005/1,” *Australian Government Australian Taxation Office*, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://law.ato.gov.au/atoLaw/view.htm?docid=TXR/TR20051/NAT/ATO00001>. The South West gained its fourth publicly-funded gallery in May 2016 with the launch of Manjimup Art Gallery, when the Shire of Manjimup refurbished a meeting room to create a one-room gallery adjacent to the library. “Manjimup Art Gallery,” *Shire Manjimup*, accessed November 10, 2016, <http://www.manjimup.wa.gov.au/our-places-and-spaces/artgallery/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>21</sup> See Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 51.

<sup>22</sup> Wynn-Moylan, “A Country Practice,” n.p.

illustrated description of some of the key institutions and sites that support the exhibition and/or sale of conceptual and commercially-driven artworks gives some insight into the nature of this particular art world.

### **Public galleries and their collections**

Until recently there were only two publically-funded art galleries in the South West – Bunbury Regional Art Galleries and the City of Busselton’s ArtGeo Gallery.<sup>23</sup> Then in 2015, a purpose-built art gallery opened in Collie (Figures 11 and 12).

Bunbury Regional Art Galleries is one of two ‘A Class’ regional galleries in Western Australia founded through a funding partnership between local government and the Art Gallery of Western Australia on behalf of the State Government.<sup>24</sup> The gallery is housed in a distinctive pink, two-storey heritage-listed building in the heart of the city centre (Figures 8 and 9). Following vociferous arguments for and against the building’s demolition when it was put up for sale in the 1970s, Bunbury Council decided to purchase the site. Part of the complex was demolished but the bulk of it was retained, and in the mid 1980s work began to convert the former convent and boarding school into an art gallery to house their collection and host touring exhibitions.<sup>25</sup>

The City of Bunbury collection is the oldest public collection to be established in regional Western Australia. It was founded in 1948 through a gift of twenty-two paintings and drawings from Sir Claude Hotchin OBE (1898–1977).<sup>26</sup> Hotchin was a prosperous philanthropist who believed that art ‘elevates the mind’. Between 1948 and 1975 he gifted hundreds of artworks from his private collection to many organisations in Western Australia. The beneficiaries included fourteen regional shire councils, including Bunbury, Busselton, Collie and Manjimup. His aim was to encourage an

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<sup>23</sup> *Collie Art Gallery*, accessed July 17, 2015, [www.collieartgallery.org.au](http://www.collieartgallery.org.au). See Figures 18 and 19. The Shire of Collie supported the foundation and launch of a not-for-profit art gallery in April 2015.

<sup>24</sup> “Art in Regional Western Australia,” *Art Gallery of Western Australia*, accessed February 15, 2011, [www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/about\\_us/wa\\_regional\\_art.asp](http://www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/about_us/wa_regional_art.asp). The other gallery founded through a partnership between State and local government is Geraldton Regional Art Gallery. A Class gallery provides secure, climate-controlled exhibition and storage spaces that meet professional art museum standards. In 2016, changes to these funding arrangements took place.

<sup>25</sup> Tresslyn Smith, “Bunbury Regional Art Galleries: Building History” (Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> *Acquisitions: The City of Bunbury Art & Craft Collection 1948–1994*, (Bunbury: Bunbury Art Galleries, 1994). Exhibition catalogue.





Figure 7 Bunbury Regional Art Galleries' distinctive pink façade  
Photo: Bunbury Regional Art Galleries



Figure 8 Tony Jones *Echo* 1996 painted steel and wood 120 x 170 x 137 (excluding frame)  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Photo: Paul Webster

appreciation of art in regional communities. Bunbury was the first regional community to receive a gift of artworks from Hotchin.<sup>27</sup> Over the years the collection has grown to over 800 items.<sup>28</sup> Between 1948 and 1962, Bunbury Society of Artists was entrusted with looking after the collection until a Council-appointed committee of community members took over its management.<sup>29</sup> Between 1968 and 1987 the collection was housed in the Civic Hall until the foundation of the gallery, where it is now kept.<sup>30</sup> In 2003 the City created the post of part-time curator and the autonomy of the collection was maintained until 2014 when the committee was disbanded and the City of Bunbury took control of the collection and the gallery.<sup>31</sup>

Since its opening in February 1987, the gallery has been known as Bunbury Regional Gallery, Bunbury Regional Art Gallery and Arts Complex, and Bunbury Art Gallery.<sup>32</sup> The name Bunbury Regional Art Galleries was adopted in 1995 when an independent governing body was established. This title was chosen to reflect the gallery's role as the region's peak not-for-profit visual arts venue.<sup>33</sup> In 2014, the City of Bunbury announced it would no longer fund the independent governing body and assumed responsibility for the gallery, as well as the collection. Further recent changes to the gallery's funding process mean that monies will no longer come from the Art Gallery of Western Australia. However, the State Government will continue to fund the regional gallery.

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<sup>27</sup> For a history of Hotchin's bequests see Janda Gooding "One Man's vision: Claude Hotchin and Regional Art Collections in Western Australia," *Sir Claude Hotchin Art Bequests* (Perth: NETS WA, 1992). Exhibition catalogue. See also *Acquisitions: The City of Bunbury Art & Craft Collection 1948–1994*; Arthur Spartalis, *A Survey of Western Australian Art from 1696* (Perth: Arthur Spartalis Fine Art, 2008), 145. Originally from South Australia, Sir Claude Hotchin was a prominent member of the Western Australian arts establishment. He established his own gallery in Perth in 1947 and substantial collection of Australian art. He was Chair of the Art Gallery and Museum Board.

<sup>28</sup> Tresslyn Smith, unrecorded conversation with author.

<sup>29</sup> According to Alison Inglis, the management of public art collections by committees rather than professional staff was common in Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Alison Inglis, "Art Collections and Art Curatorship: the Professionalization of the Art Curator in Australia," paper presented at *Museums Australia National Conference*, Melbourne 2010.

<sup>30</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 1995*, (Bunbury: Bunbury Art Galleries), 1. Exhibition catalogue.

<sup>31</sup> I was an ex-officio member of the collection committee during my tenure as Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries.

<sup>32</sup> *South West Survey* (Bunbury: Bunbury Art Galleries, 1988–2013). Exhibition catalogues

<sup>33</sup> Bunbury Regional Arts Management Board (Inc.) was an incorporated voluntary body comprising nominated representatives from the community and two principal financial stakeholders, the City of Bunbury and the Art Gallery of Western Australia. See *Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Budget Submission & Business Plan 2004–05*, 9, n.p.; *Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Strategic Business Plan 2008–2012*, accessed February 15, 2011, [www.brag.org.au/data/cms/doc/aboutus/StratBusPlan08-12.pdf](http://www.brag.org.au/data/cms/doc/aboutus/StratBusPlan08-12.pdf).

Although Bunbury Regional Art Galleries augments its budget with income generated from further subsidies, sponsorship, venue hire and commission from art sales, former management claimed that too much focus on art sales would compromise its principal role to provide public access to the visual arts through a 'rich and varied' program of exhibitions sourced regionally and Australia-wide.<sup>34</sup> The gallery's role as one of the region's principal public institutions is discussed further in chapter seven, where I examine the *Bunbury Biennale*.

In his appraisal of the South West art scene, Goddard suggests Margaret River needs a regional gallery as well as Bunbury.<sup>35</sup> This comment implies he was unaware of ArtGeo Gallery, which is part of a State heritage-listed complex managed by the City of Busselton.<sup>36</sup> Busselton is a popular coastal holiday and retirement destination, fifty-two kilometres south of Bunbury. In addition to ArtGeo Gallery, which is housed in a former bank built in 1931 (Figures 9 and 10), the complex features an historic Courthouse and judicial precinct built between 1860 and 1897. The history of the Courthouse is similar to the preservation of the buildings that now house Bunbury Regional Art Galleries.

According to anecdotal local history, a number of artists occupied the Courthouse buildings when they were vacated by the police department and threatened with demolition in the mid-1970s.<sup>37</sup> The complex was listed on the State Heritage Register in 1983 and entrusted to the (then) Shire of Busselton. The buildings were renovated and the Courthouse operated as an art centre under various commercial and community leasehold agreements for almost twenty years until the Shire resumed responsibility for managing the entire site in 2003.<sup>38</sup> In 2005, the name ArtGeo Cultural Complex was adopted when ArtGeo Gallery was established in two adjoining cottages adjacent to the Courthouse and operations expanded to include the performing arts.

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<sup>34</sup> *Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Strategic Business Plan 2008–2012*, 15. Additional rooms in the building accommodate community exhibitions, social activities and workshop space.

<sup>35</sup> Goddard quoted in Briggs, "Beyond the boundaries," 114.

<sup>36</sup> ArtGeo Gallery is considered a B Class gallery because although it is air conditioned, there are no climate controls in the storage areas or security cameras in the exhibition spaces.

<sup>37</sup> Information acquired from local sources through my position as Coordinator of ArtGeo Cultural Complex. Meanwhile, the Courthouse site had been registered by the National Trust in 1972.

<sup>38</sup> Former Busselton Shire staff member, conversation with author, 2003.

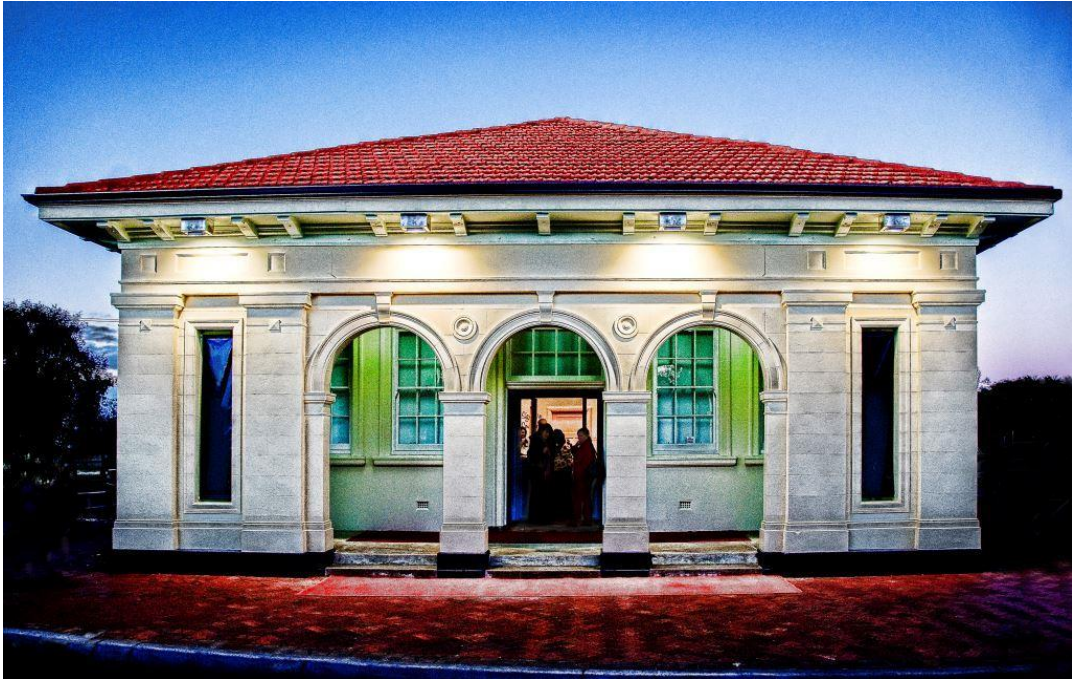


Figure 9 ArtGeo Gallery, ArtGeo Cultural Complex, Busselton  
Photo: Wendy Slee



Figure 10 Thomas Horeaux's exhibition *Déjà Vu* at ArtGeo Gallery 2014  
Exhibition Tour Manager: Art On The Move  
Photo: Diana McGirr



In 2008 the gallery was relocated to the refurbished bank facing the Courthouse. ArtGeo Gallery hosts exhibitions sourced regionally and Australia-wide and works from the City of Busselton art collection.<sup>39</sup> Like Bunbury and many other regional communities in Western Australia, Busselton's collection began with a gift of thirty drawings and paintings from Sir Claude Hotchin's private collection in 1962.<sup>40</sup> With the acquisition of a significant collection of woodcuts by Japanese master print-maker Hiroshi Tomihari (b. 1936) through a sister-city relationship with Sugito, and the launch of an acquisitive art prize in 2008, the collection has grown to over one hundred works. There is now a focus on collecting contemporary Western Australian art through the annual art award.<sup>41</sup> Meanwhile, the Courthouse continues to operate as a retail outlet for South West arts and crafts to supplement ArtGeo's budget for not-for-profit activities, including plans to interpret the history of the site through storytelling and contemporary visual media.

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<sup>39</sup> ArtGeo, accessed February, 17, 2011, [www.artgeo.com.au](http://www.artgeo.com.au). The cottages that once housed the police constables' and their families are now leased to Busselton Art Society and Acting Up Academy of Performing Arts. Former horse stables and a fodder room have been converted into artists' studios and workshop space.

<sup>40</sup> *The Passionate Collector: Sir Claude Hotchin Art Collection – Exhibition of Works from the Shire of Busselton Collection*, 2005. Exhibition brochure.

<sup>41</sup> The inaugural *City of Busselton Art Award* prize of \$10,000 was won by Philip Berry who had recently moved to the South West from Perth. The following year, Perth-based critic-curator David Bromfield awarded the \$10,000 first prize to Busselton artists Marina Troitsky and Laurie Posa, (Figures 75 and 76, chapter eight). Philip Berry won 'best local artist'. In 2010 Perth curator Catherine Czerw awarded the \$6,000 first prize to Margaret River artist Kay Gibson – a former South Australian Museum's *Waterhouse Art Prize* award-winner. Mary-Lynne Stratton of Yallingup won a \$3,000 non-acquisitive second prize. There was also a \$1000 award for local artists. Albany artist Renée Farrant won first prize in 2011 and 2012. Marina Troitsky won first prize for a second time in 2013, when Laurie Posa was awarded second prize. In 2014 the City of Busselton decided to re-instate a \$10,000 first prize and introduce an emerging artist award of \$2,500 to replace the local artist award. These changes attracted a greater number of entries from metropolitan artists. First prize was awarded to Perth-based artist Ron Nyisztor. The emerging artist award was won by Anna Richardson, also from Perth. In 2015, first prize was awarded to Lee Harrop, a New Zealand artist who is based in Kalgoorlie. The emerging artist award was won by May Ali from Perth. Information acquired through my role as Coordinator of ArtGeo Cultural Complex.



Figure 11 Collie Art Gallery  
Photo: Diana McGirr

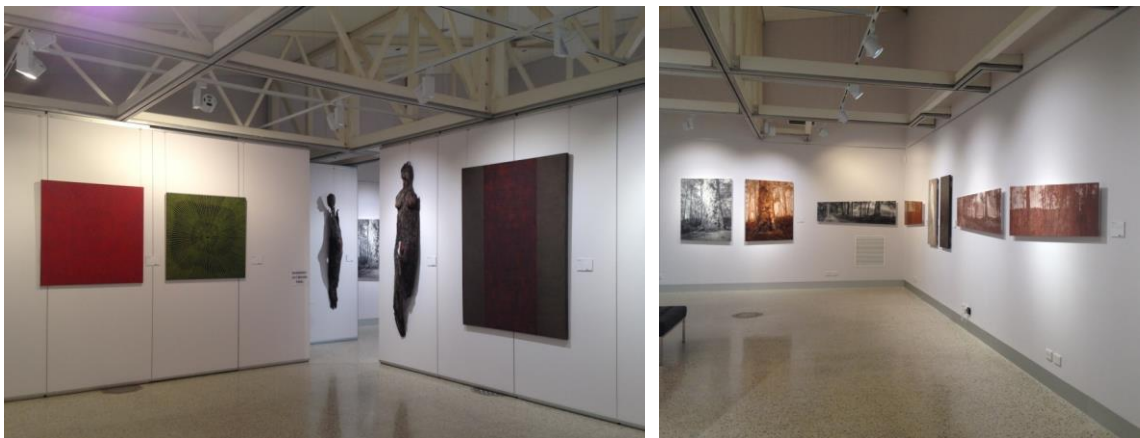


Figure 12 *Remnants: South West artists respond to the forest* at Collie Art Gallery 2016, showing work by Galliano Fardin, Kim Perrier and Tony Windberg  
Photo: Diana McGirr

## Commercial galleries

Countless owner-operated retail outlets scattered throughout the South West region sell arts and crafts. Many call themselves 'gallery' or 'studio'. Some specialise in locally-produced objects or specific media such as wood, glass, ceramics or jewellery. Others sell arts and crafts objects alongside other regional produce or imported products, and many non-specialist venues sell art and craft. These business ventures come and go, and the quality of work and standard of display varies considerably. In addition, many artists and artisans open their studios to visitors on a permanent or occasional basis.<sup>42</sup>

The biggest concentration of commercial galleries that specialise in selling high quality market-driven art works as their core business are found in or near the popular tourist destinations of Yallingup and Margaret River. Gunyulgup Galleries (Figures 13 and 14) and Jahroc (Figures 15 and 16) sell work produced in the region and elsewhere, and occasionally host small group or solo shows from the stable of artists they represent alongside their regular displays from stock.<sup>43</sup> The only commercial gallery in this area with dedicated exhibition space is Yallingup Gallery's Garden Art Studio. However, Garden Art Studio is only open during the summer and at Easter (Figures 17 and 18).<sup>44</sup> Other commercial galleries in this area include Boranup Gallery which specialises in woodcraft, and Margaret River's Tunbridge Gallery which specialises in ethically-sourced Aboriginal art from Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley, Western Desert, Northern Territory and Tiwi Islands.<sup>45</sup> The Wardan Aboriginal Centre in Yallingup exhibits and sells work by Wardandi and Noongar artists. The Centre is owned and operated by Wardandi people, the traditional owners of an area of land stretching from Capel to Augusta that includes Busselton, Yallingup and Margaret River. They also offer cultural tours and activities that tell stories of the Wardandi people.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Margaret River Artisans*, accessed July 17, 2015, <http://margaretriverartisans.com.au/>; *Margaret River Region Open Studios*, accessed July 17, 2015, [www.mrros.com.au/](http://www.mrros.com.au/); *Dardanup Art Spectacular*, accessed July 17, 2015, <http://dardanupartspectacular.com.au/art-trail/>; *Unearthed Pemberton*, accessed July 17, 2015, [www.unearthedpemberton.com.au](http://www.unearthedpemberton.com.au).

<sup>43</sup> *Gunyulgup Galleries*, accessed July 17, 2015, [www.gunyulgupgalleries.com.au/](http://www.gunyulgupgalleries.com.au/); *Jahroc*, accessed July 17, 2015, <https://www.jahroc.com.au/>.

<sup>44</sup> *Yallingup Galleries*, accessed July 17, 2015, [www.yallingupgalleries.com.au/](http://www.yallingupgalleries.com.au/).

<sup>45</sup> *Boranup Gallery*, accessed July 17, 2015, [www.boranupgallery.com/](http://www.boranupgallery.com/); *Tunbridge Gallery*, accessed July 17, 2015, <http://tunbridgegallery.com.au/>.

<sup>46</sup> *Wardan Aboriginal Centre*, accessed February 8, 2011, [www.wardan.com.au/home.htm](http://www.wardan.com.au/home.htm).



Figure 13 Gunyulgup Galleries, Yallingup  
Photo: Ashley Jones



Figure 14 Christine Gregory at Gunyulgup Galleries  
Photo: Christine Gregory





Figure 15 Jahroc Gallery, Margaret River  
Photo: Gary Bennett



Figure 16 Jahroc interior, with furniture made from West Australian wood designed by Gary Bennett  
Photo: Gary Bennett



Figure 17 Yallingup Galleries' Garden Art Studio  
Photo: Diana McGirr



Figure 18 Garden Art Studio interior with ceramics by Bela Kotai and paintings by Jenni Doherty  
Photo: Diana McGirr

Amongst numerous other ‘shop-cum-galleries’, Lyndendale Gallery in Dardanup merits a mention.<sup>47</sup> Although Dardanup is close to Bunbury and the emerging tourist destination of Ferguson Valley, this rural community is removed from the popular coastal route that draws visitors to the high profile galleries in the Margaret River area and the inland route to the southern forest near Pemberton and Northcliffe. However, the gallery established by artist-printmaker Denise Gillies in 2010 has begun to establish a reputation for specialising in high-quality, hand-crafted objects produced in the South West and creative workshops and master-classes for artists and writers (Figure 19).<sup>48</sup>



Figure 19 Lyndendale Gallery, Dardanup  
Photo: Denise Gillies

### **Public access to private collections and galleries**

Amongst the many non-specialist venues in the South West that sell art and craft objects, cellar-door sales outlets and wineries are popular with many artists. In the Margaret River area, Leeuwin Estate and Vasse Felix stand out from the crowd of venues that exhibit locally-produced art works on an ad hoc basis. Leeuwin Estate maintains an art gallery that is used solely to exhibit Denis and Tricia Horgan’s private collection of Australian art (Figure 20). The Horgan’s collection was established in 1980 when they commissioned some of the country’s leading artists to produce paintings for their ‘Art Series’ wine labels.<sup>49</sup> The gallery is also used as a venue for functions, such as

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<sup>47</sup> Terry Smith uses the term ‘shop-cum-galleries’ in “Rethinking Regionalism: Art in the Northern Territory,” 469.

<sup>48</sup> *Lyndendale Gallery*, accessed July 17, 2015, [www.lyndendale.com.au/](http://www.lyndendale.com.au/).

<sup>49</sup> “Leeuwin Estate Art Gallery,” *Leeuwin Estate*, accessed September 28, 2013, <https://leeuwinestate.com.au/visit/art-gallery.html>.



the annual *Emergence Creative* creative and digital industries conference that was launched by the South West Development Commission in 2013. However, Leeuwin Estate's involvement with cultural events is perhaps best known through its annual summer concerts featuring internationally-renowned musicians – concerts that Nina Jones of Gunyulgup Galleries suggests add to the cultural richness of the region.<sup>50</sup>

Vasse Felix is part of an enterprise associated with prominent business woman, art collector and philanthropist Janet Holmes à Court. The former wine barrel room at Vasse Felix has been converted into an impressive gallery. Now known as the Holmes à Court Gallery, this vast space is used to exhibit works from the Holmes à Court Collection of Australian and Indigenous art, or for occasional high-profile events designed to stimulate debate on the arts and culture (Figure 21).<sup>51</sup> In the recent past it has been made available for approved group shows sourced within and outside the region. For example, selected works from the City of Bunbury's collection and its flagship exhibition the *Bunbury Biennale* were exhibited at Vasse Felix in 2003 and 2009 (Figure 22), and a group of South West artists including Katherine Hall – the subject of chapter ten – held an exhibition there in 2005 (Figure 89).



Figure 20 Leeuwin Estate Art Gallery featuring the Horgan Collection  
Photo credit: [www.leeuwinestate.com.au/image-gallery.html](http://www.leeuwinestate.com.au/image-gallery.html).

<sup>50</sup> Jones quoted in Briggs, "Beyond the boundaries," 115.

<sup>51</sup> "About the Holmes à Court Gallery at Vasse Felix," in *the art of sound*, Holmes à Court Gallery, 2013; *Holmes à Court Gallery*, accessed September 28, 2013, [www.holmesacourtgallery.com.au/](http://www.holmesacourtgallery.com.au/).



Figure 21 *The Art of Sound* at the Holmes à Court Gallery 2013  
Photo: Holmes à Court Gallery



Figure 22 *Bunbuy Biennale 2009* at the Holmes à Court Gallery  
Photo: Diana McGirr

Another significant private collection that exists in the South West belongs to Bunbury collectors Lloyd and Elizabeth Horn. The Horns have been collecting contemporary art for over thirty years and primarily focus on art from Western Australia. Their collection was exhibited at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries in 2008 (Figure 23). At the time of the exhibition which was titled *Closet Circus: Works from the Horn Collection* after a work by Linde Ivimey (Figure 24), the collection held around 300 works by 120 artists, making it one of the most significant private collections of Western Australian contemporary art. According to Stringer, the Horn collection reveals ‘the interface between painting and sculpture that distinguishes WA from the Eastern States’:

Their faith and conviction in home-grown talent and their support of the local creative community has provided vital sustenance, nourishment and encouragement for artists with little prospect of a national profile.<sup>52</sup>

The show at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries was intended to be part of a *Focus on Contemporary Art* that would include a range of events around the city. However, a fund-raising event held in the Council building, the exhibition and a seminar on collecting art that was also held at the gallery were the only events that took place.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, since its exposure in Bunbury, and the publication of an accompanying catalogue by Fremantle Press, the Horn collection has grown in reputation and profile, and it is now considered a legitimate ‘site of validation’ where artists are eager to be represented (Figure 25).<sup>54</sup> Following *Closet Circus*, the Horns launched a project called *The Syndicate* in association with Ron Wise, owner of Wise vineyard and winery near Dunsborough. Their intent was to find co-sponsors to support an invited artist to work without the pressure of needing to generate an income for eighteen months. According to the project’s first recipient, Fremantle artist Simon Gilby, the brief provided freedom to create ten life-size sculptures that then belonged to the Syndicate members.<sup>55</sup> Gilby’s

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<sup>52</sup> John Stringer, foreword to *Closet Circus: Works from the Horn Collection* by John Stringer, Stuart Elliot and Diana Roberts (Fremantle: Fremantle Press, 2008), 9.

<sup>53</sup> Information acquired through my involvement with these events.

<sup>54</sup> Ted Snell, review of *Circus: Works from the Horn Collection*, by John Stringer, Stuart Elliot and Diana Roberts, *Art and Australia* 43, no. 1 (2008):140; Ric Spencer, “WA artists crash the boundaries,” *West Australia Today*, June 6, 2008; Gail Robinson, “Roll up! Roll up!” *West Weekend Magazine*, April 19, 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Simon Gilby, “The Syndicate: Letter from the artist,” *The Syndicate: ten life-sized sculptures by Simon Gilby* (Osborne Park: Art On The Move, 2009). Exhibition catalogue.





Figure 23 *Closest Circus: Works from the Horn Collection* on show in the Chapel Gallery at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries 2008  
Photos: Diana McGirr



Figure 24 Linde Ivimey *Closet Circus* 1992, 103 x 104 x 40cm, wood, paper mache, sand metal, paint  
Photo: Diana McGirr

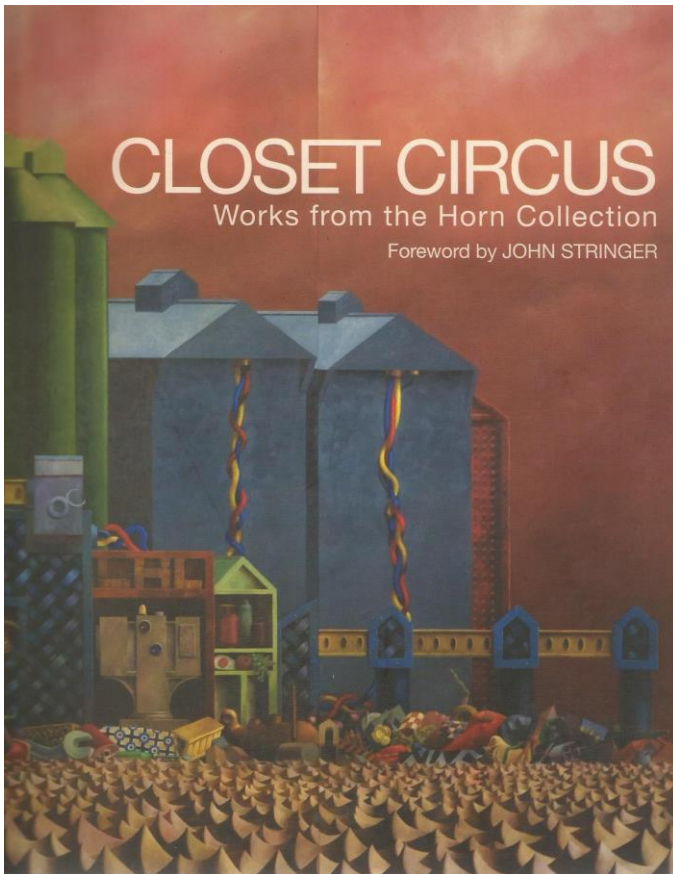


Figure 25 *Closet Circus: Works from the Horn Collection* catalogue cover showing Stuart Elliot's *Sand Castles* (detail) 2006, 217 x 370cm, oil on board, four panels  
Photo: Diana McGirr



sculptures were exhibited in Perth in 2009. They were then shown at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries and ArtGeo Gallery in 2010. The exhibition also toured to Geraldton, Albany, Melbourne and Sydney.<sup>56</sup> Lloyd Horn was also involved in a committee formed by the City of Bunbury in 2010 to examine the feasibility of building a new art gallery on the waterfront. However, Council enthusiasm for the concept fizzled out when the projected costs indicated it could not break even.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, Lloyd and Liz Horn continue to support West Australian contemporary artists through the acquisition of their work and on-going support of *The Syndicate* project.<sup>58</sup> Committed collectors like the Horns demonstrate that an art world is made up of many individuals who support the production, evaluation and circulation of artworks. Moreover, their sophisticated collection which includes several South West artists helps to counter Goddard's reductive description of the South West art scene, as well as the perception generated by Briggs' article that art production in the region is primarily commercially-driven.

### **Public art, community art initiatives and site-specific sculpture**

Public art has become quite a feature in various localities throughout the South West region. Howard Taylor's (1918–2001) *Forest Trees* commissioned by the City of Bunbury in 1979 is the earliest extant example of public art in the South West. Despite Taylor's stature as one of the State's leading modernist artists (see chapter four), for a long time 'brown poles' – as the work was affectionately known – stood almost unnoticed against the wall of the Council Chamber building in the city centre.<sup>59</sup> When the City of Bunbury built a new administration building in 2008-09, *Forest Trees* was restored and reinstalled close to its original position (Figure 26).

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<sup>56</sup> Gail Robinson, "The Syndicate," *Artsource Newsletter* (August–November, 2009): 220–222.

<sup>57</sup> Clare Negus, "Council keen for art centre," *South West Times*, May 24, 2012, 3; Negus, "Council to vote on art gallery future," *South West Times*, June 21, 2012, 11. I was a member of the Art Gallery Committee until 2012 when the proposal was dropped.

<sup>58</sup> Artists who live and work in the South West region who were represented in *Closet Circus: Works from the Horn Collection* include Shaun Atkinson (92, 93, 94, 133), Philip Berry (54), Douglas Chambers (35, 62), Mary Knott (37, 51, 53), Helen Seiver (195), Russell Sheridan (28, 75, 149) and Linda Skroyls. Three artists live in the Great Southern region: Joan May Campbell lives in Albany (113, 118); Indra Geidens now lives in Denmark (66); and Paul Moncrieff now lives near Mount Barker (146–147). John Feeney used to live in Busselton (114).

<sup>59</sup> de Bussy, "Afternoon show arts segment." I broadcast a segment on public art when I worked for ABC Radio South West as a volunteer art critic in 2002. I spoke to several members of the public in the street and asked if they were familiar with Howard Taylor. One member of the public asked if he worked for the Council.



Figure 26 Howard Taylor *Forest Trees* 1979 painted wood (dimensions unavailable)  
Collection: City of Bunbury public art  
© The Howard H. Taylor Estate represented by Galerie Düsseldorf  
Photos: Galerie Dusseldorf

Since the establishment of the Western Australian Government's 'Percent for Art Scheme' in 1989, many public artworks have been commissioned. This scheme requires a construction project worth over \$2 million to commit one percent to the production of site-specific artworks to enhance the built environment and create a sense of place.<sup>60</sup> Although most large-scale building projects that are eligible for the 'Percent for Art Scheme' have occurred in the growing population areas of Bunbury, Busselton and Margaret River, site-specific public art exists in other South West communities to provide a 'sense of place'.<sup>61</sup> The natural environment and local history are common subjects. Some installations are conceptual or formalist in their approach, whilst others present a more literal interpretation of local history (Figures 27 to 31).

Public art installations devised as community arts initiatives involve collaborations between professional artists and community members to create something they find meaningful. When two unrelated groups approached the City of Bunbury with requests to produce an artwork, *Bridging the Gap* was conceived by Disabled and Disadvantaged Art Australia to integrate their stories into a single project. Amongst the many project partners, public art specialists Alex and Nic Mickle played a pivotal role. Based in Australind, near Bunbury, the Mickles worked with a team of retired railway workers and people with disabilities to conceive and realise an artwork that salutes Bunbury's industrial heritage and social connectivity: *Circus Train - SLOW DOWN!* (Figure 32).<sup>62</sup> The Mickles have worked together and independently throughout Western Australia on many public art projects. They have built a reputation as socially-committed artists who often work on community arts projects. Their installations include *Bound* at Northcliffe's *Understory - art in nature* sculpture walk (Figure 38) – discussed below.

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<sup>60</sup> "Percent for Art Scheme," *Government of Western Australian Department of Finance*, accessed November 17, 2014, [www.finance.wa.gov.au/cms/Building\\_Management\\_and\\_Works/New\\_Buildings/Percent\\_for\\_Art.aspx](http://www.finance.wa.gov.au/cms/Building_Management_and_Works/New_Buildings/Percent_for_Art.aspx). 'Percent for Art' is managed in partnership with the Department of Culture and the Arts.

<sup>61</sup> Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: senses of place in a multcentred society* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 7, 10, 33, 34. According to Lucy Lippard, sense of place is a layered amalgamation of actual and virtual characteristics and meanings – 'textures and sensations' – that reflect lived experience and people's identification with or connection to a locality. It includes actual and virtual characteristics such as local history, stories, memories and landscape features, and applies to the built or natural environment, urban and rural areas, cities and small towns.

<sup>62</sup> Diana Roberts, "Circus Train – SLOW DOWN!" *Artsource Newsletter* (December 2010–March 2011): 24–26.

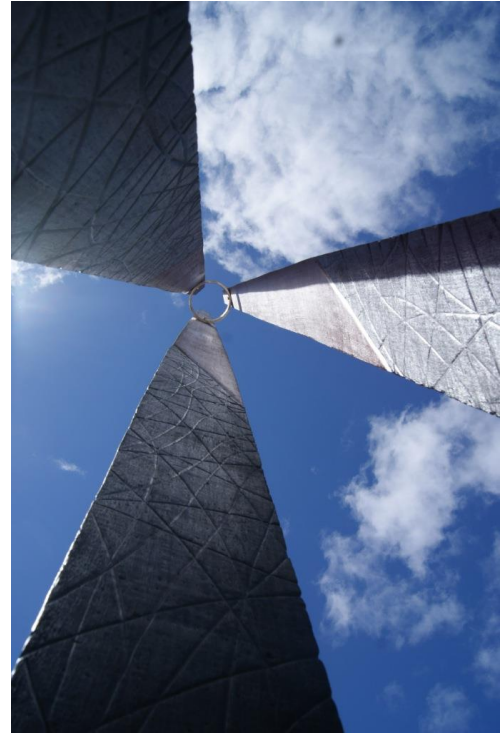
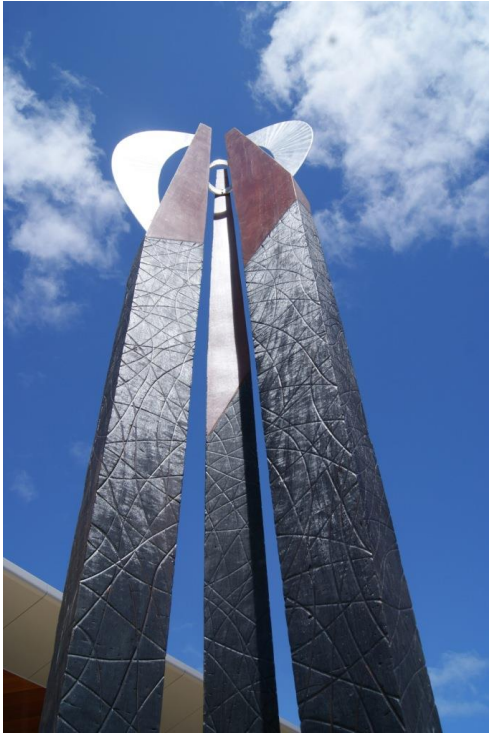


Figure 27 Monique Tippett *Forest Stand*, wood and steel  
Margaret River Shire administration and cultural centre  
Photos: Ebony Tippett



Figure 28 John Tarry *The Navigators* steel  
Koombana Bay, Bunbury  
Photo: Dave Roberts



Figure 29 Ian Dowling *Saddle Grove* ceramic  
City of Bunbury administration building  
Photo: Ian Dowling





Figure 30 Greg James *The Whaler's Wife* bronze  
Collection: City of Busselton Settlement Art Project  
Photos: Diana McGirr



Figure 31 Greg James *The Timber Worker* bronze



Figure 32 Alex Mickle and friends Circus Train – SLOW DOWN!  
 Photos: Diana McGirr and Dave Roberts



Community-run exhibitions proliferate in the South West. They are popular with local artists and audiences and include a wide-range of events held annually throughout the region in community halls, schools or parks. Although large sums of prize-money are sometimes on offer to attract high-calibre entries, content and standards vary considerably. However, often their primary purpose is to provide a social celebration of local creativity or raise funds. Examples of community-run events include *Sculpture by the Bay*, which is held in Dunsborough near Busselton every summer (Figure 33). This annual event run by the local progress association is a scaled-down imitation of *Sculpture by the Sea* held at Bondi in Sydney and Cottesloe beach in Perth.



Figure 33 *Sculpture by the Bay* Dunsborough 2013. Top image by Greg Banfield now part of the City of Busselton public art collection  
Photos: Diana McGirr

### ***Understory – art in nature***

Northcliffe's *Understory – art in nature* sculpture walk contains the largest collection of site-specific sculptures in one location in the South West. The sculpture walk through the Karri forest was conceived by artist and local resident Fiona Sinclair as an alternative to logging. According to Sinclair, the Northcliffe community was in crisis following deregulation of the dairy farming industry and on-going debate about logging in old-growth forests.<sup>63</sup> Formerly known as the *Southern Forest Sculpture Walk*, *Understory - art in nature* is a 1.2 kilometre walk trail featuring site-specific installations inspired by the forest environment and local history. The enterprise is managed on a voluntary basis by Southern Forest Arts, a not-for-profit community organisation. Located next to Northcliffe Visitor Centre, where Southern Forest Arts run a small not-for-profit art gallery called The Painted Tree, *Understory* features works by over fifty artists from the South West, the Perth metropolitan area, New South Wales and overseas.<sup>64</sup> When the sculpture walk opened in 2006, renowned photographer and local resident John Austin (b. 1944) documented the installation of the artworks in a series of black and white photographs (Figures 34 to 36). Originally from Somerset in England, Austin migrated to Australia in 1981 and settled in Quininup near Northcliffe in 1994. He works with large format cameras and traditional materials to produce archival-quality silver gelatine prints, and claims to be the only professional landscape and portrait photographer working with these materials in Western Australia.<sup>65</sup>

The other aspect of my choice of cameras is that as I live and work in the bottom left corner of the forgotten side of the least fashionable part of the planet, I need equipment which is simple and reliable.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Fiona Sinclair, "The Project Coordinator (confesses)," in *Artsource* (Winter 2007): 9–10. See also *Understory – history*, accessed April 20, 2010, [www.understory.com.au/history.php](http://www.understory.com.au/history.php).

<sup>64</sup> "Southern Forest Sculpture Walk," *Artist's Chronicle*, 112 (January 2007): 4–5; "Southern Forest Sculpture Walk," *Big Story Country: great art stories from regional Australia* (Port Adelaide: Regional Arts Australia, 2008), 16–17; *Understory – art in nature*, accessed April 20, 2010, <http://www.understory.com.au/>; *Understory – artists and artworks*, accessed April 20, 2010, [www.understory.com.au/art.php](http://www.understory.com.au/art.php).

<sup>65</sup> John Barrett-Lennard, *John Austin Photography 1970–1993*, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery (Perth: University of Western Australia, 1993), 4. Exhibition catalogue; *John Austin*, accessed April 6, 2011, [www.jbaphoto.com.au/](http://www.jbaphoto.com.au/).

<sup>66</sup> *John Austin*, accessed April 6, 2011, [www.jbaphoto.com.au/equipmentprocess.html](http://www.jbaphoto.com.au/equipmentprocess.html) (page no longer available).





Figure 34 John Austin *Nel in the canopy* 2006 silver gelatine print 36 x 53cms  
Photo: John Austin



Figure 35 Installation of *Sundew* by Natalie Williamson 2006  
silver gelatine print 45 x 31 cms  
Photo: John Austin



Figure 36 John Austin Installation of *Whole, you were meant to be here* by Lorena Grant 2006  
silver gelatine print 45 x 31 cms  
Photo: John Austin

An avid environmentalist, Austin has been drawing attention to fragile habitats and land use disputes by documenting them in photographs for many years.<sup>67</sup> The *Understory* series combines his interest in ecology and portraits of artists in a single body of work. I suggest they evoke a concept Emily Apter calls ‘an aesthetics of critical habitat’ – ecologically-engaged contemporary art grounded in sites of ideological struggle that draws on the language of environmental sustainability and the concept of ‘critical regionalism’ to integrate local features with universal ideals.<sup>68</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I set out to describe the South West region and its art world to provide a sense of time and place as a backdrop to future chapters. This description reveals the South West art scene appears to conform to a structure that occurs elsewhere in regional Australia, such as in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales and the Northern Territory, on the basis two broad categories of art production co-exist – conceptual or critically-engaged art and market-driven art.<sup>69</sup> However, like most art worlds, art production in the South West is much more nuanced than this two-fold structure implies, because the art scene comprises a broad mix of producers, artists, collectors and consumers – individuals with different tastes and aspirations who live and work in the region and much further afield. They operate independently and collaboratively in a field with a range of commercial enterprises and publicly-funded venues that provide a raft of opportunities for artists to exhibit and/or sell their work, whether it is produced for contemplation or consumption. Consequently, the matrix of people, institutions and practices involved in the production, evaluation, distribution and circulation of artworks throughout the South West and beyond is both naïve and complex, conservative and experimental, fragmented and interconnected.

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<sup>67</sup> John Austin has recently begun to make videos of his photographs and post them on his website as a form of protest. See “Forest Threnody Western Australia 1994–013,” *John Austin*, accessed November 18, 2013, [www.jbaphoto.com.au/](http://www.jbaphoto.com.au/).

<sup>68</sup> Emily Apter, “The Aesthetics of Critical Habitats” *October* 99 (Winter 2002): 21–44.

<sup>69</sup> Wynn-Moylan, “A Country Practice,” n.p.; Smith, “Rethinking Regionalism: Art in the Northern Territory,” 469–470.

According to cultural theorist George Seddon (1927–2007), artists and writers use imagery and language to ‘possess’ the landscape imaginatively rather than through ‘crude exploitation’.<sup>70</sup> Given I have revealed that the environment is integral to the South West’s sense of place – whether colonised, cultivated, excavated, contested, inhabited or enjoyed in its pristine state – it is reasonable to expect this subject to resonate with many artists and audiences. This likelihood conforms to Terry Smith’s suggestion a popular market for landscape imagery is the mainstay of regionalism throughout Australia, and a widespread public perception that that is what art is for.<sup>71</sup> A host of arts and crafts objects and views of local scenery produced for popular consumption – what might be termed ‘kitsch’ by Greenberg or ‘bourgeois’ by Bourdieu – sustains Goddard’s perception the South West art scene is ‘folksy’.<sup>72</sup> However, when you take into account other forms of conceptual or critically-engaged art production, including those that concern the landscape, a bigger picture begins to emerge of what else is happening in the region. Some of these practices existed when Goddard wrote his appraisal in 2006, others have occurred since then. Whilst the dominance of the landscape genre might represent a ‘restrictive’ form of regionalism, I propose these critically-engaged practices represent an alternative view of the South West art scene – a ‘critical regionalism’ that responds to local concerns as well as broader issues.<sup>73</sup> I explore this notion further in future chapters. First, in chapter four I reveal what else had been written about art production in the South West when I began my inquiry.

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<sup>70</sup> George Seddon, *Searching for the Snowy: an environmental history* (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1994), xxxv.

<sup>71</sup> Smith, “Rethinking Regionalism: Art in the Northern Territory,” 469.

<sup>72</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 51; Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” in *Art in Theory 1900–1990*, 533–534.

<sup>73</sup> Smith, “Rethinking Regionalism: Art in the Northern Territory,” 470–471.





Figure 37 Lorena Grant *Whole, you were meant to be here, Understorey* – art in nature sculpture walk, Northcliffe



Figure 38 Alex and Nic Mickle *Bound, Understorey* – art in nature sculpture walk, Northcliffe  
Photos: Diana McGirr

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ART PRODUCTION IN THE SOUTH WEST: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

**My understanding is there's no real research or real understanding of what arts practice is in the South West of this State.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> John Austin, in discussion with author, July 7, 2007.

## INTRODUCTION

In chapter one I revealed that a paucity of publications on South West art production and lack of critique was the initial motive for my research inquiry. In chapter two I drew attention to the role discourse, histories and publications play in the matrix of art world practices that contribute towards the validation of artists and art forms. The aim of this chapter is to scrutinise the lack of publications and critical writing identified by me and others, by revealing what had been written about art production in the South West when I began my inquiry.<sup>2</sup> I discuss the implications and examine a perception that Western Australian art has been overlooked in national histories of Australian art.

I based my literature search on four categories of material:

- hard-copy monographs or solo exhibition catalogues with a catalogue essay, where the subject has or had a direct or substantial link with the region;
- anthologies including artists who live and work in the South West;
- articles published in specialist art journals that give an overview of art production in the South West;
- any other research on art production in the South West produced within an academic framework.

Although I aimed to make my literature search as comprehensive as possible, it does not claim to be exhaustive. Inevitably over time, as I delved deeper into my investigation some more material came to light, such as magazine or newspaper reviews on specific individuals that they held in their personal archives. However, the material discussed in this chapter represents a sound review of the literature available at the time. It also enables me to position my thesis as the first academically-framed study of contemporary art production in the region from an art historical perspective. I do not review any publications on Aboriginal art production in this chapter because this subject is discussed in chapter eight, where I examine the role that exhibitions and catalogues have played in a renewal of interest in a style of naturalistic landscape painting known as the 'Carrolup style'.

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<sup>2</sup> Peter Kovacsy, e-mail message to author, August 1, 2005; John Stringer, unrecorded conversation with author, 2003.

Although the focus of my thesis is living artist and contemporary art production, I searched through *A Survey of Western Australian Art from 1696* for references to the South West to see if there was any historical sense of an emerging regional art scene.<sup>3</sup> Aside from biographical information and illustrations of topographical watercolours or hand-coloured lithographs by some early settlers, references to watercolours and etchings produced in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century, and a handful of pages on pioneers of modernism Guy Grey-Smith OA (1916–1981) and Howard Taylor OA (1918–2001), the contents of the book suggests the notion of a South West art scene is a recent concept.<sup>4</sup>

Guy Grey-Smith and Howard Taylor both lived in the South West from 1975 and 1967 respectively. However, they fall outside the scope of my thesis because of its focus on living artists. Whilst I cannot do justice to the significance of their achievements in this context, their distinctive interpretation of the natural landscape has left a lasting legacy. Therefore, a brief look at these two artists makes a logical starting point to my discussion. My review begins with Guy Grey-Smith because the earliest publication I found where the subject has or had a direct or substantial link with the South West is an exhibition catalogue for his retrospective exhibition held at the Art Gallery of Western Australia and Queensland Art Gallery in 1976–77. Therefore, this review covers a thirty year period between 1976 and 2006.<sup>5</sup> However, for reasons that will become clear, I refer to some recent publications on Guy Grey-Smith in the discussion of monographs and solo exhibition catalogues that now follows.

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<sup>3</sup> Athur Spartalis, *A Survey of Western Australian Art from 1696* (Perth: Arthur Spartalis Fine Art, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22, 25, 31, 52, 59, 61, 98–103. Spartalis does not mention Howard Taylor lived in Northcliffe or that Guy and Helen Grey-Smith lived in Pemberton, despite illustrating Helen's *Forest in Spring* painted in 1977 after they moved to Pemberton. He does mention Taylor received a commission from the City of Bunbury and exhibited at the Courthouse in Busselton. See *A selection of works by Helen Grey-Smith* (Pemberton: Pemberton Sports Club, 2009). Exhibition catalogue; Maggie Baxter, "Balance, Purity and Serenity," in *Artsource newsletter* (August–November, 2009): 16–17. Shortly before she died in 2009, Helen Grey-Smith's achievements were recognised in a retrospective exhibition in Pemberton.

<sup>5</sup> Goddard names Guy Grey-Smith as one of the 'artists of calibre' who established a tradition of art production in the South West. He does not mention Howard Taylor who undoubtedly fulfilled this role. Goddard refers to the Juniper family's links with the region. Goddard cited in Briggs, "Beyond the boundaries," 2006, 113. The Juniper family have connections with Cowaramup near Margaret River. However, Robert Juniper (1929–2012) is not part of my discussion because although he lived in that area as a child and on his return to Australia from Britain in 1949, and later painted around Cowaramup and in other parts of the South West, he spent most of his career living in the hills on the outskirts of Perth. Juliet Stone, email to author, June 1, 2011.

## MONOGRAPHS AND SOLO EXHIBITION CATALOGUES

**Guy Grey-Smith** was born in Wagin in the Wheatbelt region of Western Australia. He spent his youth in Boyup Brook and went to school in Bunbury. He served with the Royal Air Force during the Second World War, and his development as an artist is often attributed to the period of his internment during the war when he was shot down, taken prisoner, contracted tuberculosis and took up painting after his wife Helen – a textile designer who he had met in England shortly before the war – sent him books and materials.<sup>6</sup> However, according to Andrew Gaynor, Guy Grey-Smith had already shown an interest in art before then.<sup>7</sup> A visit to Fontainebleau forest near Paris after the war is said to have reminded him of the South West forest where he had spent holidays as a youth, and this memory prompted his decision to return to Western Australia in 1947.<sup>8</sup>

Guy Grey-Smith was an accomplished potter and printmaker, but he is perhaps better known for his vivid paintings of the Western Australian landscape. According to Annette Davis, curator of an exhibition that toured regional WA in 1996, he had a lifelong fascination with nature – ranging from the rugged red landscape in the North West of Western Australia (Figures 39 and 40) to the coastline and karri forest in the South West (Figures 41 and 42).<sup>9</sup> Davis acknowledges her catalogue essay drew on material provided by Lou Klepac in his catalogue for the 1976 Guy Grey-Smith retrospective exhibition held at the Art Gallery of Western Australia.<sup>10</sup> The Klepac catalogue provides biographical details of Grey-Smith's development as an artist in Europe in the 1940s and early career, and then broadly outlines his subsequent life and interpretation of the West Australian landscape.<sup>11</sup> Thirty years later, in 2006 Gaynor said Guy Grey-Smith was the first non-indigenous Australian artist to challenge perceptions of the physical and spiritual monumentality of the West Australian

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Gaynor, *Guy Grey-Smith: a survey*, McClelland Gallery and Sculpture Park, 30 April to 2 July 2006, n.p. Exhibition catalogue; Annette Davis, *Guy Grey-Smith's Landscapes of Western Australia*. (Perth: Edith Cowan University, 1996), 2. Exhibition catalogue; Lou Klepac, *Guy Grey-Smith Retrospective* (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1976). Exhibition catalogue.

<sup>7</sup> Gaynor, *Guy Grey-Smith: a survey*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Davis, *Guy Grey-Smith's Landscapes of Western Australia*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Klepac, *Guy Grey-Smith Retrospective*.





Figure 39 Guy Grey-Smith *Murchison River* 1957 watercolour and ink on paper 29.2 x 39.3cms  
© Susanna Grey-Smith and Mark Grey-Smith  
Collection: City of Busselton, Sir Claude Hotchin Art Bequest  
Photo: Paul Webster



Figure 40 Guy Grey-Smith *Landscape* 1969 oil on canvas 61 x 90cms  
© Susanna Grey-Smith and Mark Grey-Smith  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Photo: Paul Webster

landscape.<sup>12</sup> However, whilst his subject matter reflected the State's regional landscapes, his characteristic use of thick geometric blocks of paint and bright colours to convey the structure and mass of its features was influenced by post-impressionist and modernist paintings seen in France after the war and in the early 1950s – works by Paul Cezanne (1839–1906), the Fauves and Nicholas De Staël (1914–1955), and British artists encountered whilst studying at Chelsea Art School after the war.<sup>13</sup>

According to Klepac and others, Guy and Helen Grey-Smith were prominent figures in the Perth art scene and the lively arts community in Darlington on the outskirts of Perth where they lived for close to twenty years. Yet they were fiercely independent and avoided selling their work in commercial galleries, preferring to organise their own exhibitions and earn a living from sales of their pottery and textiles.<sup>14</sup> Then in 1975 they moved to a house in the South West town of Pemberton purchased the year before, drawn to the peace and proximity to nature they had enjoyed in Darlington before it became suburban. Here, Guy Grey-Smith became involved with the emerging environmental movement and campaigns to stop logging in old-growth forests.<sup>15</sup> In 1977 Peter Kovacsy bought a block of land next door to the Grey-Smiths, where he built a house out of rammed-earth – a revolutionary form of domestic architecture at the time. Kovacsy camped on his block during the early stages of construction and got to know his neighbours. He recalls they took a keen interest in his building project and he became intrigued by their independent lifestyle. Kovacsy claims it was Guy Grey-Smith who planted the idea of building a studio-gallery in his head.<sup>16</sup>

Shortly before he died in 1981, Guy Grey-Smith was awarded an Order of Australia, but according to Andrew Gaynor's monograph published in 2012, recognition of his achievements has 'waxed and waned' since then.<sup>17</sup> Gaynor suggests that compared

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<sup>12</sup> Gaynor, *Guy Grey-Smith: a survey*.

<sup>13</sup> Gaynor, *Guy Grey-Smith: a survey*; Davis, *Guy Grey-Smith's Landscapes of Western Australia* 6–7; Klepac, *Guy Grey-Smith Retrospective*, 6–9.

<sup>14</sup> Klepac, *Guy Grey-Smith Retrospective*, 8–9. See Davis, *Guy Grey-Smith's Landscapes of Western Australia*, 4; Ted Snell, *Darlington and the Hills* (Perth: Curtin University of Technology, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Gaynor, *Guy Grey-Smith: a survey*; Davis, *Guy Grey-Smith's Landscapes of Western Australia*, 6; Klepac, *Guy Grey-Smith Retrospective*, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Roberts, *Peter Kovacsy A Studio Practice*, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Gaynor, *Guy Grey-Smith: Life Force* (Perth: UWA Publishing, 2012), 1.

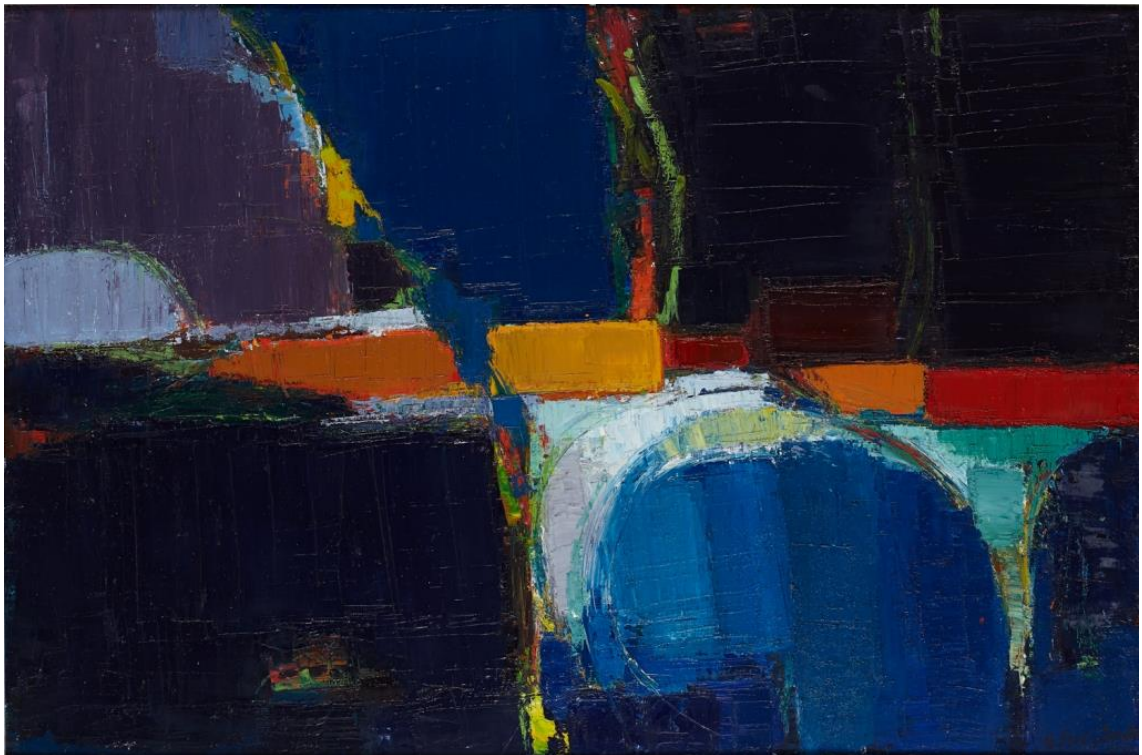


Figure 41 Guy Grey-Smith *Windy Harbour, South West WA* 1975 oil on hardboard 125.5 x 186.5 cm  
© Susanna Grey-Smith and Mark Grey-Smith  
Janet Holmes à Court Collection  
Photo: Janet Holmes à Court Collection



Figure 42 Guy Grey-Smith *Karri Trees* 1979 oil on hardboard 122.3 x 111.5cms  
© Susanna Grey-Smith and Mark Grey-Smith  
Janet Holmes à Court Collection  
Photo: Janet Holmes à Court Collection



to his peers Howard Taylor and Robert Juniper (1929–2012), little has been written about Guy Grey-Smith and the aim of his book was to fill that gap.<sup>18</sup> In 2014, a major retrospective exhibition of his work was held at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, accompanied by a beautifully illustrated catalogue.<sup>19</sup> According to the gallery's director Stefano Carboni, it was the first complete retrospective since the artist's death in 1981.<sup>20</sup> Exhibition curator Melissa Harpley suggests Guy Grey-Smith was a 'regionalist' who combined representations of real places in Western Australia with preoccupation with form, line and colour drawn from abstract modernism. She explains that during his lifetime he exhibited across Australia and worked hard to be part of the national scene, and was included in several international surveys of Australian art.<sup>21</sup> Yet according to Ted Snell, despite 'abundant evidence of his singular vision' and 'rigorous reinterpretation of Modernism in response to local conditions', the question of whether or not this recent exhibition would attract national attention is symptomatic of the lack of coverage Western Australian art receives in national discourse and recorded histories of Australian art.<sup>22</sup> Snell then goes on to say:

Guy Grey Smith, who died in 1981, was not entirely ignored in his lifetime. But his decision to live in Western Australia his entire life, and to commit himself to local issues and to the task of documenting the unique landscape and ecology of the nation's western edge, relegated him to a minor league ... This exhibition and the recent monograph provide a lens through which to refocus the career of a significant Australian artist.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 5. Robert Juniper's life and achievements have been well documented. He was born in Merredin in the Wheatbelt region of Western Australia in 1929. He went to England with his family in 1936, studied at Beckenham School of Art in Kent, and returned to Western Australia in 1949. Renowned for his interpretation of the Western Australian landscape, he exhibited nationally and internationally and won many awards during his lifetime, including the *Wynne Prize for Australian Landscape* in 1976 and 1980 (Art Gallery of New South Wales). His work is represented in collections throughout Australia. See Trevor Smith, *Robert Juniper*. (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1999); Philippa O'Brien, *Robert Juniper* (Roseville East, NSW: Craftsman House, 1992); Elwyn Lyn, *The Art of Robert Juniper* (Seaforth, NSW: Craftsman House, 1986); Hendrick Kolenberg, *Robert Juniper: drawings, 1950–1980* (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1980).

<sup>19</sup> *Guy Grey-Smith: Art as Life* (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 2014). Exhibition catalogue.

<sup>20</sup> Stefano Carboni, foreword to *Guy Grey-Smith: Art as Life*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Melissa Harpley, "Guy Grey-Smith: Art as Life," in *Guy Grey-Smith: Art as Life*, 7, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Ted Snell, "Why are Western Australian art and artists invisible?," *The Conversation*, 1 April 2014, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://theconversation.com/why-are-western-australian-art-and-artists-invisible-24888>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

Prior to the publication of Andrew Gaynor's monograph and the recent AGWA exhibition catalogue, **Howard Taylor** had received more recognition in dedicated print publications than Guy Grey-Smith. His achievements were acknowledged during his lifetime through the award of an Order of Australia in 1989 and nomination as a 'Living Treasure' in 1999, and posthumously in 2003 with a major retrospective at the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney.<sup>24</sup>

Howard Taylor was born in Hamilton, Victoria and moved to Perth in 1932. His interest in drawing began when he was shot down and interned during the Second World War, whilst serving with the Royal Australian Air Force. For a while he was held at the same prison camp in Germany as Guy Grey-Smith, but according to Helen Grey-Smith there was little artistic exchange between them at the time.<sup>25</sup> After the war, Taylor studied at Birmingham College of Art. He returned to Western Australia in 1949 and settled in Bickley on the outskirts of Perth. In 1967 he moved to Northcliffe with his wife Sheila, seeking the same kind of peace and seclusion in the karri forest that Guy and Helen Grey-Smith later sought when they moved to Pemberton in 1975.<sup>26</sup> Howard Taylor lived and worked in this secluded environment for over thirty years, observing and interpreting climatic conditions and the effects of light on the colours and natural structures he encountered in his surroundings (Figure 43). According to Gary Dufour, his work is distinguished by an analytic process of observation and primary interest in materials.<sup>27</sup> Snell and Dufour both suggest Taylor was interested in the way we look at objects and how we perceive them.<sup>28</sup> His closely considered encounters with the environment culminated in the atmospheric abstract paintings and meticulously-crafted sculptural forms he produced in the 1980s and 90s. Dufour describes Taylor's investigations during the last two decades of his life as:

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<sup>24</sup> Gary Dufour, *Howard Taylor: Phenomena* (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 2003). Exhibition catalogue; Ted Snell, *Forest Radiance: Howard Taylor* (Perth: Curtin University of Technology, 2001). Exhibition catalogue; Snell, *Howard Taylor: Forest Figure* (South Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1995); Dufour, *Howard Taylor: sculptures, paintings drawings 1942–1984* (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1985). Exhibition catalogue.

<sup>25</sup> Gaynor, *Guy Grey-Smith: a survey*, footnote 9.

<sup>26</sup> Snell, *Howard Taylor: Forest Figure*.

<sup>27</sup> Dufour, *Howard Taylor: Phenomena*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Dufour, *Howard Taylor: Phenomena*, 18; Snell, *Forest Radiance: Howard Taylor*, n.p.

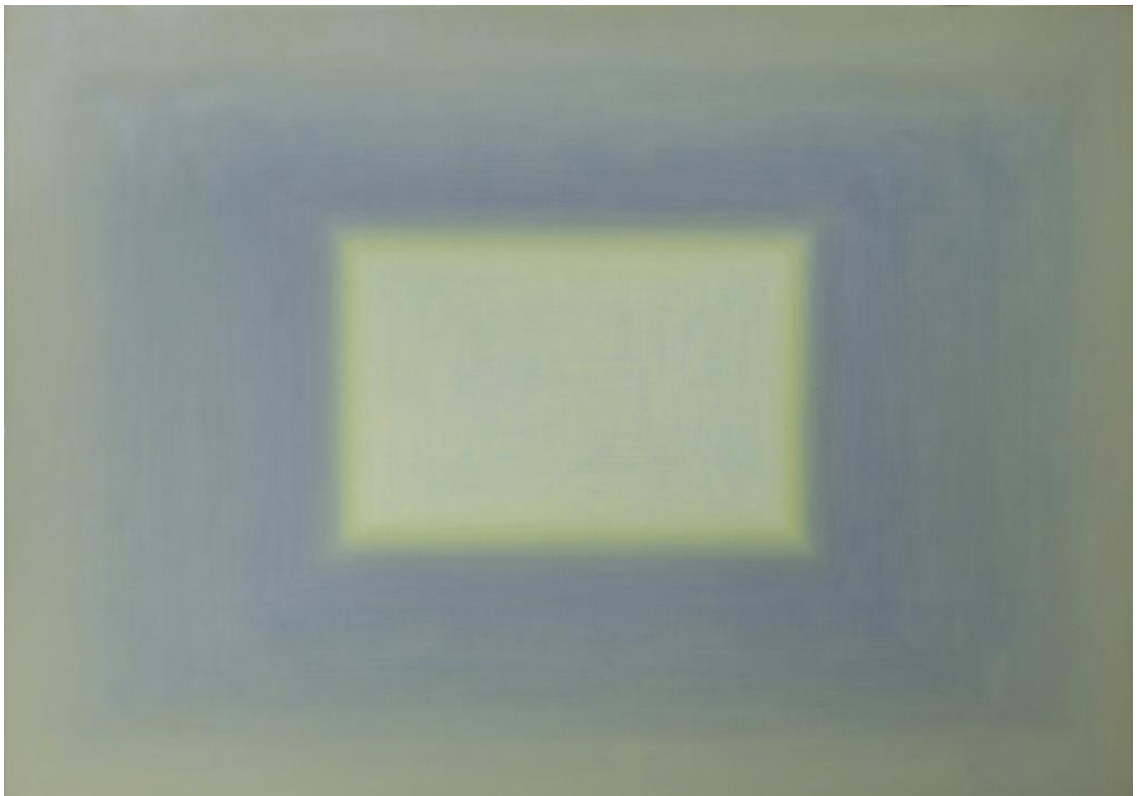


Figure 43 Howard Taylor *Foliage Light* 1986 oil on hardboard 75 x 106cms  
© The Howard H. Taylor Estate represented by Galerie Düsseldorf  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Photo: Paul Webster

... concern for optical contrast through increasingly minute adjustments of transparency, opacity, texture, underpainting, gloss, hue, shape or colour, using the artist's 'kit bag' to transform nature observed into works of outstanding formal clarity and intellectual resolve.<sup>29</sup>

In 1995 Snell claimed the publicity that followed Taylor's Order of Australia and other instances of retrospective recognition encouraged people to consider his work in the context of current debates about regionalism and internationalism.<sup>30</sup> Snell suggested attempts to position Taylor as Western Australian were understandable given the nature of his practice and the lack of attention paid to artists outside Sydney or Melbourne, but identifying him as 'regional' was:

... as foolish as calling Paul Cezanne a Provencal artist because so much of his work depended on his interaction with the landscape around Mont Saint Victoire. Even though the karri forest around Northcliffe continues to be the inspiration for his work, Howard employs this source material to explore issues that relate the phenomena of perception to the formal problems of picture making. The landscape is an essential element but a lack of knowledge of that source does not limit the potential to read the completed pictures.<sup>31</sup>

According to Dufour, the work Taylor produced whilst living in Bickley and Northcliffe that explore the particularities of place share a sense of isolation and insulation that is characteristic of regional styles, but not unique to Western Australia. Dufour suggests his continuous focus on landscape locates Taylor within the legacy of a European tradition and the history of Australian preoccupation with the genre. However, his work does not denote a distinct regional style.<sup>32</sup> Yet in response to the 2014 exhibition held at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, *Guy Grey-Smith: Life as Art*, Sally Quin suggests the work of Howard Taylor, Guy Grey-Smith and Robert Juniper constitutes 'a regional school of national significance' and 'a fascinating alternative' to other Australian modernists, such as Arthur Boyd (1920–1999), Russell Drysdale (1912–1981) and Sidney Nolan (1917–1992), who pursued the landscape tradition as a backdrop to myth-making images of national identity.<sup>33</sup> In this instance, the reference

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<sup>29</sup> Dufour, *Howard Taylor: Phenomena*, 26.

<sup>30</sup> Snell, *Howard Taylor: Forest Figure*, 117.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>32</sup> Dufour, *Howard Taylor: Phenomena*, 2003, 33.

<sup>33</sup> Sally Quin, "Guy-Grey-Smith: Modern visions of the West," *Art Monthly Australia* 271 (July 2014): 41.



Dufour, Snell and Quin make to Guy-Grey Smith or Howard Taylor 'being regional' alludes to Western Australia's position in a national framework rather than something more localised, such as living and working regionally within the State. Nevertheless, this commentary is pertinent and timely. For it contextualises my discussion about the South West within an on-going dialogue about regional positioning and the perceived marginalisation of Western Australian art from the national discourse. Snell claims:

Retrospectively, curators and critics have often acknowledged they were remiss in omitting artists, events or works held in public collections in Western Australia from their national surveys. Unfortunately, the recorded history is what remains and private apologies do not affect the next generation of critics, curators or art historians who regularly replicate these oversights.<sup>34</sup>

However, when it comes to recognition in print, I suggest the oversights intensify the further you travel from Perth and metropolitan area. For aside from Guy Grey-Smith and Howard Taylor, my literature search unearthed only two other artists linked with the South West whose achievements have been recognised and recorded in a major solo exhibition with an accompanying catalogue: Douglas Chambers (b. 1935), and John Austin (b. 1944), but neither was living in the region at the time of their exhibition.

**Douglas Chambers** was living in Albany in the Great Southern region in 1991 when the Art Gallery of Western Australia's newly appointed senior curator John Stringer offered him a retrospective exhibition because he was interested in promoting West Australian artists.<sup>35</sup> Chambers was born in London and studied at the Royal College of Art from 1959 to 1961. During that time he took part in the 'Young Contemporaries' exhibitions held at the Royal Society of British Artists with his peers David Hockney (b. 1937), Allan Jones (b. 1937) and Ron Kitaj (b. 1932), pioneers of British Pop Art. Following a career teaching art in Jamaica, Perth, Darwin and Albany, Chambers says he 'washed up' in the small South West community of Balingup in 1997.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Snell, "Why are Western Australian art and artists invisible?"

<sup>35</sup> Margaret Moore, *Douglas Chambers: A Survey* (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1991). Exhibition catalogue; Douglas Chambers, in discussion with author, June 16, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Chambers lived in Jamaica between 1963 and 1969. He moved to Western Australia in 1970. He taught at the Western Australian Institute of Art (Curtin University) until the mid-1980s. Moore, *Douglas Chambers: A Survey*, 7, 9–10; Douglas Chambers, in discussion with author, June 16, 2007.

Chambers has exhibited nationally and internationally and his work is represented in collections throughout Australia, but he claims the retrospective at the Art Gallery of Western Australia has been a highlight of his career.<sup>37</sup> According to exhibition curator Margaret Moore, Chambers is a highly intuitive artist whose work is rich in content and compositional inventiveness. She claims a willingness to experiment with techniques and materials has been a constant characteristic of his work, and because the subject-matter is so closely entwined with his life it is a key to his emotional state, sometimes sad, sometimes humorous – as seen in *The Wicketkeeper* (Figure 44), now in the City of Bunbury collection.<sup>38</sup>

There are always layers of possible meaning in Chambers' art. Ultimately his work is the expression of abstract conceptions manipulated, embedded or delineated in medium. There is a kaleidoscope of sources, both conscious and subconscious, from literature, art history and life, colliding together from the mind and hand of the artist.<sup>39</sup>

Over a long career, Chambers has explored a range of subjects relating to his life experience. But whilst his expressive imagery may allude to reality, including episodes from his personal history or observations of nature, he does not illustrate specific landscapes he has inhabited. Recurring motifs like birds, animals and the human form are used as symbols of fertility or death.<sup>40</sup> Moore calls this a long-term fascination with the seductive contrast between imagined and actual reality.<sup>41</sup> In an anthology published at the same time as Chamber's retrospective exhibition, Snell questioned the effect on an artist of living 'outside the centre', especially when their work includes animals and appears to reflect its tones. However, Chambers insisted that being in Albany had little to do with his work other than the isolation the location offered.<sup>42</sup> He confirmed this stance when I spoke to him ten years after his move to Balingup.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Douglas Chambers, in discussion with author, June 16, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Moore, *Douglas Chambers: A Survey*, 7, 14–15, 64.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Ted Snell, ed. *The Painted Image: twenty contemporary Western Australian painters* (Perth: Curtin University of Technology 1991), 20 (hereafter cited as *The Painted Image*); Woldendorp and Stringer, *Western Australian Artists in Residence*, n.p.

<sup>41</sup> Moore, *Douglas Chambers: A Survey*, 11.

<sup>42</sup> Snell, *The Painted Image*, 20.

<sup>43</sup> Douglas Chambers, in discussion with author, June 16, 2007.

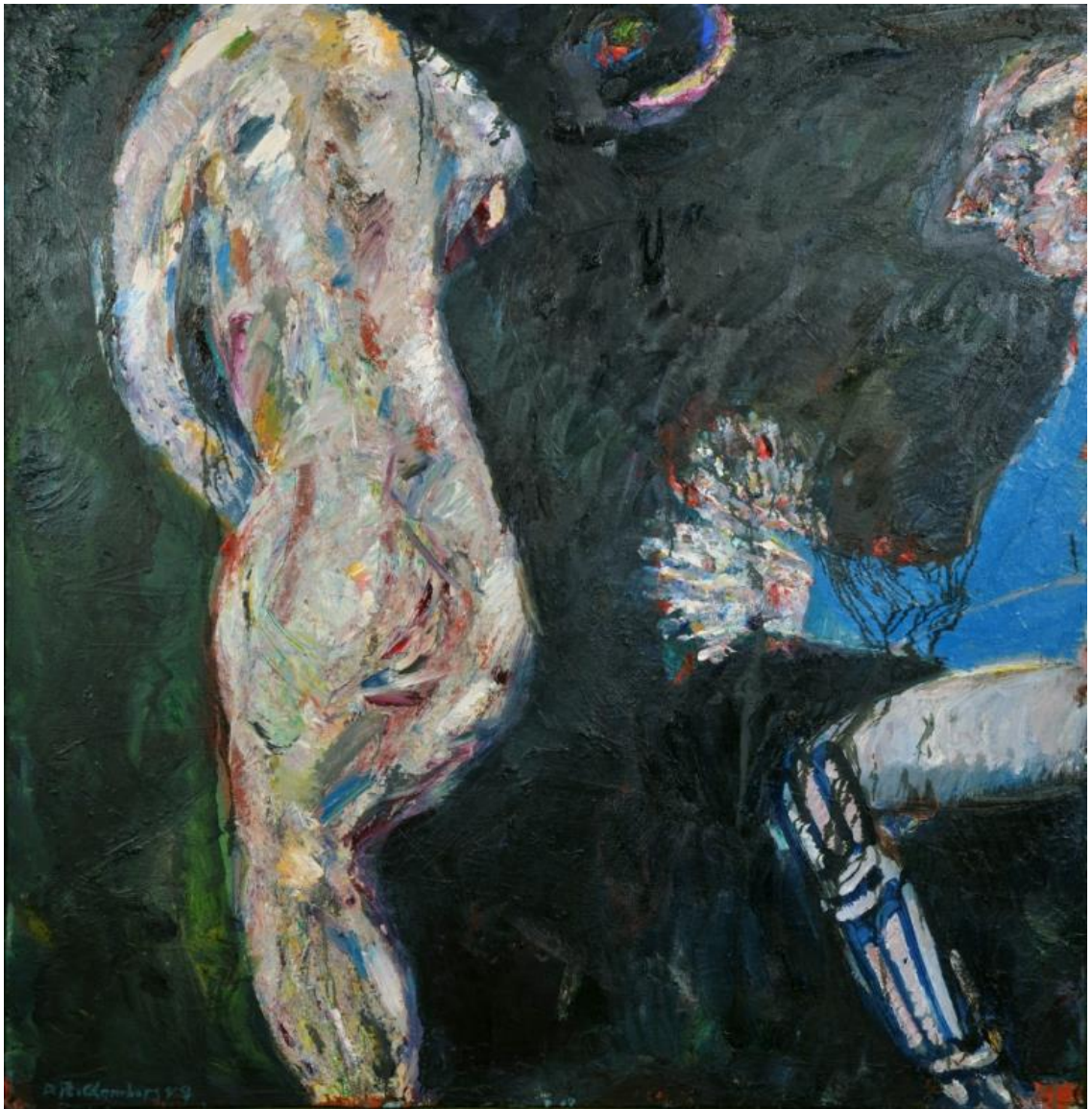


Figure 44 Douglas Chambers *The Wicketkeeper* 1989 oil on canvas 151 x 148cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Photo: Paul Webster

Douglas Chambers illustrates that labelling an artist as regional on the basis of their location can be problematic if their mobility and current or previous involvement with what happens elsewhere is overlooked, or if labelling carries with it an implication that 'being regional' equates to a parochial outlook, disengagement with wider issues, or making less significant art.<sup>44</sup> His regional location also illustrates that living in so-called isolation from the mainstream can simply be a reflection of individual choice, a position that offers both advantages and consequences. In 2015, Bunbury Regional Art Galleries endorsed Chambers' reputation as one of Western Australia's most significant contemporary artists by hosting the first survey of his work since his retrospective at the Art Gallery of Western Australia.<sup>45</sup>

Photographer **John Austin** provides another perspective on regional positioning. Originally from Somerset in England, he migrated to Australia in 1981. After living in Tasmania and Adelaide he moved to Fremantle in 1985. He then moved to Quinninup near Northcliffe in 1994. Austin's principle subjects are landscapes, natural phenomena and portraits of artists. He works with large format cameras and traditional materials to produce archival-quality silver gelatine prints. His work is represented in many collections including the National Portrait Gallery, the National Library, the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the City of Bunbury.<sup>46</sup>

Austin was living in Fremantle in 1993 when the University of Western Australia's Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery held a survey exhibition of his photographs. According to John Barrett-Lennard's catalogue essay, Austin uses the techniques of modernist photography, including 'simplicity of form and tone to focus on the essential qualities of the subject', yet they are 'of this time and place.'<sup>47</sup> Merging modernist techniques with the particularities of place exemplifies the concept of critical regionalism. I touched on this in chapter three, where I described Austin's documentation of the installation of Northcliffe's sculpture walk *Understory – art in nature*. These images combine his

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<sup>44</sup> See Goddard and Stone cited in Briggs, "Beyond the boundaries," 114.

<sup>45</sup> Catherine Czerw, *Douglas Chambers: Unfinished Business – 1991 to Now* (Bunbury: Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, 2015). Exhibition brochure.

<sup>46</sup> *John Austin*, accessed April 6, 2011, [www.jbaphoto.com.au/](http://www.jbaphoto.com.au/).

<sup>47</sup> Barrett-Lennard, *John Austin Photography 1970–1993*, 4.

interest in ecology and portraiture in a single body of work (Figures 34 to 36). Austin's approach to portraiture, especially female nudes, retains an element of the male gaze. However, his landscape photographs owe their 'stark and sensual' qualities to pure tonal contrasts rather than any hint of objectification of the female form.<sup>48</sup> Using the same tonal effects, a series of portraits of Howard Taylor in his Northcliffe studio taken in the late 1980s captures a moment in time and place with a haunting eloquence (Figure 45).<sup>49</sup> This image was shown in the Lawrence Wilson survey exhibition and a copy belongs to the City of Bunbury collection.

**Mary Knott** is the only artist who lives and works in the South West who has had an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Western Australia whilst she has been living in the region. Knott was born in Cheltenham in England in 1942, and moved to Western Australia in 1946. She studied sculpture at Claremont School of Art in the 1980s and settled in Brookhampton near Donnybrook in 1988 with her architect husband. They moved to Quindalup near Dunsborough in 2006. Knott has travelled extensively and exhibited widely in Western Australia, in Sydney and Darwin, and internationally in Hungary and Singapore. Currently, she exhibits at Gomboc Gallery in the Swan Valley near Perth and at Gunyulgup Galleries in Yallingup. Her work is represented in many collections in Western Australia, including the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the City of Bunbury. It is also sought-after by local audiences, but despite her 'bourgeois' popularity, to describe Knott's work as 'folksy' undermines the depth of its symbolism.

According to a review in the specialist art journal *Artlink* by Perth-based jeweller and writer Dorothy Erickson, Knott's exhibition of drawings and sculptures at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in late 1992 was 'beautifully presented' despite its 'low key' promotion.<sup>50</sup> The exhibition called *Crossings* was held in an area of the State Gallery then known as The Project Gallery where, according to Erickson, 'less established' artists were given an opportunity to be seen.<sup>51</sup> The show was curated

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 4–5.

<sup>49</sup> See Barrett-Lennard, *John Austin Photography*, 6, 13.

<sup>50</sup> Dorothy Erickson, "Journey by Proxy: Crossings," *Artlink* 13, no. 1 (1993): 83–84.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 84.



Figure 45 John Austin *Howard Taylor in his Studio* 1988 silver gelatine print 28 x 28cms  
Photo: John Austin  
Collection: John Austin

by (then) Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Tony Geddes. Geddes wrote an essay to accompany the show, which then toured to Bunbury and Geraldton Regional Art Galleries.<sup>52</sup> Whilst the exhibition brochure is not strictly a published catalogue, nor is it publicly available, the rarity of such exposure at the State Gallery warrants consideration in this literature review.

According to Geddes, the exhibition title referred to Knott's ability to cross from two to three dimensional media 'with compelling ease', as well as her personal experience of moving between cultures and continents.<sup>53</sup> Her work is full of symbolic motifs that signify her frequent travels and journeys – psychological and real. Open boats and foetal figures appear frequently in Knott's drawings and sculptures (Figures 46 and 47). The architectural features bring to mind Giorgio de Chirico's (1888–1978) mysterious, metaphysical paintings of unrelated objects in strange architectural settings. According to Geddes, Knott's images are metaphors that allude to global instability and a personal concern for the planet, stirring up emotions that range from contemplation to anxiety.<sup>54</sup> He suggests the underlying intensity of her work is matched by a meticulous approach to process and materials.<sup>55</sup> The sculptures are cast in bronze or made from layers of paper, paint and bitumen stretched over cane (see Figure 50, chapter seven). She also uses bitumen in her drawings to create a surreal sense of space and structure. Geddes claims Knott's approach to drawing was part of a revived interest in drawing as a contemporary medium – one that was recognised through increased curatorial attention to drawing in exhibitions and publications since the mid-1980s.<sup>56</sup> When the exhibition the State Gallery was launched art critic David Bromfield claimed it provided evidence that sculpture was thriving in Western Australia, and he congratulated Geddes on 'his sensitive presentation of this marvellous work.'<sup>57</sup> Yet whilst Bromfield acknowledged Knott's 'poetic vision', he also suggested her work exists in a space between art and craft:

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<sup>52</sup> Tony Geddes, *Crossings: Mary Knott Drawings and Sculptures 1988–1992*. Exhibition brochure. (hereafter cited as *Crossings*). Publisher unknown.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, n.p.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> David Bromfield, "Knott pushes boat out to prove talent," *West Australian*, October 17, 1992.





Figure 46 Mary Knott *Traversing* 1992 pastel, gesso and bitumen on paper 76 x 74cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Photo: Paul Webster



Figure 47 Mary Knott *Deluge* 1992 plaster, cane and paper 42 x 34cms

Collection: City of Bunbury

Acquired: *South West Survey* 1992

Photo: Paul Webster

Her objects inevitably locate themselves on the border between art and craft. Her ability to imbue each one with a sense of its own unique myth saves them from becoming mere decorator pieces.<sup>58</sup>

However, Knott's work was further recognised when the State Gallery purchased one of her boats from her exhibition for their collection.<sup>59</sup> The following year, she was the only artist resident in the South West region to be selected for the inaugural *Bunbury Biennale* held at Bunbury Regional Galleries in 1993 (see chapter seven).

## **ANTHOLOGIES**

My search for monographs and solo exhibition catalogues on artists with a substantial link to the South West was based on my knowledge of potential subjects. Anthologies provide an entry point for someone who is unfamiliar with the field. Quite simply, there are no anthologies that relate specifically to art production in the South West region. However, a handful of artists with a link to the region have featured in anthologies of Western Australian artists. For example, Snell included Douglas Chambers in his book *The Painted Image: Western Australian Art N°:1*, published in 1991.<sup>60</sup> However, as stated previously, Chambers was living in Albany at the time. Snell's premise for this new series of books was that it would provide coverage of the 'vital and burgeoning' Western Australian visual arts scene, which he claimed was ignored by many authors who wrote about Australian art yet focused on Sydney and Melbourne artists.<sup>61</sup> According to Snell, the series was to be a visual record that would focus on the work of a carefully selected group of painters who make a significant contribution to the State's cultural history. He suggested exclusion from the book could be viewed as a judgement, but this was not the intent as 'no single book could address the diversity and complexity of local art production.'<sup>62</sup> The series appears to have ended in 2002 with an eighth edition.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Barbara Booth, "Journeying with Mary Knott," *Craft Arts International* 41 (1997): 90–91; Booth, "Take a Trip in a dream boat," *West Australian Today*, May 28, 1997.

<sup>60</sup> Snell, ed. *The Painted Image: twenty contemporary Western Australian painters*, 20.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

Meanwhile, John Stringer and Richard Woldendorp published *Western Australian Artists in Residence* in 1995, which aimed to capture a moment in time and give exposure to artists who are not well recognised.<sup>63</sup> This book features images of sixty painters and sculptors in their studios, accompanied by a brief text describing their practice. Snell reviewed *Artists in Residence* soon after it was published. In his review Snell confirms the book's intent was to fill a vacuum left by the lack of recognition West Australian artists receive in print. However, he was critical of Stringer's focus on 'white artists' and alleged celebration of 'artistic personalities', and his failure to examine the social conditions in which they work. He also critiqued the 'brevity' of Stringer's text, despite the stated intent of his own anthology series to be a visual record.<sup>64</sup>

Stringer and Woldendorp's book includes two artists who lived and worked in the South West when it was published – Howard Taylor and Mary Knott. Douglas Chambers is also included, but he was living in Albany at the time. Expressionist painter Trevor Woodward (b. 1947) also features. He was living on the outskirts of Perth at the time, but he has also lived in the South West.<sup>65</sup> Italian-born artist painter Galliano Fardin (b. 1948) also features in *Artists in Residence*. Fardin lived in Pemberton for ten years in the 1970s/early 1980s before he built a home and studio at Lake Clifton.<sup>66</sup> Lake Clifton is in the Peel region on the cusp of the South West but outside the parameters of my inquiry. But since Fardin is mentioned in two subsequent chapters on the *Bunbury Biennale* (see Figure 52, chapter seven) and the *South West Survey* (chapter eight) it is helpful to name him here. According to Stringer, Fardin's inspiration comes from the State's natural environment and his keen appreciation of its Indigenous heritage:

His keen curiosity, understanding and responses to these phenomena ... are directed by a sensibility shaped in European tradition, and the artist's essential concern to reveal universal patterns, parallels and truths which transcend purely regional concerns.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Woldendorp and Stringer, *Western Australian Artists in Residence*, n.p.

<sup>64</sup> Ted Snell, "Out of Australia & Western Australian Regionalism," *Periphery* (1996) 2–4. Copy received by hand from Snell.

<sup>65</sup> Woldendorp and Stringer, *Western Australian Artists in Residence*, n.p. Trevor Woodward's home and studio in Bridgetown were badly affected by a bush fire that swept through the area in 2003. He became involved in a protracted insurance claim and no longer lives in Bridgetown.

<sup>66</sup> Galliano Fardin, in discussion with author, May 5, 2008.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Snell gave me a copy of his review because he knew my initial interest in my topic was influenced by Stringer.<sup>68</sup> Although a change in focus and circumstances meant that my approach evolved (see chapter six), it is worthwhile mentioning two other photographic books about Australian artists in their studios published in 2007, because they illustrate the currency of this format as well as the level of coverage given to Western Australian artists – Ian Lloyd and John McDonald’s *Studio: Australian Painters on the Nature of Creativity* and Sonia Payes’ *Untitled: Portraits of Australian Artists*.<sup>69</sup>

According to McDonald, *Studio* aimed to cover a broad cross-section of artists from all over Australia who work in a variety of styles, and its direct precursor was Stringer and Woldendorp’s *Western Australian Artists in Residence*.<sup>70</sup> Sixty one artists including four from Western Australia are represented in *Studio*.<sup>71</sup> Lloyd’s photographs reveal their working environment and McDonald’s profiles examine the way their studio space affects and stimulates their creativity. According to McDonald, they chose their subjects by consulting six public gallery curators whose recommendations were ‘utterly incompatible’, so they paid more attention to location than reputation when they made their final selection. They also chose to concentrate on painting as a way of narrowing the field and asserting its continuing vitality.<sup>72</sup>

The premise of Sonia Payes’ *Untitled: Portraits of Australian Artists* is very similar to *Studio*. In her foreword, Payes writes that the book explores the lives, idiosyncrasies and creative processes of sixty diverse artists.<sup>73</sup> The book features two Western Australian-born artists – Mary Moore and Brenda L. Croft (who now lives in Canberra). Snell wrote an introduction that retraces the history of the role of the studio as a place for creative activity, and each of the artists has a one page profile written by different authors. Therefore, each entry has a different focus. For example,

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<sup>68</sup> Ted Snell was my supervisor when I began my research and applied for candidacy.

<sup>69</sup> R. Ian Lloyd and John McDonald, *Studio: Australian Painters on the Nature of Creativity* (Sydney: R. Ian Lloyd Productions, 2007); Sonia Payes, *Untitled: Portraits of Australian Artists* (Prahran: Macmillan Publishers, 2007).

<sup>70</sup> Lloyd and McDonald, *Studio: Australian Painters on the Nature of Creativity*, 9–10.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 64–67, 92–95, 104, 107, 240–243. The West Australian artists are Julie Dowling, Michael Iwanoff, Robert Juniper and Yvette Watts, who now lives in Tasmania. Dowling, Juniper and Watts have works in the City of Bunbury collection.

<sup>72</sup> John McDonald, introduction to *Studio: Australian Painters on the Nature of Creativity*, 9.

<sup>73</sup> Sonia Payes, foreword in *Untitled: Portraits of Australian Artists*, 17.

some are biographical whilst others discuss the artists' preoccupations in more detail. Despite Snell's involvement in the latter book, the small number of Western Australia artists included in either book suggests that perceptions a centre-periphery hierarchy still exists between the East and West coasts of Australia.

## ARTICLES

Discounting the article published in 2006 where Goddard appraised the South West art scene, my search for articles that provide an overview of art production in the region unearthed only one more. 'Artists in a landscape: the South West' by Perth-based jeweller and writer Dorothy Erickson was published in 2002 in the specialist yet widely available art journal *Artlink*.<sup>74</sup> Erickson was guest editor for the issue, which was themed 'Art and Enterprise'.<sup>75</sup> According to her editorial, Western Australia's isolation and history makes it a place where enterprise is a way of life, in business and the arts. She suggests that whilst some artists have been 'found' by commercial galleries or enthusiastic critics and collectors, others have achieved success through their own enterprise. She claims this becomes 'doubly necessary when they are distant from the centres of power'.<sup>76</sup> Erickson also notes that it can be difficult to get coverage in east coast-based publications and her intent in this issue of *Artlink* was:

... to cover issues of national concern via a diverse range of new work being made in Western Australia using a sample of artists, galleries and collections with diverse strategies to take their art to the world.<sup>77</sup>

Erickson's article on the South West provides a descriptive account of a sample of collections, galleries and artists who operate in Margaret River, Yallingup, Bunbury and Brookhampton. Given the magazine's focus for that issue was art and enterprise, it is not surprising she begins by describing the most well-known area in the region – Margaret River – commenting on how it is known for its picturesque coastline,

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<sup>74</sup> Erickson, "Artists in a landscape: the South West," *Artlink* 22, no. 3 (2002): 50–53.

<sup>75</sup> See "About," *Artlink*, accessed September 23, 2015, <https://www.artlink.com.au/about/about-artlink/>; "History," *Artlink*, accessed September 23, 2015, <https://www.artlink.com.au/about/history/>. *Artlink* is a national print magazine about contemporary art from the Asia–Pacific region. Launched in 1981, it has been published quarterly since 1988. It is also available online.

<sup>76</sup> Dorothy Erickson, "Art & Enterprise," *Artlink* 22, no. 3 (2002), accessed September 23, 2015, <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/2665/art-and-enterprise/>.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

wineries and surf events, but it has also been home to artists for many years. She mentions that some of them combine their practice with other interests, and notes that wineries make a big contribution to cultural life through their collections, galleries and events. She selects Vasse Felix and Leeuwin Estate as specific examples, and describes how they have helped to raise the profile of Australian art since they established galleries in 2000 and 2001 respectively, for the Janet Holmes à Court and Horgan collections. She discusses Yallingup and Gunyulgup Galleries as examples of successful commercial galleries whose support of Western Australian artists has benefited from the growth of the tourist industry. This view corresponds to a comment made by Gunyulgup proprietor Nina Jones:

Couples, in particular, are on holiday and have that time together to contemplate an art purchase. Often, they wouldn't even go to galleries in the city - it just wouldn't be a priority for them.<sup>78</sup>

Erickson describes how some individual producers have developed successful studio practices in woodcraft and hot blown glass, with clients all over the world and some significant awards to their names. Her focus then turns to Bunbury, where briefly she mentions the existence of the regional gallery, Edith Cowan University's art department (although not by name) and some public art, including Tony Jones' *Echo* and John Tarry's *The Navigators*, but not Howard Taylor's *Forest Trees* (Figures 8, 26 and 28 chapter three).<sup>79</sup> She writes about three artists who have links with Bunbury through a now defunct artists' group, including Mary Knott. But although Erickson shows she clearly knows her subjects, her account of the 'success' they have met through sales, acquisitions, commissions, awards and exhibitions provides no comment or critique on what is produced or what it could mean in a wider context, although she is clear that most of her sample group have had international exposure in some form or other. Moreover, like Goddard, her interpretation of the extent of the region appears

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<sup>78</sup> Jones quoted in "Beyond the boundaries," 115.

<sup>79</sup> Following the merger of its Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts) degrees to create a Bachelor of Creative Industries, Edith Cowan University closed its School of Visual Arts in Bunbury in 2006. In 2012, the Bachelor of Arts was re-established. I was employed as a lecturer at Edith Cowan University in Bunbury for the academic years 2000–2003.



incomplete. Therefore, whilst there is nothing erroneous about Erickson's article, it reflects the scarcity of critical arts writing on art production in the South West.

## ACADEMIC RESEARCH

My search for any previous research produced within an academic framework also unearthed very little. Through my former association with Edith Cowan University, I was already familiar with a series of video recordings about six South West artists produced for the University in 1998.<sup>80</sup> They led me to a PhD thesis on education and ecology by Geoffrey Lummis published in 2001.<sup>81</sup> I found an academic article by Lorna Kaino about the development of a cultural planning policy for a regional arts industry that was also published in 2001.<sup>82</sup> However, I found no evidence of any previous in-depth study of art production in the South West from an art historical perspective.

The video recordings produced for Edith Cowan University were made by lecturer in visual arts and science education Geoffrey Lummis.<sup>83</sup> Titled *Artists of the South West*, the series featured Jenni Doherty (b. 1958), Linda Skrolys (b. 1955), Maggie Buchanan (b. 1952), Mary Knott, Rita Winkler (b. 1954) and Russell Sheridan (b. 1956). In each film the artists provide a snapshot of their practice, motives and preferred medium – drawing, painting, sculpture, jewellery and public art. Lummis went on to publish his PhD thesis in 2001. His subject is education and ecology and he uses images from the films to illustrate broad concerns facing Western society at the end of the twentieth century, such as family, identity, isolation, and ecological sustainability.<sup>84</sup> Lummis' thesis is approached from a phenomenological perspective and it is deeply philosophical. The driving force of his argument is the value of a creative arts education. He proposes the

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<sup>80</sup> Geoffrey W. Lummis, *Artists of the South West: Jenni Doherty* (Churchlands: Edith Cowan University Media Production Unit, 1998), videorecording; Lummis *Artists of the South West: Linda Skrolys*; Lummis, *Artists of the South West: Maggie Buchanan*; Lummis, *Artists of the South West: Mary Knott*; Lummis, *Artists of the South West: Rita Winkler*; Lummis, *Artists of the South West: Russell Sheridan*.

<sup>81</sup> Geoffrey W. Lummis, "Aesthetic Solidarity and Ethical Wholism: Towards an Ecopedagogy in Western Australia" (PhD thesis, Murdoch University, Perth, 2001), vi–viii. See Robyn McCarron, "Performing arts in regional communities: The case of Bunbury, Western Australia" (PhD thesis, Murdoch University, Perth, 2004), accessed July 25, 2006, <http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/191/2/02Whole.pdf>. In 2004, McCarron completed a PhD on voluntary regional performing arts organisations.

<sup>82</sup> Lorna Kaino, "The 'Problem of Culture': A Case Study of some Arts Industries in the Southwest of Western Australia," *Media International Australia* 101 (November 2001):127–138.

<sup>83</sup> Lummis, *Artists of the South West*.

<sup>84</sup> Lummis, "Aesthetic Solidarity and Ethical Wholism: Towards an Ecopedagogy in Western Australia."

creative arts encourage people to perceive the world holistically, and therefore 'aesthetic intelligence' is essential to all forms of inquiry and activity.<sup>85</sup> Other than his use of the artists' images, Lummis' thesis has no relevance to my research.

The same year Lummis published his PhD thesis, sociologist Lorna Kaino published an article about cultural planning for the development of a regional arts industry. Her aim was to provide a model for a broader study, by discussing three glass artists based in Margaret River: Kent Le Grand (d. 2011), Gerry Reilly (b. 1958) – Figures 48 and 49 – and Alan Fox (b. 1953).<sup>86</sup> Kaino suggests arts development strategies have had limited outcomes in the South West because the arts agencies charged with conceiving them are unable to offer business advice, and industry organisations do not recognise the cultural value of the arts. She also suggests that despite an impressive range of art forms attempts to exploit the potential of the region's arts industry have been held back by expectations it should be left to the voluntary sector. Yet she claims it has the capacity to illustrate the boutique lifestyle that is often used to portray the appeal of living and working in the South West. Using glass art as a model, Kaino argues a case for the market potential of arts and crafts as a product, source of income, employment, educational value, and tourist attraction. She proposes that there is plenty of scope to use arts industries to promote an image of 'cultural sophistication', but suggests understanding what is required is limited.<sup>87</sup> She suggests agencies need to be educated about the social and economic potential and 'cultural cache' of the arts, otherwise:

... the southwest will remain, as [American film-maker] Mike Moore recalled, a beautiful place for walking and fishing – but one without a visible culture.<sup>88</sup>

Whilst this discussion shows there has been some interest in scrutinising development strategies for South West art production within an academic framework, it reinforces the originality of my research as the first academically-framed study from an art historical perspective.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., ii, vi, 11–14

<sup>86</sup> Kaino, "The 'Problem of Culture': A Case Study of some Arts Industries in the Southwest of Western Australia," 127, 132–134. I was unable to locate a birth date for Kent Le Grand.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 128, 130, 132–135.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 137.



Figure 48 Kent Le Grand *Wave Form I* 1988  
blown glass 13.5 x 14cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *South West Survey* 1988



Figure 49 Gerry Reilly *Monoclines* 2003  
blown glass 30 x 24cms, 28 x 20cms, 41 x 15cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Photos: Paul Webster

## CONCLUSION

This chapter set out to scrutinise the perceived paucity of publications and lack of critique on South West art production to reveal what had been written when I began my inquiry. Despite claims the South West art scene is ‘burgeoning’, this literature review reveals that most material published between 1976 to 2006 deals with a handful of artists, and a few names occur repeatedly – Guy Grey-Smith, Howard Taylor, Douglas Chambers and Mary Knott.<sup>89</sup> It also reveals that there was no evidence of any previous academic research from an art historical perspective. I propose this represents a gap in knowledge per se, justifying the initial motive for my research inquiry. Perth-based critic and curator David Bromfield later confirmed my findings in a catalogue for Bunbury Regional Art Galleries’ 2010 *South West Survey* exhibition (see chapter eight):

The South West has a rich visual arts history yet little has been published to recognise the artists and their work.<sup>90</sup>

Therefore, this review positions my thesis as the first academically-framed study of contemporary art production in the South West from an art historical perspective. So what are the implications of the paucity of publications and absence of critical writing when it comes to recognition of regional artists and art production? First of all, the issue of arts writing and recognition is not restricted to the South West of Western Australia. According to recent comments made by Snell, a large number of books, exhibitions and television programs produced in the past century have used the term ‘Australian’ to describe an aspect of the country’s visual art scene, yet they exclude or play down references to Western Australian artists or institutions.<sup>91</sup> His statement appears to be backed up by Martin Edmond’s review of Sasha Grishin’s history of Australian art, where he noted:

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<sup>89</sup> Briggs, “Beyond the boundaries,” 113.

<sup>90</sup> Bromfield, *Over There*, v. I discuss Bromfield’s catalogue in chapter seven.

<sup>91</sup> Snell, “Why are Western Australian art and artists invisible?”; Snell, “Western Australian art is excluded from the national conversation,” *The Conversation*, October 17, 2014, accessed October 11, 2014, <http://theconversation.com/western-australian-art-is-excluded-from-the-national-conversation-32498>; Snell, “The Tyranny of Myopia”, *Artsource*, accessed 25 September 2015, [www.artsource.net.au/Magazine/Articles/The-Tyranny-of-Myopia](http://www.artsource.net.au/Magazine/Articles/The-Tyranny-of-Myopia).

... deals almost exclusively with art produced in Melbourne and Sydney, or else by Melbournians or Sydneysiders who have made their careers overseas ...<sup>92</sup>

In October 2014, the treatment of Western Australian art in national discourse prompted Artsource and the University of Western Australia Cultural Precinct to hold a one-day symposium called 'The Undiscovered'. The aim of the symposium was to provide an opportunity for the visual arts community to take part in a conversation about the position of Western Australian art nationally:<sup>93</sup>

We know that there is clear need for quality writing and dialogue about living Western Australian artists and the artwork they create. The Undiscovered symposium is part of our response to this.<sup>94</sup>

According to Gavin Buckley, Chief Executive Officer of Artsource (Western Australia's peak membership body for artists), subject to funding the plan is to address the situation by producing some publications in future years. But addressing the question of arts writing in Western Australia is not a new topic. In 2008 Artsource invited Ric Spencer to address the state of arts writing in Western Australia in their winter issue.<sup>95</sup> As a practitioner, Spencer said he was interested in the relationship between art production and writing – who writes it, who reads it and where. He drew attention to a 'heated' exchange on the treatment of the visual arts by *The West Australian* newspaper that had taken place at an arts forum in Perth in 2007, and suggested that this episode had highlighted the importance of arts writing and the need to raise awareness of 'local' content whilst placing it in a global context.<sup>96</sup> Spencer published comments on the current state of arts writing in Australia that he had received on request from members of the arts community. They included suggestions that there is little visible reflection of what is happening in the West in national and international arts media, and a need to take account of different audiences, modes of delivery and

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<sup>92</sup> Martin Edmond, "Stranger than we can imagine," review in *Sydney Review of Books*, accessed September 25, 2015, [www.sydneyreviewofbooks.com/australian-art-history-sasha-grishin/](http://www.sydneyreviewofbooks.com/australian-art-history-sasha-grishin/).

<sup>93</sup> See *The Undiscovered: A National Focus on Western Australian Art*, accessed October 11, 2014, [www.undiscoveredsymposium.com/about](http://www.undiscoveredsymposium.com/about); Gavin Buckley, "From the Chief Executive Officer," *Artsource newsletter* (August–November 2014): 4–5. Ted Snell is Director of the University of Western Australia Cultural Precinct.

<sup>94</sup> Buckley, "From the Chief Executive Officer."

<sup>95</sup> Ric Spencer, "The state of arts writing," *Artsource newsletter* (Winter 2008): 5–11.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 5–6.

contexts.<sup>97</sup> As one of the respondents, I said the lack of critical engagement with regional art production was disappointing, and suggested there needs to be more critical writing for both specialist and general audiences.<sup>98</sup>

In 2009 *Artlink* dedicated a whole issue to the topic of arts writing following two forums they had held in Adelaide and Sydney.<sup>99</sup> The publication covered a range of subjects, including the affect the internet has had on publishing and the production of interactive or user-generated content and blogs. For example Andrew Frost, author of influential blog *The Art Life*, described how it began in 2004 as a ‘labour of love’ that challenged magazines and newspapers, then drew attention to the ubiquitous and ephemeral nature of blogging, and the complexities of copyright issues when it comes to online publishing.<sup>100</sup> Joanna Mendelsohn wrote about the foundation of the *Dictionary of Australian Art Online* as a search tool for generating information on art and artists that can be constantly updated. Now known as the *Design and Art of Australasia Online*, DAAO was founded in 2003 by Mendelsohn and colleagues at the University of New South Wales. In its new form, the site is able to upload documents, such as essays and catalogues, and claims to have a worldwide readership.<sup>101</sup>

So if we accept the evidence shows that the paucity of publications and scarcity of critical or analytical writing on South West art production relates to a wider dialogue about the marginalisation of Western Australian art – one that recognises there is a need for more arts writing and a demand for print publications for specialists and general readers despite the proliferation of blogs and websites – this suggests there is a case for the inclusion of regional art production. Otherwise Western Australia’s discourse of inclusion-exclusion will remain metro-centric. For example, following ‘The Undiscovered’ symposium an online respondent proposed:

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–9.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>99</sup> *Artlink: changing climates in arts publishing* 29, no. 4 (2009).

<sup>100</sup> Andrew Frost, “From here to everywhere: the evolution of blogging,” *Artlink* 29, no. 4 (2009): 18–19; *The Art Life*, accessed September 25, 2015, <http://theartlife.com.au/>.

<sup>101</sup> Joanna Mendelsohn, “Lean, mean and living dangerously,” *Artlink* 29, no. 4 (2009): 15–17. See Vivian Johnson and Joanna Mendelsohn, “Imagining the Future: Issues in Writing and Researching Art’s Histories in a Digital Age with the DAAO,” in *Crossing Cultures*, 968–971.

Regional art and artists in WA have much to offer nationally and internationally. Often regional artists refer to their distinct lived experiences. As the urban-regional gap widens, these diverse perspectives are often excluded from contemporary discussion, when they are most needed. In seeking answers to the 'invisibility' dilemma 'Perth' [sic] should first consider looking within, and place itself within its deeper West Australian context.<sup>102</sup>

Moreover, whilst there may be a limited amount of material written about South West art production, what exists shows that the artists who have been recognised have histories and career trajectories that illustrate they move across continents, respond to what is happening locally and further afield, and produce work that has been endorsed by critics, curators, and collectors. To understand the implications of regional positioning and art world validation in a wider context, the following chapter examines recent discourse about contemporary art and new ways of writing art history that endorse new fields and forms of inquiry.

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<sup>102</sup>Catherine, June 26, 2014, comment on "Alan Muller's response to AGWA," *The Undiscovered*, accessed 25 September, 2015, [www.undiscoveredsymposium.com/post/90020004273/alan-mullers-response-to-agwa](http://www.undiscoveredsymposium.com/post/90020004273/alan-mullers-response-to-agwa).



## CHAPTER FIVE

### A 'WIDER, INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE': NEW HISTORIES AND GEOGRAPHIES OF ART

**A worldly approach is not a universal one, nor is it a view from the most powerful place. It is an approach that prioritizes both the singularity and distinctiveness of art production in each region of the world, that notes its parallelism with developments in other regions that have similar or connected cultural and political histories, and that is alert to the potential for connectedness between the differences that make us who we are and who we will, one hopes, continue to be.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Smith, "Inside out, outside in: changing perspectives in Australian art historiography," *Journal of Art Historiography* (June 2011), n.p. *Terry Smith: Online Texts and Podcasts*, accessed October 19, 2014, <https://arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/smith-inside-out-outside-in.pdf>.

## INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I revealed that a literature search substantiates perceptions there is a paucity of publications and lack of critique on art production in the South West of Western Australia. I also revealed there is no evidence of any previous academic research from an art historical perspective. I propose this represents a gap in knowledge per se, justifying the initial motive for my research inquiry. I also revealed there are wider concerns that Western Australian art is being omitted from recorded histories of Australian art, and suggested that attempts to redress the balance should include regional artists and art production. Otherwise the discourse of inclusion-exclusion will remain metro-centric. Coupling these circumstances with a timely description of the South West art scene as 'folksy' and 'not up to speed' with what is found in metropolitan galleries around the world, I propose recent art production in the region has been neglected and misrepresented. Consequently, my thesis aims to offer an alternative view of contemporary art production in the South West by arguing that 'being regional' is a legitimate position in today's art world, both on its own terms and as part of a globalising tendency that recognises the validity of regional contexts and perspectives.

The aim of this chapter is to review some of the recent discourse that illustrates this tendency. I begin by examining how the globalisation of the art world is generating debate about new ways of writing art history that recognise its 'new geographies'. This leads to a review of some recent commentary on contemporary art, where I consider Terry Smith's ideas about current trends and his propositions for writing its history, culminating in a critique of his books *What is Contemporary Art?* and *Contemporary Art: World Currents*. I conclude chapter five by explaining how some of Smith's theories provide a useful framework to draw upon to investigate instances of institutional practice and recent art production in the South West of Western Australia that reflect local conditions and contemporary trends, when coupled with ideas drawn from other commentaries and theories about regionalism. This chapter contextualises my thesis within a wider, international dialogue that endorses regional positioning.

## GLOBALISATION OF THE ART WORLD

As the twenty-first century dawned, discourse on the impact of globalisation on cultures, countries and their economies became the dominant discourse.<sup>2</sup> ‘Globalisation’ is the term used to describe world-wide economic integration across national borders through financial deregulation of markets to create a global economy for the production and distribution of goods, services and knowledge.<sup>3</sup> It is also associated with the idea of a contemporary era that began with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of East-West antagonism, symbolised by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.<sup>4</sup> The spread of digital technology and interconnectivity through access to the world-wide web is a critical feature of globalisation. Critics see globalisation’s market-driven focus as a threat to the environment and fragile nations, and its transmission of homogenised popular culture as a threat to local cultural differentiation. Conversely, new regionalism theory maintains significance of place and local knowledge embodied in institutions and individuals are measures of competitive advantage in the global market place, and some cultural economists suggest that paradoxically globalisation is thought to stimulate cultural specificity and recognition of regional distinctiveness.<sup>5</sup>

According to Hans Belting, globalisation is the most important occurrence in the history of recent art production.<sup>6</sup> Belting is co-founder of the web-based platform Global Art and the Museum (GAM). GAM was established in 2006 as a research tool for investigating the affects of globalisation on the contemporary art world, using its website, social media, symposia and online publications to generate and document debate on current thinking on global art production.<sup>7</sup> Belting claims a ‘new geography’ of art production emerged after 1989 when changes to the political and economic world order opened up museums and the art market to ‘global art’ produced outside ‘the West’. He proposes two landmark

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<sup>2</sup> David Throsby, *Economics and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 154–157; Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 5–6.

<sup>3</sup> Throsby, *Economics and Culture*, 147; Rainnie and Julie Grant, “The Knowledge–Economy, New Regionalism and the Re-emergence of Regions,” 3; Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 5–6.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Alberro, “Periodising Contemporary Art,” in *Crossing Cultures*, 935–936.

<sup>5</sup> Rainnie and Grant, “The Knowledge–Economy, New Regionalism and the Re-emergence of Regions,” 3; Throsby, *Economics and Culture*, 16, 70, 147, 155–157, 166. According to cultural economist David Throsby, globalisation both threatens and stimulates cultural differentiation.

<sup>6</sup> Belting, “Contemporary Art as a Global Art: A Critical Estimate,” in *The Global Art World*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Belting, “Contemporary Art as a Global Art: A Critical Estimate,” in *The Global Art World*, 9–11; *Global Art and the Museum*, accessed January 9, 2010, <http://globalartmuseum.de/site/home> (page no longer available); “About the Project,” *Global Art and the Museum*, accessed November 13, 2016, <http://zkm.de/en/ueber-das-projekt-englisch>.

exhibitions held in 1989 were a critical part of this process – *China Avant-Garde* and *Magiciens de la Terre*.<sup>8</sup> *China Avant-Garde* was held at the National Art Gallery in Beijing in February 1989. It was the first large-scale exhibition organised by contemporary Chinese artists. *Magiciens de la Terre* was held at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. It was the first major exhibition that brought together ‘primitive’ and ‘Western’ artworks from across the world in one exhibition to illustrate the diversity of art production, including Australian Aboriginal art which was gaining global visibility through increasing exposure in the art market.<sup>9</sup> According to Belting, *Magiciens de la Terre* was celebrated as the first global exhibition of contemporary art, yet it was also criticised for exoticising some ‘Third World’ artists.<sup>10</sup> Since then, the production, exposure and distribution of art on a world-wide scale has initiated a ‘global turn’ in the art world, with museums, the art market, landmark exhibitions and ‘biennales’ playing a key role in the circulation and validation of who and what is considered contemporary.<sup>11</sup> Print publications and online discourse have also played a vital role in this validation process, recording who and what should be recognised as significant, and why. These conventions and cultural practices are replicated across the world. However according to Belting, the impact of globalisation on the art world differs from place to place, which contradicts belief globalisation is responsible for generating cultural homogeneity. Consequently, he suggests the concept of ‘global art’ is different from ‘world art’. His argument is based on a belief global art embraces regional differences and regionalism, whereas world art includes art production everywhere but considers it within a framework of universal ideals and analytic methods inherited from modernism.<sup>12</sup>

During the timeframe of my research inquiry these contested concepts, and the corresponding concepts of ‘global art history’ and ‘world art history’, have been the subject of considerable debate about how to write art history and define its canons. For

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<sup>8</sup> Belting, “Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate,” 5, 7, 16, 22–23.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Archer, *Art Since 1960* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 198–203.

<sup>10</sup> Belting, “Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate,” in *The Global Art World*, 23.

<sup>11</sup> Belting, “Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate,” in *The Global Art World*, 23; See *Global Art and the Museum*, accessed January 9, 2010, <http://globalartmuseum.de/site/home> (page no longer available); *The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds After 1989*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe, 17 September 2011 – 5 February 2012, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.global-contemporary.de/en>; Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World*, 2008; Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004);

<sup>12</sup> Belting, “Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate,” 2–7, 22–23; *Global Art and the Museum*, accessed January 9, 2010, <http://globalartmuseum.de/site/home> (page no longer available).

example, James Elkins' essay 'Art History as a Global Discipline' was published originally in 2006 as the introduction to *Is art history global?*.<sup>13</sup> The essay was re-published by *Global Art and the Museum* in 2012.<sup>14</sup> According to Elkins, art history could be considered a global discipline embracing new subjects and areas of production, but this can only occur within a consistent set of methods that adhere to Western forms of interpretation and analysis.<sup>15</sup> His argument is based on belief in a shared set of assumptions about art history's purpose, methods and narratives that implies if it does not comply with them then it is not art history but something else, such as art criticism or theory. To Elkins, these are separate practices that involve different ways of writing. Alternatively, he also suggests art history could involve different forms of practice with distinct methods of interpretation that vary from place to place. However, in this instance it would not be a single global enterprise but several different practices that simply share a name.<sup>16</sup>

Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann distinguishes between the concept of 'world art history' perceived as a universal critique of art with a culturally-centred bias, and 'global art history' conceived in the context of globalisation, global markets and cultural exchange but opposed to the idea of universal history. In contrast to Elkins, he suggests it is time to think outside the centre-periphery paradigm and look for new perspectives and approaches to art history that recognise its new geographies.<sup>17</sup> Piotr Piotrowski claims framing art history as centralised and universal ignores local positioning. Piotrowski critiques 'vertical' models of art history that impose metropolitan values and hierarchies onto 'peripheries'. He proposes the concept of 'transnationality' (exchange and transit across national boundaries) supports the development of 'horizontal art history' – a multi-dimensional approach embracing a multiplicity of local values and regional narratives, an approach that is freed from geographically-imposed hierarchies. Piotrowski suggests that under such a framework local art worlds will generate their own hierarchies and canons.<sup>18</sup> DaCosta Kaufmann acknowledges Piotrowski's argument for histories conceived from the

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<sup>13</sup> James Elkins, "Art History as a Global Discipline," in *Is art history global?*, ed., James Elkins (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 3–23. See Elkins, "Canon and Globalization in Art History," in *Partisan Canons*, ed., Anna Brzyski (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 55–77.

<sup>14</sup> James Elkins, "Art History as a Global Discipline," *Global Art and the Museum*, accessed November 1, 2014, [http://globalartmuseum.de/site/guest\\_autor/220](http://globalartmuseum.de/site/guest_autor/220).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, "The Idea of World Art History: Introduction 1," in *Crossing Cultures*, 72–74.

<sup>18</sup> Piotr Piotrowski, "Towards Horizontal Art History," in *Crossing Cultures*, 82–85.

'margins', then he asks who defines the margins and how can we do justice to the diversity of global culture and multiplicities of places?<sup>19</sup> Piotrowski suggests the 'other' must define its own position, which paradoxically is more privileged than the centre because it can be more sensitive to context and significance of place.<sup>20</sup>

I heard DaCosta Kaufmann and Piotrowski speak at the 32<sup>nd</sup> International Congress in the History of Art (CIHA) in Melbourne in January 2008.<sup>21</sup> According to conference convenor Jaynie Anderson, CIHA occasioned a 'substantive change' in the history of art, new tendencies came to the fore and cross cultural analysis became the favoured model for writing global art history, which could only have happened outside Europe.<sup>22</sup> This event, was a seminal moment in my research inquiry, for I also heard Terry Smith present a paper proposing a framework for writing a history of contemporary art (outlined in chapter one).<sup>23</sup> Smith is acknowledged to be a leading authority in the theory of contemporary art and his paper is part of an extensive body of work on the subject of contemporaneity and contemporary art, which he began to articulate in 2001.<sup>24</sup> His books, essays and articles contribute to an extensive discourse on writing art history and the effect of globalisation on contemporary art that is being generated by authors who endorse the Western tradition and others who propose alternative models. Before I consider Smith's ideas, culminating in critique of his publications *What is Contemporary Art?* and *Contemporary Art: World Currents* published in 2009 and 2011 respectively, it is helpful to look at some other perspectives on how to write art history to show how this discourse continues to unfold and relate to the commentary on provincialism and regionalism that Smith and Burn articulated in the latter part of the twentieth century. In the early twenty-first century, it appears the challenge for art history is to find ways to reconcile divergent perspectives on how to embrace regional contexts without privileging any particular methodology or narrative. How and whether this is achievable is an on-going discourse.

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<sup>19</sup> DaCosta Kaufmann, "The Idea of World Art History: Introduction 1," in *Crossing Cultures*, 73.

<sup>20</sup> Piotrowski, "Towards Horizontal Art History," in *Crossing Cultures*, 83–84.

<sup>21</sup> I attended this conference as a postgraduate delegate. See Diana Roberts, "Contemporary Visual Art and Design Practice in the South West of Western Australia contributes to regional prosperity," (poster presented at *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration, Convergence*, 32<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art, University of Melbourne, 13–18 January, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Jaynie Anderson, preface to *Crossing Cultures*, xvii–xviii.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, "Writing the History of Contemporary Art," 918–921.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, xi; "Guest Author of December 2010," *Global Art and the Museum*, accessed November 1, 2014, [http://globalartmuseum.de/site/guest\\_author/298](http://globalartmuseum.de/site/guest_author/298).

Stating clearly that he writes from a perspective within the Western tradition, Paul Wood suggests that situating this tradition as the dominant narrative reproduces a centre-periphery paradigm.<sup>25</sup> Wood acknowledges that Terry Smith's and Ian Burn's considerations of the relationship between a system dominated by America and the wider world in the 1970s mark a significant moment in this changing narrative, and since then the system has become globalised following a progression of radical political, economic and ideological transformations across the world.<sup>26</sup> Wood suggests that for all its faults, *Magiciens de la Terre* was a sign of recognition that colonialism was over and globalisation was about to take centre stage, rendering Eurocentrism parochial. He suggests the onset of 'full-blown' globalisation and escalation of biennale exhibitions in the 1990s presented a challenge to the hegemony of 'Art' as it had been conceptualised in the Euro-American Western tradition.<sup>27</sup> Wood claims the centrality of the West is now widely questioned in debates about the notion of a world art history and contemporary art, but the prospect of a world art history emanates from the former centres not from the peripheries. He suggests this is seen from within as how the system works, and from outside as a filter to legitimate practice and knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Referencing Elkins, Wood suggests that we have reached a point whereby we either exclude kitsch in its various forms, including landscapes produced for tourists, and say it does not belong in history, or embrace everything from craft to video and declare it is 'too bad' if the burgeoning field of art and art history cannot deal with such variety and traditions. Thus, the debates are divided between a commitment to particularism on the one hand and a fear of universalising systems on the other, which could lead to a rejection of the methods and concepts of Western tradition, or a willingness to modify them to suit different contexts as required.<sup>29</sup>

Huw Hallam proposes 'cosmopolitanism' is a possible solution for configuring a 'universalisable art-historiographic discourse', by which he means recognising the global

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Wood, introduction to *Western Art and the Wider World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), Wiley Online Library e-book, 4–5, accessed September 22, 2016, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/doi/10.1002/9781118781401.ch0/summary>.

<sup>26</sup> Wood, "Avant-Garde, Contemporary, and Globalized World," in *Western Art and the Wider World*, 225, accessed September 22, 2016, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/doi/10.1002/9781118781401.ch4/pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> Wood, "Avant-Garde, Contemporary, and Globalized World," 228; Wood, "'World Art History' and Contemporary Art," in *Western Art and the Wider World*, 255, accessed September 22, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/doi/10.1002/9781118781401.ch5/pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Wood, "'World Art History' and Contemporary Art," 253, 257–259.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 264–265, 268–269.



breadth of art production and its myriad forms of distribution rather than universally determined aesthetic principles.<sup>30</sup> Hallam proposes an anthology of texts would reflect the ‘radically dispersed’ nature of world art history, but this still raises the question of how to judge what practices deserve attention. He claims Smith’s essay on provincialism in the American publication *Artforum* was a ‘rare victory’ in the recognition of an Australian perspective. However, a search of the British library catalogue uncovers very few other Australian authors, although Ian Burn’s book *Dialogue* does appear. Hallam suggests it is naïve to think this represents a problem between the ‘West’ and non-West that can be resolved by simply erasing centre-periphery distinctions. He proposes that reconsidering the notion of universality to include an ‘ethics of openness towards cultural difference’ – cosmopolitanism – might offer a model for art history that represents the geographic breadth of the many forms of art production that occur throughout the world. According to Hallam, acknowledging its fallibility, a cosmopolitan world art history would narrate the plurality of histories from which the contemporary has emerged, and reframe artistic legitimation as an understanding of difference.<sup>31</sup>

Whilst I have only touched the surface of this unfolding debate, it clearly reveals that ‘dismantling the centre-periphery model’ by ‘conferring on all localities an equal significance’ as a context for art production is implicit in the globalisation of the art world.<sup>32</sup> It also reveals that the production of critical and historical discourse contributes to the production of artistic legitimacy.<sup>33</sup>

## **WHAT IS CONTEMPORARY ART? HOW DO WE WRITE ITS HISTORY?**

In 2009, Hal Foster published a series of responses to a questionnaire about contemporary art he had sent to curators and art critics in Europe and America. Foster suggests contemporary art is so diverse there is a sense it is liberated from definition and judgement, yet paradoxically it has been institutionalised by academic discourse and museums. So he asks: if contemporary art is so ‘free floating’ then how can its fundamental features be identified? Some responses were published in the magazine *October* and Foster

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<sup>30</sup> Huw Hallam, “Globalised Art History: the New Universality and the Question of Cosmopolitanism,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 9, no. 1/2 (2008/2009): 75–76, accessed September 2, 2016, <http://search.informit.com.au.dgbw.lis.curtin.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=706326709288742;res=IELLCC>.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 80–86, 88.

<sup>32</sup> Wood, “‘World Art History’ and ‘Contemporary Art,’” 275.

<sup>33</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 35–36.

summarised some of them in the online discussion platform and journal *e-flux*, as part of a debate they were having on how to categorise contemporary art.<sup>34</sup> *E-flux* was attempting to devise an archive for contemporary art, but said they did not know how to give it a structure because there have been no significant art movements for twenty years and artists work with materials in so many different ways.<sup>35</sup> The problem they saw was how to develop criteria to scrutinise and historicise a recent and on-going activity and its many narratives, whilst leaving it open to other possibilities. So they posed the question: what is contemporary art? They suggest one approach is to institutionalise contemporary art and another is to leave it undefined.<sup>36</sup> In his response to Foster, Elkins suggests ‘the contemporary’ would either be excluded from world art history because it is not historical, or it would be an ideal subject because it exists everywhere.<sup>37</sup> Albert Alberro suggests the concept of ‘contemporary’ as a period is an option, not as a period style but characterised by new digital media and its institutionalisation by museums, the art market and a host of recurrent large scale exhibitions.<sup>38</sup> Other respondents suggest ‘contemporaneity’ is not an era but a moment of shared concerns in a loose framework that embraces a range of modes and methodologies. They draw on their own experience to suggest that we examine what is contemporary in our own context and how it relates to global discourse.<sup>39</sup>

This dialogue illustrates its own paradox: whilst contemporary art may well ‘float free’ and mean different things to different people in different places, at the same time it is being institutionalised by the art world through various mechanisms of validation – museums, collections, landmark exhibitions, biennales, the art market, discourse and publications.

<sup>34</sup> Hal Foster, “Questionnaire on ‘The Contemporary’,” *October* 130 (Fall 2009): 3–124, accessed July 1, 2011, [www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/octo.2009.130.1.3](http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/octo.2009.130.1.3); Foster, “Contemporary Extracts,” *e-flux journal* 12 (January 2010), accessed January 8, 2010, <http://e-flux.com/journal/view/109>.

<sup>35</sup> Julieta Aranda, Brian Kuan Wood and Anton Vidokle, “What is Contemporary Art? Issue One,” *e-flux journal* 11 (December 2009), accessed January 8, 2010, <http://e-flux.com/journal/view/96>.

<sup>36</sup> Aranda, Wood and Vidokle, “What is Contemporary Art? Issue One”; Aranda, Wood and Vidokle, “What is Contemporary Art? Issue Two,” *e-flux journal* 12 (January 2010), accessed January 8, 2010, <http://e-flux.com/journal/view/109>.

<sup>37</sup> Foster, “Questionnaire on ‘The Contemporary’”; Foster, “Contemporary Extracts”.

<sup>38</sup> Foster, “Questionnaire on ‘The Contemporary’,” 55–60; Foster, “Contemporary Extracts”. See Alberro, “Periodising Contemporary Art,” in *Crossing Cultures*, 935–939; Alberro, “Periodising Contemporary Art,” *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 9, no. 1/2 (2008/2009): 67–73, accessed September 2, 2016, <http://search.informit.com.au.dgbw.lis.curtin.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=706289443346226;res=IELLCC>.

<sup>39</sup> Zdenka Badovinac, “Contemporaneity as Points of Connection,” *e-flux journal* 11 (December 2009), accessed January 8, 2010, <http://e-flux.com/journal/view/102>; Carol Yinghua Lu, “Back to Contemporary: One Contemporary Ambition, Many Worlds,” *e-flux journal* 11 (December 2009), accessed January 8, 2010, <http://e-flux.com/journal/view/102>.

This contemporary situation resonates with extant theories about the role individuals, institutions and cultural practices play in the process of artistic legitimation, including Becker's observation that in principle any object can be legitimated as art but in practice every art world has conventions that govern who and what is validated by whom.<sup>40</sup>

In his response to Foster's questionnaire, Terry Smith reports that his pursuit of an historical premise for the nature of contemporary art begins with questions about how the world has changed since the aftermath of the Second World War re-shaped Europe, the process of decolonisation opened up Africa and Asia, political upheaval occurred in South America, neo-liberal economics stimulated the global distribution of products and information, and China and India emerged as 'superpowers'. He claims these circumstances created the conditions for the concept of 'the contemporary' to signify multiple ways of being, and whilst this has always been the case, the end of the era of totalising narratives has enabled the diversity of 'being contemporary' to prevail. Consequently, he suggests historians of contemporary art face some methodological challenges if they are to reconcile the particularities of place ('place-making') with a broader outlook ('world-picturing') in the conditions of contemporaneity, which is characterised by globalisation and continuing exploitation of natural resources in face of increasing cultural differentiation, social inequity, and the mediation of images and information via global communications systems.<sup>41</sup> Within the myriad forms of contemporary art that exist in these conditions, Smith distinguishes three major currents, each distinct yet related to the others: 'an aesthetics of globalisation' or 'relentless re-modernising' manifest in installation, sculpture, photography, architecture and the establishment of institutions of modern art that adhere to modernist ideals of avant-garde innovation; an abundance of art shaped by all sorts of particularities in response to the process of decolonisation, which circulates via the art market and biennales creating a dialogue between local and international values; and a younger generation of artists using electronic and interactive technology to explore ideas about time, place and self.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 163.

<sup>41</sup> Foster, "Questionnaire on 'The Contemporary'," 47–49.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 49–53.

Smith describes these trends and his ideas for writing a history of contemporary art in several books and articles.<sup>43</sup> They include an article published in 2007 which he sent to me after the CIHA conference.<sup>44</sup> As if pre-empting Elkins' comment that the contemporary is not historical, Smith begins this article by suggesting:

... the very idea that contemporary art might be subject to historical analysis and interpretation is a simple contradiction in terms ... That there may exist a historiography of contemporary art would seem, from this point of view, plain silly ... Yet, as I will show, these objections have themselves been sidelined by actual historical developments, changes in art practice ... shifts in critical theory and the application of both historical and art historical perspectives to contemporary art.<sup>45</sup>

This quote provides an entrée into Smith's thinking about the unpredictable, provisional nature of contemporary art, contemporaneity and history. In 2011 he summarised the 'thrust' of his recent work as exploring:

... the relationships between contemporary art and its wider settings, within a world picture that I believe is characterized above all by the contemporaneousness of difference.<sup>46</sup>

Smith endeavours to embrace the specific and shared concerns that artists, curators and art historians articulate in many different temporalities, locations and formats, without privileging any system or field. He is against the totalising implications of universalism. He claims the coexistence of multiple cultural variances is 'fundamentally antithetical' to the idea of artistic canons, but the art world continues to need such structures.<sup>47</sup> However, 'official' contemporary art does not include all current practices, because artistic canons are structured according to the preferences of their authors. Smith suggests their shortfall is not that selections are made, but rather their claims to universal significance. He proposes a 'partisan' approach to canon formation is a viable alternative – one that

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<sup>43</sup> Terry Smith, "Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (Summer 2006): 681–707; Smith, "World Picturing in Contemporary Art: Iconographic Turning," in *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 7, no. 1 (2006), n.p., accessed January 24, 2008, [www.terryesmith.net/texts/TS\\_IconogeographicTurning.pdf](http://www.terryesmith.net/texts/TS_IconogeographicTurning.pdf); Smith, "Writing the History of Contemporary Art", 918–921; Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 254–259, 264–269; Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 10–11; Smith, "Inside out, outside in: changing perspectives in Australian art historiography", n.p.

<sup>44</sup> Terry Smith, "For a History of Contemporary Art," *Siècles* 20 no. 21 (2007): 191–215. Received via email from Terry Smith, January 24, 2008, n.p.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, n.p.

<sup>46</sup> Terry Smith, "Inside out, outside in: changing perspectives in Australian art historiography," n.p.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, "Coda: Canons and Contemporaneity," in *Partisan Canons*, ed., Anna Brzyski (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007), 310–311, 313.

advocates the significance of local initiatives. Yet he maintains the construction of canons will become an increasingly futile exercise.<sup>48</sup>

Despite his misgivings, like any writer Smith contributes to the creation of a canon of 'Contemporary Art' in the choices he makes to illustrate his theories and themes in *What is Contemporary Art?* and his subsequent book *Contemporary Art: World Currents*. In *What is Contemporary Art?* he examines the three major currents he distinguishes amongst the many forms of contemporary art that have emerged across the world in recent decades in a series of chapters that conform to customary art world institutions or practices, including museums, architectural 'spectacles', the art market, collections, landmark exhibitions and participatory events. In the final chapter, Smith summarises his ideas about major currents in contemporary art and outlines his art historical hypothesis about contemporaneity and possible lines of inquiry (see chapter one). Although, as I have said, this is not the first time he has articulated these propositions, this chapter is extremely enlightening. Therefore, whilst he does outline his premise in the introduction, perhaps the fuller explanation may have been more useful at the start of the book to foreground his subsequent chapters, rather than at the close.

*Contemporary Art: World Currents* is a world-wide survey of what Smith perceives as the shift from modern to contemporary art that began in the 1950s, took shape in the 1980s, and continues to unfold today. According to Smith, it also shows that although much is shared by artists wherever they live, art production occurs in different ways in different cultural regions and art-producing localities.<sup>49</sup> The book's three-part format corresponds to the three major currents in contemporary art he identifies and discusses in *What is Contemporary Art?*, but in this instance these trends are presented as an illustrated survey rather than a series of discursive essays. Part one covers the emergence of contemporary art in Europe and America since the 1950s, and its institutionalisation in the 1980s and 90s when the market and museums turned it into a global 'brand'. Smith claims this is the period when retro-sensationalism, re-modernism and spectacle became distinct tendencies of contemporary art, manifest in a range of artistic practices including installation, sculpture, photography and architecture. He illustrates his theory with a list of

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<sup>48</sup> Smith, "Coda: Canons and Contemporaneity," 311, 315, 320, 324–325.

<sup>49</sup> Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 9–11.

familiar names and examples – Jeff Koons’ enormous puppy made from plants, Damian Hirst’s tiger shark in a tank of formaldehyde, Tracey Emin’s unmade bed, Rachel Whiteread’s cast-concrete house, Jeff Wall’s large scale digitally-enhanced photographs, and Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao.<sup>50</sup> Smith suggests installation has become a ubiquitous form of contemporary art, but the continuing use of painting, sculpture, photography and figurative imagery was a ‘defiant demonstration’ that some artists still consider ‘traditional’ media an effective means for expressing critical content whilst others employ more innovative media like video.<sup>51</sup>

In part two Smith outlines developments in contemporary art that have occurred outside Western Europe, America, and ‘former colonies’ like Australia, since what he now calls the ‘transnational’ turn, when greater global mobility coupled with growing recognition of cultural difference has generated diverse forms of art produced locally that circulates internationally.<sup>52</sup> His coverage of seven world regions includes ‘Oceania’. He describes this as the Pacific region encompassing the ocean ‘dotted with islands’ between the continents of Asia, America and Australasia. Despite the vastness of this area and diversity of its cultures, the chapter covers only three countries – Papua New Guinea, New Zealand and Australia.<sup>53</sup> In the section on Australia which focuses on Aboriginal art, Smith suggests that although the country’s Indigenous population is only 2.5% of the total population, Aboriginal art has become its most prominent and representative form of visual expression. He goes on to describe Aboriginal art production in some remote areas that draws its imagery from traditional stories and symbolic motifs, and then outlines the emergence of abstract painting at Papunya in the Central Desert in the 1970s, when traditional sand drawings were transposed onto canvas, using colours and shapes and lines to symbolise sacred sites or sense of place. Smith acknowledges that a relationship with their land is vitally important to Indigenous people. He also points out that landscape has been a popular subject with Australian artists since settlement. He suggests the treatment of Aboriginal people and their land is a subject that interests Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists from cities and country towns. For example, he describes how an artist from Alice Springs called Rod Moss depicts the interaction between Aboriginal people and

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 45–46, 65–79.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 196–213.

settlers with ‘unsparing’ realism in compositions that reference historic European paintings and photographs.<sup>54</sup> In 1994, Smith described Moss’ ‘sweeping panoramas’ of real situations as a form of critical regionalism that embraces realism to confront contemporary issues.<sup>55</sup> However, although he uses regional examples like this to illustrate his theories, Smith makes no reference to what is happening in Western Australia. The West is overlooked in this particular record of history.

In part three Smith describes participation in the ‘image economy’ by a new generation of artists as the most recent current in contemporary art. He suggests that although there is some evidence of engagement with the image economy in the other two major currents, a preference for informal spaces and virtual communications networks coupled with an indifference to art world power struggles makes this third current distinct from the other two. Connectivity and immersive or mediated experience are its key features. He claims young artists are tapping into the interactive potential of new technology and social media to explore the affect of time and place on personal and shared experience. However, he includes within this third current artists from Europe, America and former colonies who live and work internationally who have responded to the transnational turn by critiquing geo-political structures.<sup>56</sup>

Another tendency Smith identifies within this current is growing concern for the environment and the natural world. In a chapter titled ‘Climate Change: Art and Ecology’ he identifies exploitation of natural resources, the affect of human impact on the environment, land use, loss of animal habitats, population growth and global warming amongst a range of environmental issues of current global concern. He describes how artists have been creating site-specific installations and ephemeral sculptures in the landscape since the 1960s and 70s. He suggests that during the 1980s and 90s, whilst some artists were responding to the market others became increasingly motivated by growing ecological consciousness. He describes a recent example of two Australian women who used crochet installations to draw attention to the affect of global warming on the Great Barrier Reef. According to Smith, their hand-crafted creations represent a symbolic

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 203–204, 207–208, 211–212.

<sup>55</sup> Smith, “Rethinking Regionalism: art in the Northern Territory,” 470–471.

<sup>56</sup> Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 256–259, 296–297.



substitute for the disappearing reef, and their coral reef project has inspired thousands of other artists to produce similar objects that raise awareness of this problem.

Smith goes on to describe other collaborative projects conceived and created by artists and communities to highlight problems that occur in specific environments that have global implications or parallels.<sup>57</sup> These examples illustrate how categories of art production that Clement Greenberg would have dismissed as kitsch rather than avant-garde have become contemporary through the particularity of their purpose and context, which shows how unwavering ideals of universal aesthetic value can appear inappropriate and out-of-date. At the end of this chapter, Smith suggests art that enables critical engagement with the environment provides a pathway between a perceived dichotomy between aesthetic value and environmental activism, and claims the questions raised by growing ecological consciousness are becoming increasingly evident in exhibitions and discourse.<sup>58</sup> He ends the book reinforcing the diverse yet connected nature of contemporary art.<sup>59</sup>

Huw Hallam and Anthony Gardner reviewed *What is Contemporary Art?* when it was published in 2009. Hallam and Gardner suggest Smith's categorisation of contemporary art is useful and his methodology could have far-reaching implications for writing art history. They claim Smith approaches each case study like a reviewer who first observes and encounters a work or space, describes and evaluates, then locates his analysis within the history of art, moving from the particular to the general. However, although they compliment his extensive knowledge of the art world, they suggest he uses too many lists of artists and broad descriptions to substantiate his three categories or currents of contemporary art, and his case studies lack depth. Yet as one account within his extensive study of the subject, they conclude that Smith's insistence on the 'perpetual provisionality' of the contemporary is compelling.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 257, 274–279, 280–285, 287.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>60</sup> Anthony Gardner and Huw Hallam, "On the contemporary – and contemporary art history," review in *Journal of Art Historiography* 4 (June 2011): 252–258. QUT ePrints. Accessed May 22, 2015. <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/57419/>.

Andrew McNamara reviewed both books following the publication of *Contemporary Art: World Currents*.<sup>61</sup> He suggests they provide important answers to the question ‘what is contemporary art’ and Smith’s efforts to chart its parameters have received a positive reception. He claims the books signal important changes in thinking towards particular issues such as ecological preservation and the presence of contemporary art everywhere. He suggests Smith has always navigated ‘complex terrain’ by devising classifications that aim to be distinct, but says this approach can lead to schematic treatment of subjects and reductive lists of artworks. McNamara also suggests Smith’s claim that a heightened level of self-reflection is a condition of contemporaneity is contentious, for it implies a preoccupation with contemporary issues was less evident in previous times and art forms. Yet how do we judge whether we are more conscious of our concerns than previous generations? He suggests an alignment of the contemporary with the postcolonial turn is useful, but Smith’s argument for a ‘momentous’ shift from the modern to the contemporary is unconvincing. According to McNamara, the contemporary relies on certain modernist values, such as universal acceptance of tolerance, and for that reason he finds it hard to agree that a commitment to postcolonialism requires a rejection of universalism, even though that is supposed to be the key point of difference. Consequently, contemporary creativity remains indebted to the legacy of modernism.<sup>62</sup>

Paul Wood acknowledges that Smith has been a prolific contributor to the debate on contemporary art and suggests his book *Contemporary Art: World Currents* is a valuable visual illustration of a wide range of concerns that preoccupy contemporary artists, and the validity of realism. But like McNamara, he disagrees with Smith’s notion of a fundamental break between modernism and contemporary art. Wood suggests that the key features of contemporary art Smith identifies – including an expanded range of materials, a pre-occupation with identity and recognition of the particular and local – are features of postmodernism’s resistance to totalising narratives and there is nothing specifically contemporary about them.<sup>63</sup> ‘Looking back from the other side of 1989’, he proposes the intricate interplay of global and local out of which the contemporary is

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<sup>61</sup> Andrew E. McNamara, “What is contemporary art? A review of two books by Terry Smith,” review in *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* (December 2012): 252–258. [academia.edu](http://academia.edu), accessed May 22, 2015, [www.academia.edu/2711886/What\\_is\\_Contemporary\\_Art\\_A\\_review\\_of\\_two\\_books\\_by\\_Terry\\_Smith](http://www.academia.edu/2711886/What_is_Contemporary_Art_A_review_of_two_books_by_Terry_Smith).

<sup>62</sup> McNamara, “What is contemporary art? A review of two books by Terry Smith”, n.p.

<sup>63</sup> Wood, “Avant-Garde, Contemporary, and Globalized World,” 235; Wood, “‘World Art History’ and ‘Contemporary Art,’” 273–275, 278.

constituted originates in a dialectic relationship that is quite distinct from the centre-periphery, mainstream-provincial model of modernism; and whilst commentators such as Smith emphasise the contrast with modernism, this interplay illustrates the complexity of the situation.<sup>64</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Bourdieu and Becker suggested the art world is a site of constant struggle for recognition or authority to preserve or challenge the cultural hierarchy, and new histories are constructed from a conviction that what is being produced is now considered legitimate.<sup>65</sup> The discourse outlined in this chapter embodies this proposal, for it illustrates that new forms of art history are challenging notions of centre-periphery hierarchies by endorsing the validity of regional perspectives, contexts and narratives. Yet divergent views exist on whether art and its history is to be understood within an over-arching, universalising 'world art history' framework or accepted as 'global' encompassing multiple forms of analysis and regional difference. Correspondingly, descriptions of contemporary art as 'free-floating' or institutionalised, and distinct from or indebted to modernism, reflect co-existent conflicting perspectives on what is happening globally. According to Terry Smith, changes in the way Australian art history has been written have often occurred because its content and form has been questioned:

... transformation in the writing of the history of Australian art is frequently, and perhaps most profoundly, the outcome of battles about which kind of history *ought* to be written.<sup>66</sup>

In the 1990s, Ian Burn proposed that re-examining the nature of centre-periphery relations between Australia and European and American practices would reveal an interdependent rather than a subservient relationship, thereby enabling an alternative interpretation of twentieth century art.<sup>67</sup> Although some flaws have been identified in Smith's approach, his premise that the conditions of contemporaneity enable many different forms of contemporary art and history to co-exist is expedient. For example, he endorses the critical role that place plays in art production, and the provisional nature of

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<sup>64</sup> Wood, "Avant-Garde, Contemporary, and Globalized World," 233.

<sup>65</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 35–36, 40–42, 121–123, 131–132, 136; Becker, *Art Worlds*, 59, 61, 300–301, 305, 312–313, 314, 339, 367.

<sup>66</sup> Smith, "Inside out, outside in: changing perspectives in Australian art historiography," n.p.

<sup>67</sup> Burn, Lendon, Merewether and Stephen, *The Necessity of Australian Art*, 132–133.

history.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, some of his propositions for writing histories of contemporary art provide a useful framework to draw upon to investigate instances of recent art production and institutional practice in the South West of Western Australia that reflect local conditions and contemporary trends, when coupled with ideas drawn from other commentaries and theories about regionalism.

Firstly, Smith's proposition that the postcolonial turn has generated a need for narratives that look at art production in its local setting and wider circulation complements ideas articulated by Belting and others about the need for new approaches to art history that enable us to look outside the centre-periphery paradigm and be more sensitive to its specific contexts.<sup>69</sup> These ideas resonate with recent theories on regionalism that dispel the centre-periphery myth by advocating the value of local knowledge embodied in individuals and institutions and significance of place.<sup>70</sup> They also build on Smith's own commentary on regionalism where he claims regional positioning should be seen as an enabling condition, endorses the potential for 'traffic along lateral lines', and suggests that 'critical regionalism' offers a way to consider work that responds to local conditions as well as broader issues.<sup>71</sup> Recently he proposed that comparative or critical regionalism has on-going currency as a strategy for signalling the potentiality of critical creativity everywhere – potentiality derived from its distinctiveness and connectivity.<sup>72</sup>

Secondly, amongst the possible lines of inquiry Smith proposes, outlining the role the art world plays in validating what counts as current art is another pertinent proposition. It echoes comments made by Belting and others about the role museums, the art market, landmark exhibitions and biennales play in the endorsement and circulation of who and what is considered contemporary, which relates to extant theories about the endorsement of artists and artworks by individuals and institutions.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> DaCosta Kaufmann, "The Idea of World Art History: Introduction I"; Piotrowski, "Towards Horizontal Art History"; Belting "Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate," in *The Global Art World*.

<sup>70</sup> Rainnie and Grant, "The Knowledge–Economy, New Regionalism and the Re-emergence of Regions"; Rainnie, "Learning regions, agglomeration and regional development"; Rainnie, "New Regionalism in Australia – Limits and Possibilities"; Morgan, "Sustainable Regions: Governance, Innovation and Sustainability"; Beer *et al.*, *Developing Australia's Regions*.

<sup>71</sup> Smith, "Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?," 5, 8; Smith, "Rethinking Regionalism: Art in the Northern Territory, 470–471."

<sup>72</sup> Smith, "World Picturing in Contemporary Art: Iconogeographic Turning," n.p.

<sup>73</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*; Bourdieu, *Fields of Cultural Production*.

Thirdly, Smith's theory of growing concern for the environment and the natural world brings to mind an article by Jonathan Holmes published in *Artlink* in 2006, where he refers to Ian Burn's exhibition of mid twentieth-century landscape paintings at Bendigo Art Gallery in 1982 (see chapter two). According to Holmes, the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue essay set out to challenge two opposing opinions about the paintings – popular opinion that their attraction stems from the well-crafted depiction of familiar views, and a critical perspective that they illustrate conservative parochialism. Echoing Burn, he suggests a 'blindspot' in our understanding of Australian art has arisen.<sup>74</sup> To illustrate how a more considered view of the regional landscape tradition could reflect its significance, Holmes then describes how visual art has played a critical role in campaigns to save the Tasmanian wilderness, and how this has become a well-documented part of Tasmania's sense of place and emerging art history.<sup>75</sup>

Smith's proposition complements other recent commentaries on the relationship between art and environmental consciousness. For example, in an issue of *Third Text* devoted to the consideration of artistic responses to ecological topics, Emily Eliza Scott identifies a recent spate of art practices that address real world issues as an insistence that ecological, economic and social concerns are inseparable.<sup>76</sup> The examples Scott describes include regionally-based activist groups whose projects investigate the impact of coal mining and genetically-modified crops on rural communities and the natural environment in Midwest America, and collaborative initiatives creating discourse about social, technological, environmental and development issues affecting communities and traditional cultures in Arctic regions. Platforms employed for these projects and initiatives include research, video, postcards, social networks, performance, film, books, photography, exhibitions and conferences aimed to engage and empower people through the acquisition of knowledge. According to Scott, these groups operate within and beyond the art world, using specific issues to draw attention to universal concerns such as climate change, species extinction,

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<sup>74</sup> Jonathan Holmes, "Blindspot: regional art histories in Australia," *Artlink* 26, no. 1 (2006): 66–67. See Burn, "Popular landscape painting between the wars."

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 68–73.

<sup>76</sup> TJ Demos, "An (Online) Introduction: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology," *Third Text*, accessed September 23, 2016, <http://www.thirdtext.org/contemporary-art-and-the-politics-of-ecology-into>; Emily Eliza Scott, "Artists' Platforms for New Ecologies," *Third Text*, accessed September 23, 2016, <http://www.thirdtext.org/artists-platforms-for-new-ecologies-arc>.

land use, and the relationship between people and the environment.<sup>77</sup> Given I have already revealed that the environment is integral to the South West's sense of place – whether colonised, cultivated, excavated, contested, inhabited or enjoyed in its pristine state – it is reasonable to expect that 'exploring sustainable relationships with specific social and natural environments within an ecological framework' will resonate with many of the region's artists.<sup>78</sup>

I am an expatriate Scot who lives in the South West of Western Australia – a transnational writing from a Western perspective – and whilst the scope and intent of my inquiry is specific and localised, clearly the unfolding discourse outlined above provides a sound platform to support a locally-driven approach to writing a regional art history. It enables my thesis to contribute to a wider, international dialogue on contemporary art production and ways of writing art history that recognises 'being regional' is a valid position, on its own terms and as part of a globalising tendency. In the following chapter I discuss how I merged the ideas I have extracted from this discourse with a strategy for gathering evidence and insight in the field and elsewhere that enabled me to draw on this legacy of scholarship, lived experience, the artist's voice, local knowledge and the significance of place as a legitimate way to augment my narrative with alternative views, and make my thesis more reflective, collaborative, engaging and relevant.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Scott, "Artists' Platforms for New Ecologies".

<sup>78</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 266.

<sup>79</sup> Foley and Valenzuela, "Critical Ethnography," in *The Sage Handbook*, 217–234.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **RESEARCH STRATEGY: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

**The more intrinsic the interest of the researcher in the case, the more the focus of study will be on the case's idiosyncrasy, its particular context, issues, and story.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Stake, "Qualitative Case Studies," in *The Sage Handbook*, 460.



## INTRODUCTION

At the end of chapter five I explained why some of Terry Smith's ideas about contemporary art and writing its history provide a useful framework to draw upon to investigate instances of institutional practice and recent art production in the South West of Western Australia, when coupled with ideas drawn from other commentaries and theories on regionalism and the operations of art worlds. The aim of this chapter is to show how I merged this theoretical framework with methods endorsed by critical ethnography to devise a research strategy that enabled me to draw on lived experience, local knowledge, multiple voices and the particularities of place. This approach enabled me to augment and 'crystallise' my narrative with alternative views, respond to circumstances as they arose, and use an accessible style of writing, which makes my thesis more reflexive, collaborative, engaging and relevant.<sup>2</sup>

I begin by explaining how critical ethnography supports cultural critique as a situated, collaborative and reflexive process, and clarify my position as researcher in the field. Next I describe my selection of case study subjects and themes, and the methods I used to gather evidence and insight from sources in the field and elsewhere. Then I explain how I drew on this material to compose five case study chapters that illustrate how regional art production (making and validation) reflects local conditions and relates to contemporary trends, structured around the two key themes: the concept of artistic legitimacy, and the continuing significance of landscape as a contemporary subject.

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<sup>2</sup> Foley and Valenzuela, "Critical Ethnography," in *The Sage Handbook*, 217–234; Richardson and St. Pierre, "Writing," in *The Sage Handbook*, 959–979.

## CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY: RESEARCHER IN THE FIELD

A major difference between the concepts of ‘world art’ and ‘global art’ is in their attitude to methodology. As discussed in chapter five, the concept of world art history embraces new fields of art production, but it claims close allegiance to existing methods of art historical interpretation and formal analysis is necessary to maintain the integrity of the discipline. However, the concept of global art is open to alternative approaches and methods of understanding. According to art historian Hans Belting, roles are being switched – curators are studying art as a cultural geography whilst ethnographers curate contemporary art exhibitions.<sup>3</sup>

Traditionally, ethnography sits within the field of anthropology, but its methods are used in many other disciplines as a means of gathering information and insight from the field through differing degrees of detachment or involvement with the subject or object of inquiry.<sup>4</sup> According to Barbara Tedlock, historically researchers participated in a social or cultural study using a method known as ‘participant observation’ to obtain material they said reflected the member’s point of view, but more recently the ‘observation of participation’ has been adopted which allows researchers to reflect on their own engagement with the field.<sup>5</sup> Tedlock claims the concept of ‘autoethnography’ evolved from this approach, connecting autobiography with direct engagement with the creation of culture.<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu considered the new ‘reflexive’ approach to anthropology ‘narcissistic’ and lacking scientific objectivity.<sup>7</sup> He proposed ‘participant objectification’ is more apt because the researcher makes their subjective relationship with the object of study an object of study too, in order to retain objectivity.<sup>8</sup> However, I suggest this is a rather complex notion that seems to conflict with Bourdieu’s theory that an

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<sup>3</sup> Belting, “Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate,” in *The Global Art World*, 13.

<sup>4</sup> Foley and Valenzuela, “Critical Ethnography,” in *The Sage Handbook*, 217–222; Holmes and Marcus, “Refunctioning Ethnography: The Challenge of the Contemporary,” in *The Sage Handbook*, 1099–1113; Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World*, 263–266; John Carty, “Indigeneity/Aboriginality, Art/Culture and Institutions,” (paper presented at *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration, Convergence*, 32<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the International Committee of the History of Art, University of Melbourne, 13–18 January, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara Tedlock, “The Observation of Participation and the Emergence of Public Ethnography,” in *The Sage Handbook*, 467.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, “Participant Objectification,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropology Institute* 9, no. 2 (June 2003): 281–294.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

individual's cultural capital and habitus are involved in the production of meaning and value and the endorsement of artists and artworks.<sup>9</sup> I agree with claims that no inquiry is neutral and identity is implicit in interpretation.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, I find Bourdieu's concept of 'participant objectification' problematic. Moreover, Douglas Foley and Angela Valenzuela suggest recent trends in 'critical ethnography' endorse the view cultural critique is not value-free but situated and partial.<sup>11</sup> Foley and Valenzuela say a new more reflexive approach to critical ethnography recognises the inter-subjective nature of relationships between researchers and their subjects.<sup>12</sup> They suggest four key elements make cultural critique more collaborative and engaging without any loss of 'authorial authority':

- an insider's perspective on local life;
- adopting an informal conversational or dialogic interview style;
- allowing participants to review transcripts or manuscripts;
- and writing in an accessible style of language.<sup>13</sup>

According to Foley and Valenzuela there are many ways of being collaborative, and each researcher will develop their own approach.<sup>14</sup> For example, Valenzuela draws on her own background and life experience to show how it informs her scholarly research.<sup>15</sup> She provides a detailed account of her personal situation to reveal her insider status, position and relationship with her research subjects, and claims her role as researcher grew out of a 'deeply felt identification' with her field of interest.<sup>16</sup> Valenzuela also explains that through her personal involvement with a particular issue she knew her subject was 'woefully under-researched', which led her to connect her

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<sup>9</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 34–37, 190–191.

<sup>10</sup> Amelia Jones, "Meaning, Identity, Embodiment: The Uses of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology in Art History," in *Art and Thought*, D. Arnold and M. Iverson, eds. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Foley and Valenzuela, "Critical Ethnography," in *The Sage Handbook*, 217–218.

<sup>12</sup> Foley and Valenzuela, "Critical Ethnography," in *The Sage Handbook*, 218. See Douglas R. Holmes and George E. Marcus, "Refunctioning Ethnography: The Challenge of the Contemporary," in *The Sage Handbook*, 1099. Douglas R. Holmes and George E. Marcus also refer to recent changes in ethnography such as increasing complicity and collaboration with subjects as 'distinctly contemporary'.

<sup>13</sup> Foley and Valenzuela, "Critical Ethnography," in *The Sage Handbook*, 223–224.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 225–230.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 225–228.

first-hand experience with discourse and analysis to make her argument.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, her writing is a form of ‘autoethnography’.

According to Susan E. Chase, autoethnography enables researchers to ‘turn the analytic lens on themselves and their interactions with others’, whilst they interpret and write their narrative.<sup>18</sup> Stacy Holman Jones suggests autoethnography is writing that connects personal experience and knowledge of a social context with cultural critique.<sup>19</sup> Georgio Vasari is the archetypal precedent of auto-ethnography in art history. His manuscript *Lives of the Artists* was based on his direct involvement with art and artists in Italy in the sixteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Howard Becker and Pierre Bourdieu combined a sociological perspective with ethnography to draw on their life experiences to investigate various art worlds and artistic fields.<sup>21</sup> More recently, Sarah Thornton drew on her knowledge of art history, journalism and sociology to conduct an ethnographic study of the contemporary art world. In *Seven Days in the Art World* she combines scholarship with first-hand experience to explore how the contemporary art world works as a ‘symbolic economy’ where ideas about cultural worth are debated and traded on the basis of ‘nebulous and often contradictory hierarchies’ of perceived significance and value. Between 2004 and 2007, Thornton visited seven institutions involved in the production and validation of art and its producers – an auction house, art school critique, art fair, art prize, magazine, studio visit, and a biennale exhibition – and conducted interviews to generate seven enlightening and entertaining narratives about their operations and participants – the artists, curators, critics, academics, dealers, auctioneers and collectors whose activities, judgements and wallets determine who and what is in vogue.<sup>22</sup> According to her biography, Thornton has written about the art world and the art market for many publications, but says she gained access to the field as a ‘non-judgemental participant observer’ rather than an insider, for that would have meant

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 228–229.

<sup>18</sup> Susan E. Chase, “Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices,” in *The Sage Handbook*, 660.

<sup>19</sup> Stacy Holman Jones, “Autoethnography: Making the Personal Political,” in *The Sage Handbook*, 763–767.

<sup>20</sup> Georgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1965).

<sup>21</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*; Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*.

<sup>22</sup> Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World*, xi–xx, 263.

adopting a role.<sup>23</sup> She describes the contemporary art world as a network or ‘cluster of subcultures’ held together by differing and conflicting belief in art – a network that exists all over the world in capital cities and places with vibrant art scenes ‘like Glasgow’.<sup>24</sup>

In considering how these approaches might inform my research, my own background plays a part. I was born and educated in Glasgow – a colourful and cultured city that had a huge influence on my decision to study art history and work in the museum sector or art world. As stated in chapter one, this career path led me to Western Australia in 1989 to manage a high-profile corporate art collection. In 1994, I moved to the South West, where I have lived and worked ever since. Following a self-imposed break from the art world, in January 2000 I accepted a position lecturing in the School of Visual Arts at Edith Cowan University’s South West Campus in Bunbury. That role led to the offer of the post as Director at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries.

Subsequently, I have worked as an independent curator, as Executive Officer of Museums Australia WA, and since January 2013 as Coordinator of the City of Busselton’s ArtGeo Cultural Complex. Consequently, unlike Thornton, I claim insider status as an active member of the South West art world. Moreover, Thornton called her account of the contemporary art world a social history, a hybrid of sociology and art history.<sup>25</sup> Art historian Terry Smith shaped his discussions for *What is Contemporary Art?* from direct encounters with artists, galleries, exhibitions, art fairs, auctions, conferences, lectures and websites, and claims he tries to convey a sense of art as it happened in the sites and spaces it occurs.<sup>26</sup> My approach integrates art history with methods endorsed by critical ethnography for writing collaborative narratives. This strategy has enabled me to draw on my lived experience, the artist’s voice, local knowledge, the particularities of place, as well as a legacy of scholarship, to gather evidence and insight from people and documents in the field and elsewhere. Therefore, although my thesis is framed as art history, by drawing on critical ethnography my approach embraces an interdisciplinary methodology.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 263–266.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., xi, xix.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 263–266.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 2.

## SELECTION OF CASE STUDY SUBJECTS AND THEMES

I dislike the way people imagine themselves going into the field as a tabula rasa, waiting for things to ‘emerge’ ... Topics and problems and themes do not ‘emerge’ ... we ‘emerge’ them, invent them as a result of what we learn once we begin our work.<sup>27</sup>

Becker suggests themes do not emerge, we emerge them as a result of what we learn.<sup>28</sup> This notion corresponds to the reflexive process advocated by critical ethnography – a process that allows an inquiry to draw on lived experience and evolve as discoveries and events take place. As stated in chapter one, during my term as director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, John Stringer suggested I write a South West version of the book he had produced with photographer Richard Woldendorp – *Western Australian Artists in Residence*.<sup>29</sup> As noted in chapter four, Snell reviewed the book soon after it was published and later gave me a copy of his review because he knew my initial interest in taking a broad-brush approach to my topic had been influenced by Stringer’s suggestion. Snell confirmed the intent of Stringer and Woldendorp’s book was to fill a vacuum left by the lack of recognition Western Australian artists receive in print, but he found fault with its approach. For example, he criticised its focus on ‘white artists’ and failure to examine the social conditions in which they work or look for signs of regional identity.<sup>30</sup>

Mindful of Snell’s critique, I drew on my first-hand knowledge of the South West art world to identify a group of artists who could represent a way to address the two-fold problem I had identified – a paucity of publications and lack of critique on South West art production, spurred on by my interest in the question of artistic validation and the implications of regional positioning. In the first instance, I compiled a list of artists using criteria customarily used in the art world to endorse artists or categorise them as emerging, mid-career or established:

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<sup>27</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, xi

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Woldendorp and Stringer, *Western Australian Artists in Residence*.

<sup>30</sup> Ted Snell, “Out of Australia & Western Australian Regionalism,” n.p.

- their exhibition record in established commercial and/or public galleries;
- representation in a significant public, corporate and/or private collection;
- receipt of a major art award or commission.

Whilst there is no exact definition of ‘established’, ‘mid-career’ and ‘emerging’ artist, these terms are in common and consistent use. For example, Country Arts WA describes an emerging artist as someone in the first five years of their practice and a mid-career artist as someone who has been practicing for five to ten years.<sup>31</sup> According to the Western Australian Department of Culture and the Arts’ arts development program, artists who apply for a mid-career fellowship must demonstrate a minimum of ten years professional practice.<sup>32</sup> The Australian Government collection Artbank collects work by emerging and established Australian artists but provides no definition of these terms.<sup>33</sup> According to Cara Ober, categories used to label artists can be confusing. Nevertheless, she suggests an emerging artist is someone in the early stage of their career who has had a solo exhibition, exhibited in a number of group shows or been a finalist in an art award but has not yet established a substantial reputation. She describes a mid-career artist as someone who has achieved regional or national recognition through the presentation of their work in solo and group exhibitions in a major public museum rather than a commercial gallery, or in a publication produced by a museum or publishing house, and an established artist as someone at a mature stage in their career who is nationally or internationally recognised.<sup>34</sup>

On that basis, my list of twenty prospective participants met some or all of the criteria of artists who would be categorised as emerging or mid-career. This was considered a

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<sup>31</sup> “Arte Facts,” August 2009, *Country Arts WA*, accessed November 16, 2009, [www.countryartswa.asn.au/cms/cawa/documents/ArteFacts\\_downloads/ArteFactsSept09.doc](http://www.countryartswa.asn.au/cms/cawa/documents/ArteFacts_downloads/ArteFactsSept09.doc).

<sup>32</sup> “Arts Development grants handbook: Application handbook 2015,” (2015): 11, *Government of Western Australia Department of Culture and the Arts*, accessed January 24, 2016, [http://www.dca.wa.gov.au/Documents/Online\\_Grants/Applicant\\_Resources/Arts\\_Development\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.dca.wa.gov.au/Documents/Online_Grants/Applicant_Resources/Arts_Development_handbook.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> “Artbank: Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts,” (2006): 32, 38, *Australian National Audit Office*, accessed January 24, 2016, [http://www.anao.gov.au/~media/Uploads/Documents/2005%2006\\_audit\\_report\\_39.pdf](http://www.anao.gov.au/~media/Uploads/Documents/2005%2006_audit_report_39.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> Cara Ober, “Differences between emerging, mid-career, and established artists: professional practices for visual artists,” *BmoreArt* (July 2009) accessed January 24, 2016, <http://bmoreart.com/2009/07/differences-between-emerging-mid-career.html>.

manageable sample group for the first stage of my inquiry. Each artist was invited to participate by agreeing to a studio visit and an informal interview that would take the form of an open-ended conversation. The purpose of the interview was to gather information about their practice and reveal their insights on the South West art scene. Following this initial approach by letter my intent was to hone the list and identify a core group of potential subjects to represent key themes that may emerge as my inquiry progressed.<sup>35</sup> This approach corresponds to a process followed by Williams Housley, who selected three 'exemplar narratives' from twenty in-depth interviews to argue that the voice of the artist provides crucial data for re-conceptualising cultural policy in Wales.<sup>36</sup> I also invited four other members of the South West art scene to participate – the (then) Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, a commercial gallery owner-operator, the (then) Curator of the City of Bunbury Collection, and a private collector. This brought the number of people I had approached for the first stage of my inquiry to twenty-four.

However, circumstances change, including my own. Some of the people I approached did not reply and some were unavailable. So in keeping with a reflexive process, I decided to concentrate more on documents and discourse rather than interviews. By that stage I had conducted twelve interviews.<sup>37</sup> Through this sharpening of focus, I

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<sup>35</sup> This approach received ethics approval in December 2006. See Appendix I.

<sup>36</sup> William Housley, "Visions of Wales: Visual Artists and Cultural Futures," *Cultural Sociology* 3, no. 1 (2009):147, 151.

<sup>37</sup> Between 2007 and 2008 I interviewed and the following ten artists: John Austin, photographer (b. 1944 Somerset, England), now resides in Quinninup near Northcliffe; Douglas Chambers, painter (b. 1935 London), now resides in Balingup; Jenny Doherty, painter and textile artist (b. 1958, Perth, WA), now resides in the Ferguson Valley in Bunbury; Ian Dowling, ceramic artist and sculptor, (b. 1950, Perth, WA), now resides in Margaret River; Galliano Fardin, painter (b. 1948, Mogliano Veneto, Italy), now resides in Lake Clifton; Katherine Hall, drawings and installation (b. 1961, Christmas Island WA), now resides in Melbourne but lived in Gracetown near Margaret River until 2013; Steve Pease, glass artist and metalworker (b. 1955, Leeds, England), now resides in Margaret River; Gerry Reilly, glass artist (b. 1958, Gippsland, Victoria), now resides in Margaret River; Juliet Stone, painter (b. 1945, Exeter, England), now resides in Quindalup near Dunsborough; Tony Windberg, painter (b. 1966, Melbourne, Victoria), now resides in Northcliffe. I also interviewed former Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Sonya Dye and Naomie Hatherley, former owner-operator of Mullalyup Galleries near Balingup. I invited Greg White, then Curator of the City of Bunbury collection, and private collector Lloyd Horn to participate but they did not reply. Initially I invited three Noongar artists with kinship ties to the South West to participate. They included Troy Bennell (b. 1971, Bunbury) in his role as Indigenous Arts Development Officer at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, Tjyllyungoo Lance Chadd (b. 1954, Bunbury) and Shane Pickett (1957–2010). Pickett's work was exhibited at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries many times, including the 2003 *Bunbury Biennale* which took place soon after my appointment as Director of the gallery. He



became increasingly interested in the theme of regionalism, the implications of regional positioning, theories about the operations of art worlds and the concept of artistic legitimacy. Consequently, I grew enthused by recent discourse in the art world and elsewhere that endorses the validity of regional contexts and perspectives – a stance that resonates strongly with Smith’s ideas about contemporary art and writing its history. For example, Smith suggests the postcolonial turn has generated a need for narratives written from regional perspectives that look at art production in its local setting and wider circulation. He also proposes a possible line of inquiry would be to outline the role the art world plays in highlighting what counts as current art.<sup>38</sup> Smith’s propositions echo views held by Hans Belting and others about the role museums, biennales and landmark exhibitions play in the endorsement and circulation of who and what is considered contemporary.<sup>39</sup> This recent discourse relates to Bourdieu and Becker’s theories about the operations of art worlds, where they claim artists and artworks acquire artistic legitimacy from institutions and individuals through instances of exposure and recognition that include exhibitions, collections and publications.<sup>40</sup>

Additionally, Smith proposes that exploring sustainable relationships with specific social and natural environments, within a framework of ecological values, is a key current in contemporary art.<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, he wrote that a growing concern for the environment and the natural world is a contemporary trend.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, in his earlier writing on regionalism, Smith had suggested that regional positioning enables artists to respond directly to regional landscapes, and whilst he also suggested the dominance of the landscape genre represents a ‘restrictive’ form of regionalism, he proposed that innovative and critically-engaged work that responds to local conditions as well as

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worked alongside Troy Bennell on several occasions, supporting the gallery’s Indigenous arts development program. Sadly, the art world lost this respected and multi-award-winning artist during the lifetime of my inquiry. Bennell and Chadd did not reply to my invitation to participate. I discovered later that Chadd had moved to Perth. As it turns out, everyone that I approached is mentioned in my thesis, either within the text in relation to my introduction, description of the South West art scene, literature search or a case study.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 256–259.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, “Writing the History of Contemporary Art”; Belting, “Contemporary Art as Global Art: A Critical Estimate,” in *The Global Art World*; Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated: The Story of Contemporary Art*; Wood, *Western Art and the Wider World*.

<sup>40</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 150–153, 224, 351–352, 360, 367; Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 34–37.

<sup>41</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 8, 266.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 274–295.

broader issues, or employs the visual language of international art such as installation, represents a form of ‘critical regionalism’ that signifies a willingness to work across centres, peripheries and cultures.<sup>43</sup>

Naturally, it was beyond the scope and intent of my thesis to embrace Smith’s ideas and possible line of inquiry precisely. Nevertheless, drawing on his proposition that the task of a history of contemporary art is ‘to show what, how and why the art, ideas, cultural practices and values that are created within the conditions of contemporaneity have recently taken and currently take the forms they do’, I ‘emerged’ five case studies from the material I gathered in the field and elsewhere to illustrate two key themes that resonate with the ideas outlined above:<sup>44</sup>

- the concept of artistic legitimacy manifest in the validation of artists and artworks by institutions and individuals through instances of exposure and recognition, such as inclusion in a significant exhibition or catalogue, or acquisition by a major collection; and
- the continuing significance of landscape as a contemporary subject.

## **CHOICE OF METHODS**

As I have shown, recent commentaries on contemporary art and new ways of writing art history endorse the validity of regional contexts and perspectives, and critical ethnography endorses collaboration and tapping into situated-knowledge. These principles complement new regionalism theory, which endorses the significance of place and value of local knowledge embedded in individuals and institutions. Merging these theories into a strategy for gathering evidence and insight in the field and elsewhere sustains my use of multiple voices and local knowledge as an integral part of my research process and narrative. This process is usually known as ‘triangulation’. However, according to Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, ‘crystallisation’ is a better term.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, as well as using information gathered

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<sup>43</sup> Smith, “Rethinking Regionalism: Art in the Northern Territory,” 469–471; Smith, “Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?,” 5.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, “Writing the History of Contemporary Art,” 918.

<sup>45</sup> Richardson and St. Pierre, “Writing,” in *The Sage Handbook*, 959–979; Stake, “Qualitative Case Studies,” *The Sage Handbook*, 453–454.

during informal interviews, I have used quotes from artists and others that exist in documents such as artist's statements, exhibition catalogues, exhibition reviews and blogs to amplify or augment my argument, or present an alternative view. Some of these documents are considered primary sources because they represent accounts recorded at the time, as part of living memory.<sup>46</sup> According to Brian Allison, Tim O'Sullivan and Alun Owen, primary sources relate to events that occur within living memory, and secondary sources are one or more stages away from an actual event. However, these authors suggest that a document might be classed as a primary source for one inquiry and a secondary source for another, depending on the nature of the inquiry.<sup>47</sup> For example, Perth-based critic and curator David Bromfield who was commissioned to curate the *South West Survey* for Bunbury Regional Art Galleries in 2010 blogged his views on the South West art scene on his website 'Brown Art Consultants' as part of his research process (see chapter seven). I followed Bromfield's blog whilst it was live, and I have drawn upon it to augment my discussion. As part of a lived experience, real world inquiry, I have also drawn on anecdotal evidence provided by friends and colleagues when I visited galleries, exhibitions, conferences, workshops, meetings, or participated in events before and during my investigations. According to Andrew Gardner, using anecdote to describe an encounter is an acceptable strategy.<sup>48</sup> Burn also suggests that anecdote is an effective way to communicate a sense of history.<sup>49</sup> Information gathered during these social situations appears in the main body of my text or in footnotes.

For the interviews with members of the South West art world, I followed recent trends advocated by critical ethnography.<sup>50</sup> I used an informal, conversational style of interviewing and my relationship with my subject was reciprocal. However, to maintain

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<sup>46</sup> Brian Allison, Tim O'Sullivan and Alun Owen "The methods of research," in *Research Skills for Students*, (London: Kogan Page, 1996), 13.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–4.

<sup>48</sup> Gardner, "On the 'Evental' Installation: Contemporary Art and Politics of Presence," 953.

<sup>49</sup> Burn, *Dialogue*, 3.

<sup>50</sup> Foley and Valenzuela, "Critical Ethnography," in *The Sage Handbook*; Holmes and Marcus, "Refuncting Ethnography: The Challenge of the Contemporary," in *The Sage Handbook*; Chase, "Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices" *The Sage Handbook*. See Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey, "The Interview: From Neutral Stance to Political Involvement," in *The Sage Handbook*, 695–727.

some consistency in my approach, I prepared an interview guide or prompt sheet with a broad set of concepts and questions, but allowed each conversation to unfold naturally in response to each situation.<sup>51</sup> Conversations with artists were dialogic and took place in their studios and homes. I gathered biographical data from each subject and talked about their interests and work. I asked about their reasons for living in the South West, and sought their views on the region's art scene. I discussed the advantages and challenges or drawbacks of living and working in a regional location. Dialogic conversations with a former director of the regional gallery and the owner-director of a commercial gallery took place in their respective galleries. As the interview process progressed, I learnt to talk less and listen more. Each interview was recorded and later transcribed, using a process recommended for transcribing oral history.<sup>52</sup> A great deal of material was generated. Much of it has not been used in my thesis because the purpose of the interviews was to gather information and insight rather than publish any transcripts in their entirety. However, each subject was required to sign an 'informed consent' form that has enabled me to use quotes and edit them for the sake of clarity and narrative logic, whilst maintaining the integrity of their comments. Indicative of the reflexive process critical ethnography advocates, my two individual case study subjects Katherine Hall and Tony Windberg were invited to review their interview transcripts and individual chapters, and I continued to update information by maintaining contact with them and others in person or via email.

## **CASE STUDIES**

Each case study chapter is composed as a discursive montage embracing situational descriptions, dialogue, analysis and images. They crystallise material gathered from people and documents. Yet they can only represent a partial reflection of recent art production in the South West, and an incomplete remedy to the problem of the paucity of publications and lack of critique. Subjective choices are made throughout any

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<sup>51</sup> Chase, "Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices," *The Sage Handbook*, 662. According to Chase, the researcher can prepare for interviews by developing parameters and broad questions that invite the interviewee to tell their story.

<sup>52</sup> Valerie Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2005); Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

research process. Through the process of ‘emerging’ themes, selecting subjects, choosing methods, linking concepts with evidence, analysing and interpreting this material, I am aware that I have participated in the production of meaning and contributed to the validation of the examples that I have chosen to address my central research question and three subsidiary questions:<sup>53</sup>

- What evidence exists to show that contemporary art production in the South West of Western Australia reflects local conditions and relates to contemporary trends elsewhere?

Subsidiary questions:

- Who has the authority to validate art and artists, and how?
- What significant opportunities exist in the South West other than the marketplace where artists and artworks can acquire artistic legitimacy through instances of exposure and endorsement by curators, critics and collectors?
- What do artists have to say about the advantages, drawbacks or challenges they face of being regionally-based?

Therefore, my thesis represents one of many possible approaches to the history of art production in the South West of Western Australia. I do not claim to have exhausted the possibilities of this subject, but as Smith recommends, I have written some of this history ‘as it is happening, otherwise it will elude us’.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, combined with my examination of extant theories and recent discourse on contemporary art, writing its history, regionalism and the operations of art worlds, these selections enabled me to achieve my thesis aim:

- To offer an alternative view of South West art production by arguing that ‘being regional’ is a legitimate position in today’s art world, on its own terms and as part of a globalising tendency that recognises the validity of regional contexts and perspectives.

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<sup>53</sup> See Stake, “Qualitative Case Studies,” in *The Sage Handbook*, 457; Chase, “Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, Voices,” *The Sage Handbook*, 656–657, 663, 665, 667.

<sup>54</sup> Smith, “Writing the History of Contemporary Art,” 919.

## **Case study 1: Chapter Seven**

### **Power, Prestige and Regional Art Production Part I: Biennales**

This case study is the first of two that draw on theories about the operations of art worlds and recent discourse that claims biennales and landmark exhibitions play a major role in the validation and institutionalisation of contemporary art and artists. I begin with the *Bunbury Biennale* established in 1993 to help build the City of Bunbury collection through the acquisition of contemporary Western Australian art. For more than two decades, this event hosted by Bunbury Regional Art Galleries has been giving artists who live and work anywhere in the State an opportunity for exposure and recognition through their selection, and possible acquisition by the City of Bunbury. Through this example, I discuss how a particular instance of institutional practice in the South West emulates and differs from similar recurring exhibitions that occur in other metropolitan and regional art worlds.

## **Case study 2: Chapter Eight**

### **Power, Prestige and Regional Art Production Part II: Landmark Exhibitions**

Once again drawing on theories about the operations of art worlds and recent discourse that claims landmark exhibitions play a major role in the validation of art and artists, this chapter examines another recurring exhibition hosted by Bunbury Regional Art Galleries – the *South West Survey*. This event was established in 1987 as an annual showcase of regional art. Since then the *Survey* has given artists who live and work in the South West an opportunity for exposure and recognition through their selection by curators and critics, and possible acquisition by the City of Bunbury collection. In 2009 the gallery appointed an external curator to produce the 2010 exhibition and a complementary catalogue documenting current art practice in the South West. This case study explores this particular landmark exhibition curated by Perth-based critic-curator David Bromfield. I begin by outlining the history of the *South West Survey*. Then I discuss Bromfield's impressions of the South West art scene when he toured through the region to gather ideas and material for the exhibition and catalogue, and the themes he suggests characterise art production in the region.

### **Case study 3: Chapter Nine**

#### **Postcolonial Picturesque: The Carrolup Style**

This case study takes a lead from Bromfield's comments about the significance of landscape to artists in the South West, the scarcity of Indigenous art in the 'commonplace' profile of the region's contemporary art scene, and his unexplained remark that Indigenous artists paint landscape in the Carrolup style. Drawing on Smith's proposition that the 'postcolonial turn' has generated an abundance of art shaped by all sorts of values, including anti-colonial sentiments, I examine how the Carrolup style can be considered a legitimate form of contemporary art. To contextualise my argument, I begin with a brief history of the emergence of the Carrolup art movement at an Aboriginal settlement in Katanning in the late 1940s and 50s. Then I examine how a series of exhibitions that took place in Western Australia and elsewhere in the 1990s and 2000s has generated renewed interest in the Carrolup style, and calls for it to be integrated into the history of Australian Aboriginal art. I embrace recent discourse to discuss some of the terminology that is commonly used to describe Aboriginal art and the familiar dot painting technique that pervades the public imagination of what it is authentic. I discuss the role Bunbury Regional Art Galleries has played in the process of validation through its involvement with a government sponsored Indigenous arts development program, a series of exhibitions and its links with some of the artists who continue the Carrolup style. Throughout my account I draw on discussion and dialogue that has been recorded in exhibition catalogues to support my proposal that the continuation of the Carrolup style is a legitimate form of contemporary art on its own terms, with particular significance to Noongar artists and people.

### **Case study 4: Chapter Ten**

#### **Katherine Hall: Cross-cultural Encounters and Collaborations**

Katherine Hall is a well-travelled and accomplished artist and educator who specialises in drawing as a process of investigation and self-discovery. She is interested in connections between people and landscapes and cross-cultural collaboration. In 2000 Katherine moved from Melbourne to the small coastal community of Gracetown near

Margaret River to focus on her art.<sup>55</sup> Drawing on Smith's proposition that exploring sustainable relationships with specific social and natural environments is a key trend in contemporary art, this case study explores the evolution of Katherine's work from observation to conceptualised mark-making through a process she calls 'letting go' in response to cross-cultural encounters with Aboriginal people and their country. I enlist Katherine's voice throughout the narrative to augment my account, drawing on interview dialogue, email correspondence and excerpts from artist's statements that express her intentions. The chapter concludes with an epilogue about a recent collaborative project and her current thoughts about her practice now that she is in a period of transition. I enlist Katherine's voice throughout the narrative to augment my account, drawing on interview dialogue, email correspondence and excerpts from artist's statements that express her intentions.

### **Case study 5: Chapter Eleven**

#### **Tony Windberg: 'Man versus Nature' – a Contemporary Concern**

Tony Windberg is a multi-award-winning artist who specialises in realistic landscape paintings, drawings and mixed-media works to explore the theme of 'man versus nature'. Once again drawing on Smith's proposition that exploring sustainable relationships with specific social and natural environments within a framework of ecological values is a key trend in contemporary art, and his subsequent claim that a growing concern for the environment and the natural world is a current trend, this case study explores how Tony interprets the concept of nature as awe-inspiring yet foreboding to make a contemporary response to specific environments and the issue of land use in regional Western Australia. Now immersed in the South West locality of Northcliffe, his life-long affinity with nature has matured into a critical reflection on land use in this setting. Once again, I enlist the artist's voice throughout the narrative to augment my account, drawing on interview dialogue, email correspondence and excerpts from artist's statements that express his intentions.

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<sup>55</sup> I refer to Katherine Hall and Tony Windberg by first name in each case study to reflect our dialogic, intersubjective relationship. See Foley and Valenzuela, "Critical Ethnography: The Politics of Collaboration."



## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **POWER, PRESTIGE AND REGIONAL ART PRODUCTION: PART I – BIENNALES**

**The curator has become one of the primary gatekeepers of the contemporary 'canon'. To receive the imprimatur of selection for an exhibition at a prestigious venue with an international reputation may be more desirable for today's artist than a critical review in a newspaper or the art press, though of course every little bit helps.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Morgan, "Australian Art Criticism and its Discontents," 13.

## INTRODUCTION

According to Becker, artists' reputations are made or lost by the decisions of the curators, critics, gallery directors and collectors who expose, endorse and preserve their work exhibitions, collections and publications.<sup>2</sup> According to Bourdieu, the artistic field is a site of struggle where reputations are at stake and agents strive for position of power to endorse producers or products through instances of recognition or exclusion. Consequently, the production of art includes its making, the context of its production, the conventions of the artistic field in which it circulates, and the production of belief in its symbolic meaning or value by a set of agents whose 'cultural habitus' is part of that process, and this system is governed by a 'hierarchy of cultural legitimacy'. However, the field is also a site of struggle to preserve or challenge this hierarchy.<sup>3</sup>

Drawing on these theories and recent discourse that claims biennales and landmark exhibitions play a major role in the validation and institutionalisation of contemporary art – specifically Terry Smith's claim that biennales shape our capacity to understand the local in a wider context – this chapter examines how artists and artworks acquire artistic legitimacy through their inclusion in the *Bunbury Biennale*.<sup>4</sup> Bunbury Regional Art Galleries has been hosting the *Bunbury Biennale* since it was established in 1993 to help build the City of Bunbury collection through the acquisition of contemporary Western Australian art. For more than two decades, this event has been giving artists who live and work anywhere in the State an opportunity for exposure and recognition through their selection, and possible acquisition by the City of Bunbury. Through this example, I discuss how a particular instance of institutional practice in the South West emulates and differs from similar recurring exhibitions that occur in other metropolitan and regional art worlds.

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<sup>2</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 224–225, 351–352, 360, 367.

<sup>3</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 42, 78, 121, 131–137, 183–185, 189.

<sup>4</sup> See Smith *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 12.

## THE BUNBURY BIENNALE

When the voluntary committee responsible for managing the City of Bunbury art collection launched the *Bunbury Biennale* in 1993, they claimed the idea was modelled on the *Venice Biennale*. Their aim was to build the City's collection by purchasing contemporary Western Australian art from an exhibition hosted by Bunbury Regional Art Galleries.<sup>5</sup> However, the *Bunbury Biennale* differs fundamentally from the biennale launched by the City of Venice in 1895 – the multi-venue international showcase of contemporary art that has been copied world-wide since the mid-twentieth century.

According to Thornton, 'true' biennales are 'goliath' exhibitions of international contemporary art hosted by cities rather than museums to capture the mood of the moment. They are not simply exhibitions that recur every two years.<sup>6</sup> In 1951, São Paulo in Brazil was the first city to copy the *Venice Biennale* model. Sydney was next in 1973, followed by Havana (1984) and Istanbul (1987).<sup>7</sup> The *Biennale of Sydney* was launched as a platform for bringing international contemporary art to Australia and to encourage cultural exchange. Curatorial direction has varied over the years, but in essence this multi-venue event focuses on recent developments in contemporary art from a field of international and Australian artists.<sup>8</sup> Thornton suggests the trend for cities to stage large-scale international biennales went into overdrive across the world in the 1990s, starting with Sharjah in 1993.<sup>9</sup> In 1993 Queensland Art Gallery launched the *Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* to complement their growing collection of contemporary Asian and Pacific art. Now hosted by Queensland Art Gallery and the Gallery of Modern Art on Brisbane's South Bank, the *Asia Pacific Triennial* claims to be the only major exhibition series with an exclusive focus on contemporary art from Asia, the Pacific and Australia.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Tony Geddes, "The Biennale: An Historical Context," in *Bunbury Biennale 1993* (Bunbury: Bunbury Art Galleries), 1. Exhibition catalogue.

<sup>6</sup> Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World*, 225.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* For further commentary on the evolution of biennales as a world-wide phenomena see Terry Smith, "Biennales in the Conditions of Contemporaneity," 408.

<sup>8</sup> Guido Belgiorio-Nettis, Chairman's foreward to *Sydney 2000* (Sydney: Biennale of Sydney, 2000), 6–7.

<sup>9</sup> Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World*, 225.

<sup>10</sup> "Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art," *Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art*, accessed February 14, 2012, <http://qag.qld.gov.au/exhibitions/apt>; *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press), 1078.

Whilst Sydney was the first international biennale established in Australia, the trend for staging biennial or triennial exhibitions focused solely on Australian art began in 1961 with the launch in regional Victoria of the *Mildura Sculpture Triennial* for contemporary Australian sculpture. According to the *New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, this was the first attempt to stage a major exhibition of Australian sculpture on a national scale.<sup>11</sup> In 1981 the Art Gallery of New South Wales launched *Australian Perspecta* – biennial survey of contemporary Australian art that grew into a series of related activities spread across Sydney.<sup>12</sup> In the 1990s, the international escalation of biennales was echoed in Australia. It began with the launch of the *Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art* by the Art Gallery of South Australia in 1990. As a feature of the Adelaide Festival of Arts, this event was meant to complement the *Biennale of Sydney* and *Australian Perspecta*, which ceased in 1999. The *Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art* now claims to be the only biennial exhibition dedicated to contemporary Australian art.<sup>13</sup> However, in 2010, the Adelaide Festival launched a new concept called *Adelaide International* which featured works by eleven artists installed in five separate venues across the city.<sup>14</sup> In 1992 the Art Gallery of Western Australia launched the *Australian International Crafts Triennial*, but this event was only held three times. In 2003 they launched an annual award for Australian glass artists called the *Tom Malone Prize*. In

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<sup>11</sup> According to McCulloch's *Encyclopedia*, the *Mildura Sculpture Triennial* was initially called the *Mildura Sculpture Prize* after its inaugural sponsor Mildura Winery. It became known as the *Mildura Sculpture Prize* in 1964, and as the *Mildura Sculpture Triennial* from 1970, and continued in various forms until 1988. *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 1071, 1173–1174. According to the website for the tenth *Mildura Palimpsest Biennale* in 2015, the *Mildura Sculpture Triennial* was re-launched in 1997 as an event featuring site-specific works made by Australian and international artists during residencies in the Mildura Region during the previous two years. *Mildura Palimpsest Biennale #10, 2015 everywhere all at once...here*, accessed January 25, 2016, <http://mildurapalimpsestbiennale.com/about/>. The *Australian Sculpture Triennial* was launched in 1981 at La Trobe University in Victoria and ran until 1995. See *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 1074–1075. In 2001 the National Gallery of Australia launched the *National Sculpture Prize and Exhibition*. *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 1176; "National Sculpture Prize," *National Gallery of Australia*, accessed January 27, 2016, <http://nga.gov.au/SculpturePrize01/>.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen O'Connell, "Australian Perspecta 99," *Frieze Magazine*, accessed February 6, 2012, [http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/australian\\_perspecta\\_99/](http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/australian_perspecta_99/). According to McCulloch's, the first *Australian Perspecta* was held in 1982. *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 1074.

<sup>13</sup> The *Adelaide Biennale* was modelled on the *Whitney Biennial* held at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. Ian North, "A Critical Evaluation of the First Adelaide Biennale of Australian Art," *Artlink* 10, no. 4 (1990), accessed July 28, 2010, [www.artlink.com.au/issues/1040/10th-birthday-issue/](http://www.artlink.com.au/issues/1040/10th-birthday-issue/); Margot Osborne, "Handle with Care: 2008 Adelaide Biennial and Adelaide Festival Visual Arts Program," *Art Monthly Australia* 209 (May 2008): 5–8; "Whitney Biennial 2012," *Whitney Museum of American Art*, accessed February 14, 2012, <http://whitney.org/Exhibitions/2012Biennial>.

<sup>14</sup> Stephanie Radok, "Adelaide International 2010: Apart, We Are Together," *Artlink* 30, no. 2 (2010): 84–85.

2008 they launched the *Western Australian Indigenous Art Award*, a national event that became biennial in 2011.<sup>15</sup>

The *Bunbury Biennale* was launched during the 1990s biennale expansion era, but despite claims it was modelled on the *Venice Biennale*, its aspirations were described more modestly by the (then) Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Tony Geddes:

In the context of such major league exhibitions, the Bunbury Biennale is clearly diminutive in scale and focus. However, the fundamental principles and aspirations which underlie the Biennales of Venice ... and Sydney, as well as many other international exhibitions of contemporary art, remain at the heart of the Bunbury Biennale: to enrich and stimulate the cultural life of the community and generate a broader understanding of art and the world around us.<sup>16</sup>

The aim was to draw artists from across Western Australia to exhibit in the city by offering them a financial incentive in the form of several acquisitive awards and subsequent representation in the City of Bunbury art collection. The only criterion of eligibility was that the artists must have been resident in Western Australia for more than a year and, if selected, the work they submitted must be recent.<sup>17</sup> The inaugural selection panel comprised David Bromfield, then Associate Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Western Australia, Margaret Moore, then Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, and Noel Sheridan, then Director of the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art. According to Geddes, their informed judgement ensured the exhibition was a 'formidable' display of contemporary Western Australian art and the acquisition of 'worthy' examples for the City of Bunbury collection through a succession of *Biennales* would provide a wider context for audiences to view and assess local art production.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> "Tom Malone Prize," *Art Gallery of Western Australia*, accessed February 14, 2012, [www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/exhibitions/tomaloneprize.asp](http://www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/exhibitions/tomaloneprize.asp); "Awards," *Art Gallery of Western Australia*, accessed September 30, 2015 [www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/exhibitions/Awards.asp#WAIAA](http://www.artgallery.wa.gov.au/exhibitions/Awards.asp#WAIAA).

<sup>16</sup> Geddes, "The Biennale: An Historical Context," in *Bunbury Biennale 1993*, 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 1993: Exhibition Prospectus and Call for Entries* (Bunbury: Bunbury Art Galleries, 1993). Artists were invited submit a curriculum vitae and folio of slides for consideration by a panel of 'contemporary art experts'. cf., Sharon Kennedy, "Guided tour and preview of the Bunbury Biennale," *ABC South West*, accessed February 14, 2012, [www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2007/08/10/2002305.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2007/08/10/2002305.htm). Former collection curator Greg White incorrectly claimed artists from across Australia could enter.

<sup>18</sup> Geddes, "The Bunbury Biennale: Contemporary Art Purchase," *Bunbury Biennale 1993* (Bunbury: Bunbury Art Galleries, 1993), 1.

According to Smith, the aim of a biennale is to show the latest trends in international contemporary art on a recurring basis for the benefit of local artists and audiences.<sup>19</sup> He identifies some core features that makes them distinct from other temporary exhibitions: their existence as an ‘exhibitionary event’ or occasion staged across a number of sites in their host city, a regular and repetitious commitment to contemporaneity, and the encouragement of cultural exchange between local and international art worlds.<sup>20</sup> Smith cites Venice as an example:

At Venice every two years there is a precinct, and an entire city, organized according to national pavilions. Very few other biennials follow the model of the international exposition, or trade fair, so closely. But all biennials import into a local art world contemporary artworks from a variety of other places, works chosen as exemplary, representative and/or of high quality. As well, they often position certain local practices within this larger framework.<sup>21</sup>

Whilst the *Bunbury Biennale* has some of the features that Smith identifies such as providing a recurring context for audiences to view the latest trends in contemporary art, it differs significantly from the Venetian model. For instance, the exhibition takes place in a single venue and it excludes art produced outside Western Australia. Therefore, I suggest its focus on a particular region – in this instance Western Australia – has more in common with the intent of the *Havana Biennale* than the *Venice Biennale*. According to Smith, the *Havana Biennale* built its reputation from the start as the premier showcase for contemporary art from Latin America because:

The organisers – an alliance of Cuban artists and intellectuals, along with advisors from elsewhere in the region ... set out to plug local and regional art into the international circuit, and to do so, as far as possible, on their own terms. Above all this has meant a welcome to art that focuses on the specifics of practice at the peripheries, that is critical of the globalising tendencies of the official circuit, and that make its connections laterally, between the cultures of the south, those with the most direct experience of decolonisation.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Smith, “Biennales in the Conditions of Contemporaneity,” 408. See also Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 154.

<sup>20</sup> Terry Smith, “The Double Dynamic of Biennials,” *Global Art and the Museum* (March–April 2014), accessed October 1, 2014, [http://www.globalartmuseum.de/site/guest\\_author/368](http://www.globalartmuseum.de/site/guest_author/368).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, n.p.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, “Biennales in the Conditions of Contemporaneity,” 410; Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 154.

Smith's claim that biennales import 'exemplary' contemporary art from other places into a local art world is relevant to the *Bunbury Biennale*. However, his suggestion that biennales often position local art within a larger framework took a moment to evolve. For example, the inaugural *Bunbury Biennale* catalogue shows the exhibition comprised thirty-eight works produced by twenty-one artists from eight different countries of origin. Nineteen of these artists lived in the metropolitan area and two of them lived in regional areas, including the sole South West representative painter and sculptor Mary Knott.<sup>23</sup> However, Knott's work was not selected as one of six acquisitions recommended for the collection by former Director of the Biennale of Sydney Bill Wright (1937–2014).<sup>24</sup>

In 1995, Knott was once again the sole South West representative to be selected for the *Bunbury Biennale* and the only regional artist. The (then) new Director of Bunbury Art Galleries James Davies claimed the exhibition's growing reputation had led to a noticeable increase in entries.<sup>25</sup> However, the number of artists selected (twenty-one) and works submitted (thirty-six) was comparable to the inaugural event.<sup>26</sup> The 1995 selection panel included John Stringer – by then Curator of the Kerry Stokes Collection – and the new Director of Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA) Sarah Miller. Former Director of the *Biennale of Sydney* Nick Waterlow (1941–2010) selected the acquisitions and opened the exhibition.<sup>27</sup> This time the acquisitions included Knott's three-dimensional 'invocation of the endless abundance of nature and life' *Cornucopian* (Figure 50).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 1993*. Countries of origin included East Africa, England, Kenya, Malaysia, Netherlands, New Zealand, United States, South Australia and Western Australia. The other regional artist selected in 1993 was Chris Hillstead from Albany in the Great Southern region.

<sup>24</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 1993*, 4; "Vale Bill Wright AM 1937–2014," *ArtsHub*, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://www.artshub.com.au/news-article/news/all-arts/madeleine-dore/vale-bill-wright-am-1937-2014-246357>.

<sup>25</sup> James Davies, "The Bunbury Biennale: Contemporary Art Purchase," in *Bunbury Biennale 1995*, 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 1995*.

<sup>27</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 1995*, 1. Nick Waterlow OAM was Director of the *Biennale of Sydney* in 1979, 1986 and 1988, and Director of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council from 1980 to 1983. For commentary on Nick Waterlow (1941–2010) see Janet McKenzie, "Nick Waterlow Obituary: Cultural Diplomat and curator of the Sydney Biennale," *guardian.co.uk* (November 17, 2009), accessed February 6, 2012, [www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/nov/17/nick-waterlow-obituary](http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/nov/17/nick-waterlow-obituary).

<sup>28</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 1995*, 10.

According to Smith, 'international' is not a synonym for 'global', nor an antonym for 'local', and within the 'biennale dynamic' it means everywhere else and connectedness beyond one's immediate art world:

It recognizes the fact that art worlds everywhere else are also local, with regionalities around them, and other art worlds at practical and ideological distance. It stakes its agency on effective mobility across this circuitry, as distinct from falling subject to the logic of provincialism, of centre-periphery dominance.<sup>29</sup>

In 1990 Knott had been one of a group of artists from Western Australia who took part in the 8<sup>th</sup> *Small Scale Sculpture Triennial* held in Budapest, Hungary. In 1996 she exhibited in the *International Exhibition of Sculptors' Drawings* in Budapest.<sup>30</sup> Whilst Knott's participation in these events in Hungary does not signify she is at the pointy-end of international contemporary art practice, it illustrates that she was willing to circulate her work outside the local art scene and 'plug' it into an international exhibition circuit, 'on her own terms'. Moreover, I suggest the presence of Wright and Waterlow as selectors at the *Bunbury Biennale* in 1993 and 1995, respectively, illustrates 'effective mobility' across the biennale circuit, because they brought their knowledge of other contemporary art worlds to the region and their presence doubtless added cachet to the event and the endorsement of artists and artworks on those occasions.

In 1997 the *Bunbury Biennale* retained much the same format. Twenty artists were selected and once again Knott was the sole representative from the South West.<sup>31</sup> However, Noongar artist Sandra Hill and Italian-born Galliano Fardin were also selected and they both had their work selected for acquisition (Figures 51 and 52). At the time, Sandra Hill lived in Mandurah. She now lives in Balingup. Fardin lives at Lake Clifton on the cusp of the South West region.

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<sup>29</sup> Smith, "The Double Dynamic of Biennials," n.p.

<sup>30</sup> Booth. "Journeying with Mary Knott," 90–91.

<sup>31</sup> See *Bunbury Biennale 1997*, (Bunbury: Bunbury Regional Art Galleries). The 1997 selection panel comprised Director of the John Curtin Gallery John Barrett-Lennard and Director of Art Place Gallery Brigitte Braun. Art Gallery of Western Australia Curator of Contemporary Art Trevor Smith selected the acquisitions. The other regionally-based artists selected in 1997 were Jodie Rogers from Bouvard near Mandurah and Peter Watts from York.





Figure 50 Mary Knott *Cornucopian* 1995 paper and cane 50 x 400cms (multiple pieces)  
 Collection: City of Bunbury  
 Acquired: *Bunbury Biennale* 1995  
 Photo: Paul Webster

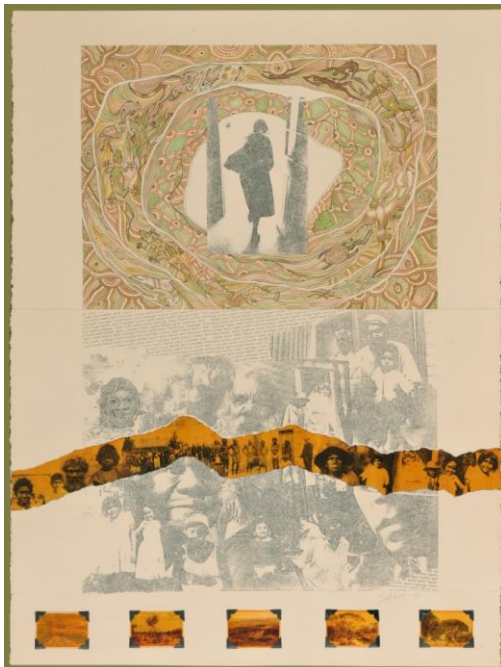


Figure 51 Sandra Hill *Going Back Home* 1997  
 transfer print and watercolour 120 x 100cms  
 Collection: City of Bunbury  
 Acquired: *Bunbury Biennale* 1997  
 Photo: Paul Webster

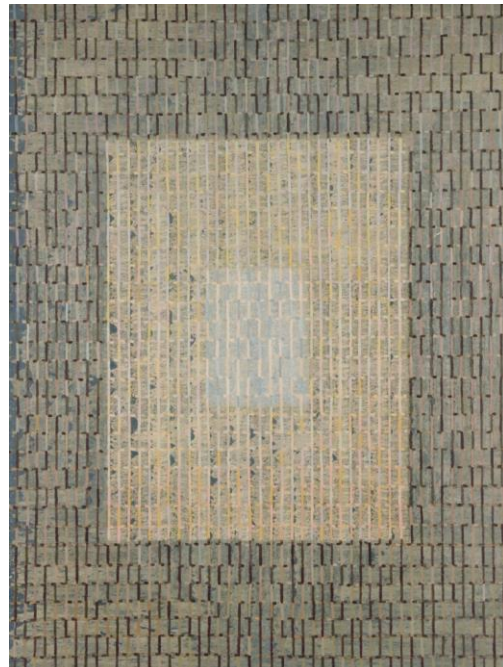


Figure 52 Galliano Fardin *Directions and Choices 3 (Boundary Lake)* 1996 oil on canvas 175 x 129cms  
 Collection: City of Bunbury  
 Acquired: *Bunbury Biennale* 1997  
 Photo: Paul Webster

From 1999 onwards South West representation in the *Bunbury Biennale* began to grow. For example, in 1999 the selection panel chose twenty-two artists for the exhibition, including four South West residents – Shaun Atkinson, Peter Hill, Paul Uhlmann and Michael Wise. Moreover, works by Atkinson (Figure 53) and Uhlmann (Figure 54) were amongst those selected for acquisition.<sup>32</sup> Whilst this shift of focus may reflect growing recognition by the selectors that ‘worthy’ examples of contemporary art were being produced in metropolitan and regional localities, according to the Chair of the Collection Committee Tresslyn Smith, it was intentional:

Our Biennale’s success has enabled us to add many contemporary works by artists of significance to Western Australia and the South West, to the City of Bunbury Collection ... The Bunbury Biennale exhibition also fits in with the City of Bunbury Collection Committee policy which states that works should generally be of a contemporary nature, produced primarily by young Western Australian artists with emphasis placed on works which bear links to Bunbury and the South West region.<sup>33</sup>

Uhlmann was Head of the School of Visual Arts at Edith Cowan University’s Bunbury Campus at the time. He commuted from Fremantle on a weekly basis but later moved to the metro-area full-time. Atkinson moved to Bali for a number of years. The mobility of Uhlmann, Atkinson, Sandra Hill and others, and the proximity of Fardin’s studio-residence to the South West administrative boundary, illustrates that labelling artists as ‘regional’, ‘local’ or ‘South West’ is a provisional and arbitrary process, and therefore potentially problematic. Nevertheless, on the basis I am using residence as a criterion to identify someone as regionally-based or from the South West, regional representation in the *Bunbury Biennale* continued to increase and the number of South West artists selected for the exhibition continued to rise. For example, in 2001, 2003 and 2005, artists resident in the South West represented six out of eighteen, five out of eighteen and eight out of twenty-four that were chosen for the exhibition,

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<sup>32</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 1999*. The 1999 selection panel included Curator of the Kerry Stokes Collection John Stringer and Director of Geraldton Regional Art Gallery Damian Kelly. The acquisitions were selected by Director of the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art Sarah Miller.

<sup>33</sup> Tresslyn Smith, introduction to *Bunbury Biennale 1999* (Bunbury: City of Bunbury Collection Committee), n.p.



Figure 53 Shaun Atkinson *Infinite/Finite* 1999 oil on board 46.5 x 495cms (detail)  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *Bunbury Biennale* 1999  
Photos: Paul Webster

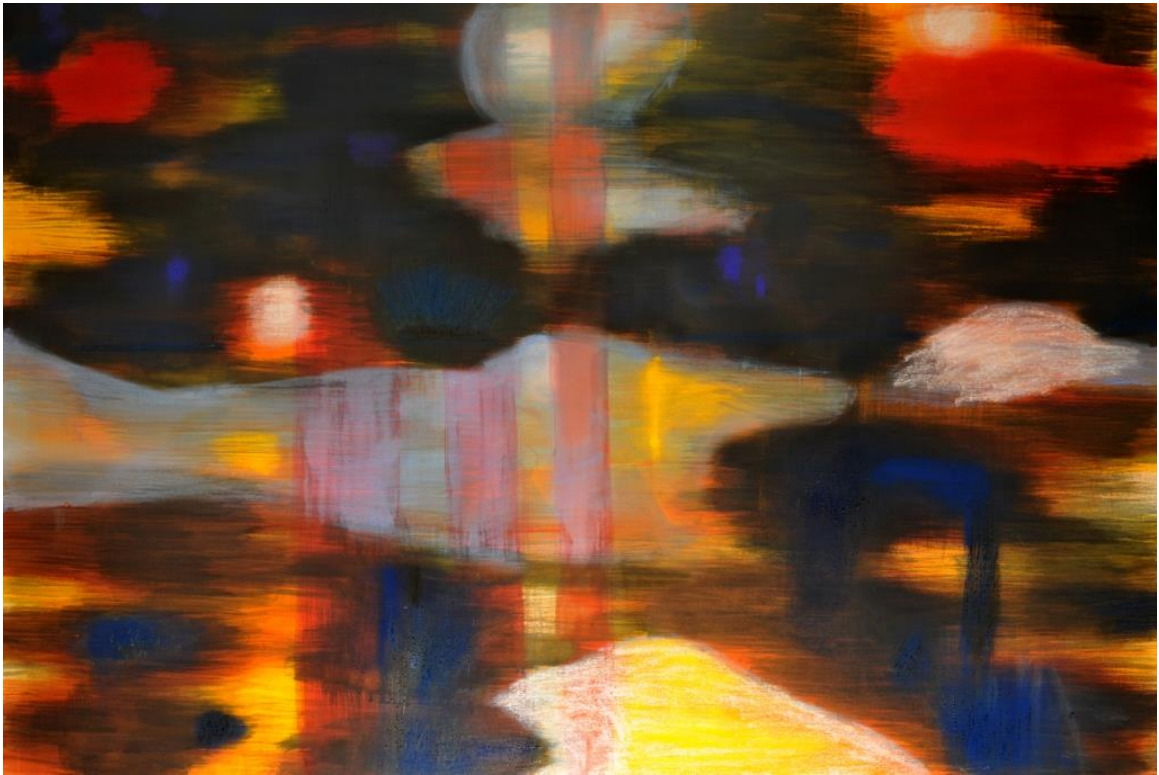


Figure 54 Paul Uhlmann *Untitled Studies in Light (Night/Sea)* 1999 oil on board 121.5 x 152cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *Bunbury Biennale* 1999  
Photo: Paul Webster

respectively.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, a work by a South West artist was acquired for the collection from each of these exhibitions – Katherine Hall’s drawing *Burial Ground* (Figure 55), Steve Pease’s *Landline Series Sandrift 4* (Figure 56), and Rick Martin’s *Opening to an Unquiet Day* (Figure 57).

By 2007, (then) Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Sonya Dye was proclaiming:

The continual evolution of the Biennale is indicative of its relevance to the region. The most distinctive difference between the original exhibition of 1993 and that of today is its composition, and growth in representation of South West practitioners. In 2007, there is almost equal presentation of works from metropolitan and regional origins. This, combined with the inclusion of established and early career artists, shows the Biennale to be a truly representative survey of contemporary Western Australian visual arts.<sup>35</sup>

Dye was a member of the selection panel in 2007, along with the (then) Curator of the City of Bunbury collection Curator Greg White and two ‘external’ curators from metropolitan institutions. Eighteen of the thirty-two artists they selected for the exhibition were regionally-based – seventeen of them lived in the South West. In this particular instance of institutional recognition, the *Bunbury Biennale* included more regional artists than any previous or subsequent exhibitions. Moreover, four of the five works recommended for acquisition were produced by South West residents – *Drought* by Helen Foster (Figure 58), *Strange Seed I* and *Strange Seed II* by Thomas Heidt (Figure 59) and *Ascension* by Tony Windberg (Figure 60) – and the fifth, *Homage*

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<sup>34</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 2001; Bunbury Biennale 2003; Bunbury Biennale 2005*. The 2001 panel included Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries James Davies, independent curator Paola Anselmi, and Curator of the City of Fremantle and Sir Charles Gairdner collections Melissa Harpley. They selected eighteen artists, including six from the South West: Noel Clarke, Jon Denaro, Katherine Hall, Annette Orr, Paul Uhlmann and Michael Wise. David Dolan (1949–2010), Director of the Institute for Cultural Heritage at Curtin University selected four acquisitions. The 2003 panel comprised (then) Dean of Art at Curtin University Ted Snell, Curator of the City of Bunbury collection Janine Galati, and Bunbury Regional Art Galleries’ Public Programs Co-ordinator Helena Sahm. They selected eighteen artists, five from the South West: Annette Orr, John Pasco, Steve Pease, Lynda Skrolys and Michael Wise. They also selected Noongar artist Shane Pickett (1957–2010) who was born in Quairading in the Wheatbelt and had strong regional connections. General Manager of the Janet Holmes à Court collection Belinda Carrigan selected four acquisitions. The 2005 panel comprised Curator of the Kerry Stokes collection John Stringer, Curator of the City of Bunbury collection Greg White, and me in my capacity as former Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries. Nine of the twenty-four artists selected were living in the South West: Philip Berry, Douglas Chambers, Ian Dowling, Katherine Hall, Rick Martin, Steve Pease, Marina Troitsky, Rita Winkler and Michael Wise. Stringer selected four acquisitions.

<sup>35</sup> Sonya Dye, in *Bunbury Biennale 2007* (Bunbury: City of Bunbury Collection Committee, 2007), 2. Exhibition catalogue.





Figure 55 Katherine Hall *Burial Ground* 2001 charcoal on paper 150.5 x 250cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *Bunbury Biennale* 2001



Figure 56 Steve Pease *Landline Series Sandrift 4* 2003  
chemically-coloured brass 6.8 x 20cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *Bunbury Biennale* 2003  
Photo: unknown source



*Landline Series Sandrift 4* (top view)  
Photo: Paul Webster



Figure 57 Rick Martin *Opening to an unquiet day* 2005 acrylic and oil on canvas 170 x 100cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *Bunbury Biennale* 2005  
Photo: Paul Webster



Figure 58 Helen Foster *Drought* 2007  
Stoneware 8 x 45cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *Bunbury Biennale* 2007  
Photo: Paul Webster



Figure 59 Thomas Heidt *Strange Seed I* 2007  
wood and copper 40 x 200cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *Bunbury Biennale* 2007  
Photo: Paul Webster



Figure 60 Tony Windberg *Ascension* 2007 oil on canvas 61 x 66cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *Bunbury Biennale* 2007  
Photo: Paul Webster

to *Georgina Molloy* by Gisela Zuchner-Mogall, relates to a regional pioneer.<sup>36</sup> Yet despite the proportionally large contingent of South West artists represented in the exhibition, White suggested that:

Professional artists living in the regions face the challenges of working in isolation and a lack of exhibition opportunities appropriate to their practice. The Bunbury Biennale provides a much needed prestigious exhibition in a regional context.<sup>37</sup>

In 2009 the selection panel was composed entirely of people who live and work in the South West. Fourteen of the forty artists they chose for the exhibition were from regional areas, including ten from the South West. Galliano Fardin's *Tower of Babel* was acquired for the collection, but no works produced by South West residents were selected for acquisition by the City collection.<sup>38</sup>

The *Bunbury Biennale* was not held in 2011.<sup>39</sup> Consequently, Bunbury's tenth *Biennale* took place in 2013. The exhibition featured a field of forty-three artists. Seventeen of the artists lived in regional areas. Eleven of them lived in the South West at that particular time.<sup>40</sup> According to Tresslyn Smith, the exhibition was the culmination of a 'radical' decision made twenty years earlier to:

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<sup>36</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 2007*. The 2007 selection panel comprised Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Sonya Dye, Curator of the City of Bunbury collection Greg White, Curator of the City of Fremantle collection Andre Lipscombe, and Hannah Matthews, Curator, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art. They selected seventeen South West artists: Jean Astbury, Troy Bennell, Horatio T. Birdbath, Tjyllumgo Lance Chadd, Ian Dowling, Helen Foster, Katherine Hall, John Harrison, Thomas Heidt, Peter Hill, Philip McLeish, Deanna Mosca, Judith Roche, Helen Seiver, Mary-Lynne Stratton, Marina Troitsky and Tony Windberg. They also selected Catherine Higham from the Wheatbelt and former South West resident Annette Orr who lived in Bunbury when she was selected in 2001 and 2003 (see footnote 34 above).

<sup>37</sup> Greg White, curator in *Bunbury Biennale 2007*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 2009*. The 2009 selection panel included Chair of the Collection Committee Tresslyn Smith, Deputy Chair Rosemary Nicholson, Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Exhibition Manager Simon Long, Curator of the City of Bunbury collection Greg White and me in my capacity as an independent curator. The ten South West artists selected were Jean Astbury, Helen Foster, Katherine Hall, Thomas Heidt, Peter Kovacsy, Gerry Reilly, Helen Seiver, Marina Troitsky, Tony Windberg and Michael Wise. Jon Denaro and Judith Roche were former South West residents. The other regionally-based artists selected were Galliano Fardin and Monique Tippett from the Peel region, and Joan May-Campbell and Indra Geidens from the Great Southern.

<sup>39</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 2013*. In 2011, Bunbury Regional Art Galleries held a retrospective exhibition by renowned Western Australian artist Brian McKay (1926–2014) instead of the *Bunbury Biennale*.

<sup>40</sup> In 2013 the selection panel comprised Director of the University of Western Australia Cultural Precinct Ted Snell, former Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Sonya Dye and Curator/Registrar of the City of Bunbury collection Caroline Lunel. The eleven South West artists selected were Crispin Akerman, David Attwood, Yvonne Dorricot, Donna Fortescue, Helen Foster, Katherine Hall, Sam Harris, Thomas Heidt, Karen Seaman, Tony Windberg and Pauline Williams. The other regionally-based



... keep in touch with art as new ideas emerged ... [and] show that regional areas were just as capable of attracting significant artists and mounting contemporary exhibitions in a regional setting.<sup>41</sup>

On the same occasion, Acting Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Simon Long commented:

The acquisition of a collection of works over time can be likened to a time capsule documenting the development of current visual arts practice ... acting as a litmus to the changes in the social and sometimes political environment of the time. With works from both metropolitan and regional artists ... the Biennale is truly a survey representative of current contemporary Western Australian visual arts.<sup>42</sup>

To trace the history of the *Bunbury Biennale* from its inception in 1993 to 2013 and establish some statistics, I searched through successive catalogues and drew on my insider-knowledge of who's who, because information about each artist's birthplace or current location has not been provided in catalogues since 1999. This history shows that regional representation in the exhibition has grown steadily over twenty years (see Appendix 2, Table 1). In addition, participation in selection panels has evolved to include fewer external advisors and more regional representatives, and the City of Bunbury collection has acquired at least one work by an artist who lives in the South West region on its cusp (Galliano Fardin) every year since 1995. On the one hand, the growth of regional representation in the exhibition, on selection panels and in acquisitions for the collection could illustrate 'defiant localism' – the assertion of the legitimacy of art produced outside the metropolitan area.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, perhaps, like some Cuban meme, it signifies welcome recognition by the Western Australian contemporary art world that, in reality, art that deals with the 'specifics of practice at the periphery' is considered 'up-to-speed' whether it is produced in a regional or metropolitan location. For example, Indra Geidens (b. 1963) participated in

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artists selected were Robert Ewing and Monique Tippet from the Peel region, Sue Codee, Indra Geidens and Paul Moncrieff from the Great Southern, and Marianne Penberthy from the Mid West. Former South West resident Jon Denaro was also selected. Since this exhibition, Thomas Heidt has moved to Melbourne. Seven works were acquired for the collection, of which two were by South West artists David Attwood and Sam Harris.

<sup>41</sup> Tresslyn Smith, in *Bunbury Biennale 2013* (Bunbury: City of Bunbury Collection Committee, 2013), 2.

<sup>42</sup> Simon Long, in *Bunbury Biennale 2013*, 4.

<sup>43</sup> See Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," n.p.

the *Bunbury Biennale* in 1993, 1995, 2009 and 2013.<sup>44</sup> On the first three occasions she lived in the metropolitan area. By 2013 she had moved to the Great Southern region. Geiden's 2013 work refers to her new situation and surroundings, literally and figuratively. Her work titled *Free Fall* features a figure of a woman falling through the sky against the profile of the Stirling Ranges – a distinctive mountain range in the Great Southern:

This work references a transitional state. It is about changes in place, a new space and a new terrain. The descending figure is a metaphor for a seeming lack of control that at the same time creates a sense of liberation.<sup>45</sup>

Geiden's mobility and allusion to a transitional state illustrates that 'being regional' is a provisional notion. A similar condition applies to Annette Orr (b. 1963) and Judith Roche (n.d.), for both have exhibited in the *Bunbury Biennale* as South West and metropolitan residents.<sup>46</sup>

## REGIONAL COMPARISONS

According to Smith, biennales offer an alternative to collection or temporary exhibitions. However, he suggests that they have changed significantly in recent years and curators face a constant challenge of reinventing the biennale format. He also suggests many museums continually re-shape their collections by acquiring works from biennales.<sup>47</sup> On that basis, the *Bunbury Biennale* has achieved its aim to:

... build a collection that reflects the scope of art production in the region within the framework of Western Australian art.<sup>48</sup>

Yet despite Smith's observations on recent changes in biennales globally, which has resulted in more themed events or events that resemble collection or temporary exhibitions, I suggest the *Bunbury Biennale* has more in common with recurring

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<sup>44</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 1993*, 9; *Bunbury Biennale 1995*, 9; *Bunbury Biennale 2009*, 17; *Bunbury Biennale 2013*, 24. In 1995 two small paintings by Indra Geidens were acquired for the City of Bunbury collection. In 2009 and 2013 her work was not acquired for the collection. I suggest these decisions were made on the basis of competition and collecting priorities on each occasion.

<sup>45</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 2013*, 25.

<sup>46</sup> See footnotes 34, 36 and 38.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, "The Double Dynamic of Biennials," n.p.

<sup>48</sup> Geddes, foreword in *Acquisitions: The City of Bunbury Art & Craft Collection 1948–1994*, 2.

exhibitions designed to build subject or medium-specific collections through acquisitive awards or commissions than a large-scale international multi-venue contemporary art 'showcase'.<sup>49</sup> For example, other recurring exhibitions that focus solely on contemporary Western Australian art include the *Joondalup Invitation Art Award* launched in 1998 and hosted by the City of Joondalup, and the *BankWest Contemporary Art Prize* launched in 2001.<sup>50</sup> The City of Busselton launched an annual acquisitive art prize for West Australian contemporary art in 2008 when ArtGeo Gallery re-located to its new premises, but the following year the exhibition organisers changed the name to *Signature South West* to encourage local artists to respond to a theme. In 2014 this condition was removed when the City decided to re-vamp its art award and offer a more substantial first prize. This development encouraged many artists from beyond the South West region to enter, and since then the ratio of regional to metropolitan artists taking part is approximately 50:50.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, the re-named *City of Busselton Art Award* now provides another significant opportunity in the South West for regional and metropolitan artists to gain exposure and recognition through selection for the exhibition and potential acquisition by the City of Busselton collection. The City of Busselton collection consists of around 100 works and is therefore modest compared to the size and significance of the City of Bunbury collection. Nevertheless, like the *Bunbury Biennale* which aspires to 'enrich the cultural life of the community', through its art award the City of Busselton aims to build a collection of contemporary Western Australian art for public enjoyment in civic buildings.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Smith, "The Double Dynamic of Biennials," n.p.

<sup>50</sup> "Invitation Art Awards 1998–2012," *City of Joondalup*, accessed November 9, 2014.

[www.joondalup.wa.gov.au/Explore/artsandevents/VisualArts/InvitationArtAwards.aspx](http://www.joondalup.wa.gov.au/Explore/artsandevents/VisualArts/InvitationArtAwards.aspx); "2014 BankWest Art Prize", *BankWest*, accessed November 9, 2014, [www.bankwest.com.au/artprize](http://www.bankwest.com.au/artprize); *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 1158; "BankWest Contemporary Art Prize," *Perth Institute of Contemporary Art*, accessed February 14, 2012, <http://pica.org.au/search.php>. The annual *Joondalup Invitation Art Award* was renamed the *City of Joondalup Community Invitation Art Award* in 2013. The *BankWest Art Prize* has run annually and biennially. Once hosted by Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, it is now held in BankWest's own premises in Perth.

<sup>51</sup> Artists from as far as Carnarvon and Kalgoorlie have entered, as well as many from the metropolitan area. Information acquired through my role as Coordinator of ArtGeo Cultural Complex since January 2013.

<sup>52</sup> Geddes, "The Biennale: An Historical Context," in *Bunbury Biennale 1993*, 1. See chapter three, footnote 41 for more information about the City of Busselton Art Award.

Recurring exhibitions held in Western Australia that are open to artists from across Australia include the *Albany Art Prize* for two-dimensional paintings, the *City of Perth Art Award* for two-dimensional contemporary art which alternates with the *City of Perth Photomedia Award*, the *City of Perth Black Swan Prize* for portraiture, and the *Fremantle Art Centre Print Award*.<sup>53</sup> Examples of recurring subject or medium-specific exhibitions staged in other parts of regional Australia include the *Tamworth Fibre Textile Biennial* established in the 1970s by Tamworth Regional Art Gallery in New South Wales to showcase Australian textiles. This event attracts entries from across Australia.<sup>54</sup> The *Fleurieu Art Prize*, formerly the *Fleurieu Biennale* was established in 1998 to link the arts with food and wine tourism industries in the McLaren Vale and Fleurieu Peninsula region of South Australia. It claims to be the world's richest prize for landscape painting and is open to Australian and international artists.<sup>55</sup> The biennial *Sidney Myer Fund Australian Ceramic Award* hosted by Shepperton Art Gallery in Victoria grew out of a national award established in 1991 that went international in 1997. Re-vamped in 2010, this event now offers two stipends for an Australian and an international ceramic artist to produce a body of work for exhibition from which the gallery selects pieces for its collection.<sup>56</sup> The *Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Award* established in 1988 by Grafton Regional Gallery in New South Wales promotes excellence and innovation in drawing,

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<sup>53</sup> *City of Albany Art Prize 2009* (Albany: City of Albany, 2009). Exhibition catalogue; "City of Albany Art Prize 2012: Entry Form and Conditions," *City of Albany Art Prize*, accessed February 14, 2012, [www.albanyartprize.com.au](http://www.albanyartprize.com.au); *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 1154; "City of Perth Art Award," *Perth Institute of Contemporary Art*, accessed February 14, 2012, <http://pica.org.au/view.php?l=City+of+Perth+Art+Award&2=206>; *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 1161; "City of Perth Black Swan Prize," accessed February 14, 2012, [www.blackswanprize.com.au](http://www.blackswanprize.com.au); "Fremantle Art Centre Print Award," *Fremantle Arts Centre*, accessed February 14, 2012, [www.fac.org.au/fremantle-arts-centre-print-award](http://www.fac.org.au/fremantle-arts-centre-print-award); *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 1165. The *Albany Art Prize* grew out of a former event. Since 2009, first prize has included substantial prize money and a sponsored residency. Launched in 1999, the *City of Perth Art Award* is by invitation only.

<sup>54</sup> "Sensorial Loop: Tamworth Textile Triennial," *Tamworth Regional Gallery*, accessed February 14, 2012, [www.tamworthregionalgallery.com.au/triennial.php](http://www.tamworthregionalgallery.com.au/triennial.php). The *Tamworth Fibre Textile Biennial* was re-launched in 2011 as the *Tamworth Textile Triennial*. There is no mention of *Tamworth Fibre Textile Biennial* in *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*. Other events specialising in craft and design include *Contemporary Wearables Biennial Jewellery Award and Exhibition* for artists from Australian and New Zealand, established in 1989 by Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery in Queensland to build a collection of wearable art. See *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 1162–1163.

<sup>55</sup> *Fleurieu Art Prize*, accessed February 14, 2012, <http://artprize.com.au>; *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 1165; Michael Newall, "The Fleurieu Biennale 1998," *Artlink* 19, no. 1 (1999), accessed July 28, 2010, <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/137/the-fleurieu-biennale-1998/>.

<sup>56</sup> "Sidney Myer Fund Australian Ceramic Award," *Shepperton Art Museum*, accessed February 14, 2012, [www.sheppertonartgallery.com.au/exhibitionprogram/smfacaal/](http://www.sheppertonartgallery.com.au/exhibitionprogram/smfacaal/).

enabling the gallery to build a significant collection of contemporary Australian drawing.<sup>57</sup> South Australia's *City of Whyalla Art Prize* established in 1972 to promote emerging regional artists is now a biennial non-acquisitive award for any two-dimensional media except photography and claims to be one of the richest prizes for contemporary art in any theme in Australia.<sup>58</sup>

This description of annual, biennial or triennial recurring art award exhibitions staged in Australia is not comprehensive. However, it illustrates where the *Bunbury Biennale* fits nationally and regionally – assuming the State of Western Australia is considered to be a region in this instance – and how it corresponds to other events. History shows these events come and go, or change in shape and direction over time, and for that reason, the *Bunbury Biennale* is notable for its sustained focus and longevity.

## CONCLUSION

When they launched the *Bunbury Biennale* in 1993, the City of Bunbury Collection Committee mimicked a trend that was occurring across the world. Whilst it claims to have been modelled on the celebrated international biennale held in Venice – albeit on a diminutive scale – I suggest the *Bunbury Biennale* format has closer parallels to other recurring exhibitions that occur in metropolitan and regional art worlds throughout Australia. Yet that does not lessen its significance as a site of artistic legitimacy and cultural attraction, signalled by its longevity and sustained focus on building a collection that reflects the scope of art production in the region within the framework of

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<sup>57</sup> “Grafton Regional Gallery Exhibitions and Events July 2010–January 2011,” *Grafton Regional Gallery*, accessed February 14, 2012, [www.graftongallery.nsw.gov.au/content/uploads/GRGJulyDec2010.pdf](http://www.graftongallery.nsw.gov.au/content/uploads/GRGJulyDec2010.pdf) (2013); “the jada,” *Grafton Regional Gallery*, accessed February 14, 2012, [www.graftongallery.nsw.gov.au/cmst/gg001/view\\_doc.asp?id=481&cat=111](http://www.graftongallery.nsw.gov.au/cmst/gg001/view_doc.asp?id=481&cat=111); *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 1170. Other events that focus on drawing include the *Canberra Drawing Biennale* formerly known as the *Australian Drawing Biennale*, established in 1996 by the Australian National University to promote drawing as a skill and contemporary medium. “Seventh Drawing Biennale,” *Drill Hall Gallery and Art Collection*, accessed February 14, 2012, [www.anu.edu.au/mac/content/dhg/seventh\\_drawing\\_biennale/](http://www.anu.edu.au/mac/content/dhg/seventh_drawing_biennale/). The *National Works on Paper* contemporary awards at Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery in Victoria was established as an annual event in 1998. It has been biennial since 2004. “Past MPRG Curated Exhibitions,” *Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery*, accessed February 14, 2012, <http://mprg.mornpen.vic.gov.au/exhibitions/index.html>. *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 1176.

<sup>58</sup> “Whyalla Art Prize 2011,” *Country Arts SA*, accessed February 14, 2012, <http://countryarts.nessus.com.au/catalogs/arts-programs/south-australia/whyalla-art-prize-2011-276186.php>; *The New McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, 1161. The *Whyalla Art Prize* became biennial after 2002.

Western Australian art for the enrichment of the region's cultural life.<sup>59</sup> On that basis, the *Bunbury Biennale* has evolved on its own terms.

Clearly a large-scale international biennale has a higher profile than a recurring exhibition run by a regional gallery. However, through its successive occurrences, the *Bunbury Biennale* has provided artists and audiences with a much anticipated occasion to keep up-to-speed with current trends in contemporary Western Australian art, regardless of its place of production. In addition, it provides an opportunity for artists and artworks to seek exposure and endorsement through selection and potential acquisition by a reputable collection, plus documentation in an exhibition catalogue. These are all instances of recognition that signify as much symbolic value as any similar event staged in city or country locations throughout Australia. In that sense, the *Bunbury Biennale* complies with a characteristic that Smith suggests is fundamental to the role of a biennale, if it is to serve the culture of the cities or localities that present them: it provides entertainment, instruction and competition in varying degrees – competition between artists, inspiration to collectors, and education for local audiences about what is being made outside their community.<sup>60</sup>

Smith suggests the spread of biennales throughout the world as a vehicle for circulating contemporary art within and between regions and countries has created a network or circuit that is no longer dependent on the metropolitan centres. He maintains that recent changes include greater emphasis on promoting the art of the host region and shaping our capacity to understand local art production in a wider world picture.<sup>61</sup> By tracing its history, I have shown how the *Bunbury Biennale* has developed an increasingly regional focus through the inclusion of more regionally-based artists in the exhibition and more regional representation on selection panels. Additionally, the acquisition of work produced in the South West by the City of Bunbury collection has increased over the years. I have suggested this could represent 'defiant localism' or recognition that

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<sup>59</sup> Geddes, *Acquisitions: The City of Bunbury Art & Craft Collection 1948–1994*; Geddes, "The Biennale: An Historical Context," 1.

<sup>60</sup> Smith, "The Doubled Dynamic of Biennials," n.p.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

whilst art produced within the conditions of contemporaneity may be informed by regional positioning it need not be constrained by it.

Tracing the history of the *Bunbury Biennale* also illustrates that the attribution of artistic legitimacy to whomever and whatever is considered contemporary is clearly influenced by the decisions of the ‘agents’ appointed to make selections and recommendations for inclusion and acquisition. According to Bourdieu’s their decisions are informed by their ‘cultural habitus’ and their position in the ‘hierarchy of cultural legitimacy’ influences the symbolic value attached to each instance of recognition.<sup>62</sup> For example, as I have stated, former Directors of the *Biennale of Sydney* Bill Wright and Nick Waterlow were selectors at the *Bunbury Biennales* held in 1993 and 1995. Therefore, whilst it is a stretch to suggest the *Bunbury Biennale* is part of an international biennale circuit, their presence doubtless added cachet to the event and the endorsement of artists and artworks on those particular occasions. Furthermore, some artists who have exhibited at the *Bunbury Biennale* have also exhibited at international biennales in Brazil and China.<sup>63</sup> The opportunity for an artist to compete and exhibit in the same field as someone whose artistic legitimacy has been recognised at a prestigious international event also contributes to the perceived status of each instance of recognition. Therefore, I suggest that the notion of artistic legitimacy being attributed to art and artists has less to do with territorial boundaries than the perceptions and collective actions of the people and institutions who are involved in the process of art production – the makers, critics, curators and collectors.

According to Geddes, the collecting policies of regional galleries are generally focused ‘close to home’ or on specific media.<sup>64</sup> Illustrating acquisitions made by the City of Bunbury collection of work by artists who have lived and worked in or on the cusp of the South West region between 1995 and 2009 reveals the extent to which nature-

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<sup>62</sup> Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 34–42, 121–123, 131–132, 136.

<sup>63</sup> Phil Gamblen exhibited in the 1999 *Bunbury Biennale* and collaboratively at the *São Paulo Art and Technology International Biennale* in Brazil in July 2010. See *Bunbury Biennale 1999*; *Artsource newsletter*, (August–November 2010): 2. Peteris Ciemitis exhibited in the 2009 *Bunbury Biennale*. See *Bunbury Biennale 2009*. He exhibited in the 2014 *City of Busselton Art Award* but was unable to attend the opening because he was going to China as the Australian representative at the inaugural *International Biennale of Quindao*. Information acquired in my position as Coordinator at ArtGeo Cultural Complex.

<sup>64</sup> Geddes, foreword to *Acquisitions: The City of Bunbury Art & Craft Collection 1948–1994*, 2.

based subject-matter preoccupies many of these artists. This observation corresponds to Smith's suggestion that regional positioning enables artists to respond directly to landscape and natural phenomena. He proposes that the dominance of the landscape genre represents a 'restrictive' form of regionalism, but critically-engaged work that responds to local conditions as well as broader issues represents a form of 'critical regionalism'. Smith also suggests that concern for the environment and the natural world is a growing trend.<sup>65</sup> The images also reveal that the notion of artwork as object retains currency in this particular context. Therefore, this form of practice has been endorsed by selectors and subsequently institutionalised by the collection.<sup>66</sup> However, the acquisition of Sam Harris' untitled digital print of aspects of family life in 2013 illustrates the City's collecting strategy is evolving to represent an alternative view of contemporaneity (Figures 61 and 62).

Through this case study I have shown that the *Bunbury Biennale* both emulates and differs from similar events that occur in other metropolitan and regional art worlds, yet it does so on its own terms. So, what challenges or opportunities lie ahead? Smith suggests biennales pose challenges to local art administrators to provide the relevant infrastructure for contemporary art to be made and circulated.<sup>67</sup> In 2003, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the *Bunbury Biennale*, (then) Curator of the City of Bunbury collection Janine Galati organised a concurrent exhibition of selected acquisitions called *Decalogue* at the Holmes à Court Gallery at Vasse Felix near Margaret River.<sup>68</sup> In 2009, the *Bunbury Biennale* ventured beyond the walls of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries when (then) Curator of the collection Greg White organised an exhibition of selected works at the Holmes à Court Gallery after the show closed in Bunbury (see Figure 22, chapter three). Whilst these two instances are hardly evidence that the *Bunbury Biennale* is beginning to evolve into a multi-venue event, they do illustrate further

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<sup>65</sup> Smith, "Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?," 5; Smith, "Rethinking Regionalism: Art in the Northern Territory," 469–471; Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 274–295.

<sup>66</sup> According to Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, 'artistic conservatism' reflected by the endorsement of traditional media such as painting and sculpture as new modes of contemporary practice was a characteristic of some international biennales with a strong regional focus in the 1970s and 1980s. Gardner and Green, "Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global," *Third Text*, 27, no. 4 (2013), 449–450. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2013.810892>.

<sup>67</sup> Smith, "The Doubled Dynamic of Biennials," n.p.

<sup>68</sup> Information acquired in my role as Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries 2003–2005.



recognition of its significance within the region. Therefore if, as Smith suggests, being a 'distributed event' rather than an assembly of objects in a static display is what makes a biennale contemporary, then perhaps dispersing the exhibition beyond the walls of the regional gallery is something the *Bunbury Biennale* organisers could explore?<sup>69</sup> The thought of a temporary pavilion overlooking Bunbury's Leschenault Estuary housing the work of an invited artist – regional, national or international – to emulate the concept of a national pavilion on the canals of Venice, is enticing. However, a series of public debates or satellite events held within the host city or elsewhere in the region is perhaps a more realistic way to reconceptualise the event and generate critical discourse, than imagining it could be a catalyst for new cultural infrastructure.<sup>70</sup> If the inaugural *Bunbury Biennale* organisers were able to see the *Venice Biennale* as their model, then perhaps *Documenta 11* could be the inspiration for a series of modest-scale regional 'platforms'. For example, between March 2001 and September 2002, Nigerian-born curator and writer Okwui Enwezor presented *Documenta 11* as a series of five 'Platforms' of public debates, conferences, workshops, film and video programs in five locations in Europe, Asia, the Caribbean and Africa, ending across various sites in the German city of Kassel between March 2001 and September 2002.<sup>71</sup> Many authors suggest *Documenta 11* was a landmark moment in the exposition of 'art from the margins' on the global circuit.<sup>72</sup> Enwezor claims its 'spectacular difference' was that its conception as a 'constellation of public spheres' rather than an exhibition challenged conservative thinking.<sup>73</sup> Any future modification to the current format of the *Bunbury Biennale* will depend on whether its producers and participants think changes are necessary, or practical.

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<sup>69</sup> Smith, "The Doubled Dynamic of Biennials," n.p.

<sup>70</sup> See Gardner and Green, "Biennials of the South on the Edges of the Global," 454.

<sup>71</sup> Okwui Enwezor, "The Black Box," in *Documenta 11 Platform 5: Exhibition Catalogue*, eds., Heike Ander and Nadja Rottner (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 44–55, accessed September 23, 2016, [http://web.mit.edu/smt/www/4.662/Enwezor\\_Documenta\\_BlackBox.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/smt/www/4.662/Enwezor_Documenta_BlackBox.pdf); "Documenta 11 Platform 5: Exhibition Catalogue," *Asiart Archive*, accessed November 19, 2016, <http://www.aaa.org.hk/Collection/Details/4078>. *Documenta* was established in Kassel in 1955. It takes place every five years.

<sup>72</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 151; Niru Ratnam, "Art and globalisation," in *Themes in Contemporary Art*, eds. Gill Perry and Paul Wood (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 277–286.

<sup>73</sup> Enwezor, "The Black Box," 43, 54.



Figures 61 and 62 Sam Harris *Untitled* 2013 archival digital print 71 x 93.5 (each with frame)  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *Bunbury Biennale* 2013  
Photo: Paul Webster

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **POWER, PRESTIGE AND REGIONAL ART PRODUCTION**

#### **PART II – LANDMARK EXHIBITIONS:**

**Most commonplace assumptions and special pleadings about regional art and artists turned out to be misleading if not downright false ... Many argued the creative benefits of a regional location over a 'centre' whether that centre was Bunbury, Perth or New York.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Bromfield and Tandy, *Over There*, 3.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Once again drawing on theories about the operations of art worlds and recent discourse that claims landmark exhibitions play a major role in the endorsement and institutionalisation of contemporary art, this chapter examines another recurring exhibition hosted by Bunbury Regional Art Galleries – the *South West Survey*. This event was established in 1987 as an annual showcase of regional art practice. Since then the *Survey* has given artists who live and work in the South West an opportunity for exposure and recognition through their selection and endorsement by curators and critics, and possible acquisition by the City of Bunbury collection. In 2009 the gallery appointed an external curator to produce the 2010 exhibition and a complementary catalogue documenting current art practice in the South West. This chapter explores this particular landmark exhibition curated by Perth-based curator-critic David Bromfield. I begin by outlining the history of the *South West Survey*. Then I discuss Bromfield's impressions of the South West art scene when he toured through the region to gather ideas and material for the exhibition and catalogue, and consider the themes that he suggests characterise art production in the region.

## **THE SOUTH WEST SURVEY**

In 2014, the new Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Julian Bowron decided the gallery's annual exhibition the *South West Survey* would become a bi-annual event, alternating with the *Bunbury Biennale*. His announcement coincided with the City of Bunbury's 'take-over' of the gallery's management from the independent voluntary board, Bunbury Regional Art Management Board. Whilst on the one hand, Bowron's decision could be seen as a reduction in the number of opportunities for artists to gain exposure in a 'prestige' event hosted by the regional gallery, as a former director I am mindful of the logistics of staging large-scale regional exhibitions and their affect on stretched resources, and so I suggest his decision makes sense. In fact, it could help to encourage an event that was founded to showcase 'regional talent' to evolve into something more innovative and relevant than the broad-brush approach that has been its history. Meanwhile, one very obvious difference between the *South West Survey* and the *Bunbury Biennale* is the former's focus on regional art production – meaning work

produced by artists who live and work in the region – although in this instance the regional boundary is rather loosely interpreted and not confined by legislative administrative borders. For example, artists from the Peel region, Great Southern and Wheatbelt are often included.

The *Survey* grew out of a small scale exhibition initiated by Bunbury Council in 1980 called the *South West Arts and Crafts Festival Invitation Exhibition*.<sup>2</sup> The foundation of Bunbury Art Gallery in 1987 provided an incentive to re-vamp the exhibition, and in 1988 it was renamed the *South West Survey*.<sup>3</sup> I was unable to obtain a copy of the inaugural catalogue. However, in the second *Survey* catalogue, Gallery Curator and Exhibition Coordinator Robert Vallis claims its main objective was:

... to reflect the state of contemporary art and craft, thereby acknowledging the great talent that the region possesses.<sup>4</sup>

Vallis goes on to explain that the exhibition was not a definitive survey because a number of known artists had not entered.<sup>5</sup> The 1988 selection panel included John Stringer, then recently returned to Australia from New York and newly appointed as Senior Curator at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. The exhibition comprised 210 works by 113 artists, and one group entry.<sup>6</sup> In 1989 Vallis – who was now referred to as Regional Director and Exhibition Coordinator – claimed the *South West Survey* had taken on the role of a ‘regional mirror’ reflecting current trends in contemporary art.<sup>7</sup> According to Vallis, these trends included a growing regional network of galleries and craft shops and a stronger focus on arts and crafts as a viable industry, particularly fine wood craft. He suggested few visitors left the region without a hand-crafted memento of their visit. He also commented that the establishment of a peer-review panel by the

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Geddes, *South West Survey 1991* (Bunbury: Bunbury Art Galleries, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* There was no *South West Survey* in 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Vallis, introduction to *South West Survey 1988: Initiation Exhibition* (Bunbury: Bunbury Regional Art Gallery, 1988), 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *South West Survey 1988: Initiation Exhibition*.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Vallis, introduction to *South West Survey 1989: Invitation Exhibition*, (Bunbury: Bunbury Regional Art Gallery, 1989), 2.





Figure 63 Kent Le Grand *Wave Form I* 1988  
 blown glass 13.5 x 14cms  
 Collection: City of Bunbury  
 Acquired: *South West Survey* 1988  
 Photo: Paul Webster



Figure 64 Kent Le Grand *Wave Form II* 1988  
 blown glass 11.7 x 10cms  
 Collection: City of Bunbury  
 Acquired: *South West Survey* 1988  
 Photo: Paul Webster

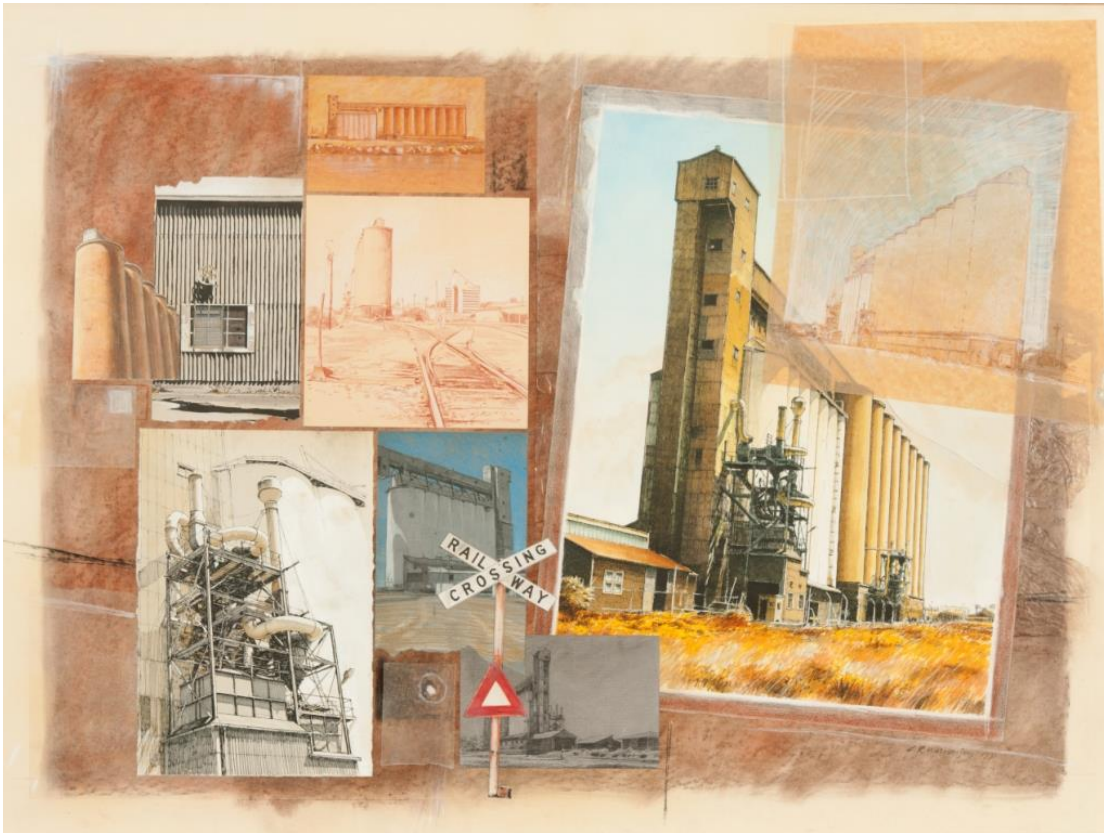


Figure 65 Chris Williamson *Silo Sketchbook* watercolour, gouache, collage on paper 77 x 102cms  
 Collection: City of Bunbury  
 Acquired: *South West Survey* 1991  
 Photo: Paul Webster

Western Australian Government Department for the Arts with regional representation reflected growing recognition that regions are 'artistically-rich'.<sup>8</sup>

The early *Survey* catalogues give no indication of the selection process. However, according to the (then) Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Tony Geddes, by 1991 it had become an 'open invitation' exhibition, which he claimed made it more accessible to artists who had not had an opportunity to exhibit previously, as well as those with an established practice.<sup>9</sup> Although the number of entries received and works selected for exhibition fluctuated annually little actually changed with the shape of the *South West Survey* for a number of years. Its aim to showcase the 'breadth and depth of the region's artistic talent' and provide an opportunity for regional artists to gain exposure, and perhaps financial reward in the form of a prize, remained constant.<sup>10</sup> According to Geddes, the *Survey* was:

... one of a variety of opportunities for some artists to gain public exposure and financial rewards for their efforts. For many, the *Survey* is the main avenue for having their work displayed in a professional manner and being assessed in the company of their peers, both amateurs and full-time practitioners. In this respect the *South West Survey* plays a significant role in promoting the visual arts and craft, contributing to their development and enrichment.<sup>11</sup>

The *South West Survey* continued along much the same path under future gallery directors, although claims of a tougher selection process were made by James Davis in 1996.<sup>12</sup> The only significant change introduced was to move the date from the winter months to February so that the exhibition launch would coincide with the anniversary of the gallery's foundation. This occurred in 2000. The summer schedule also allowed outdoor musical entertainment and food stalls to become part of the opening night celebrations, to create more of a festival atmosphere – a regional spectacle and social occasion when prize-winners are announced.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Geddes, introduction to *South West Survey 1991*, 2. According to Geddes, there was no exhibition in 1990 due to the absence of a director.

<sup>10</sup> *South West Survey 1991*, *South West Survey 1992*, *South West Survey 1993* and *South West Survey 1994*.

<sup>11</sup> Geddes, introduction to *South West Survey 1993* (Bunbury: Bunbury Art Galleries), n.p.

<sup>12</sup> James Davies, introduction to *South West Survey 1996* (Bunbury: Bunbury Art Galleries), n.p.

<sup>13</sup> In 2016 the *Survey* was held in June–July because it now alternates with the *Bunbury Biennale*.



Figure 66 Rita Winkler *Breaking Out* sterling silver, stainless steel, gold and cubic zirconium stones  
 ring: 1.4 x 0.8cms, brooch: 6 x 5.5cms, earrings: 3 x 2.7cms  
 Collection: City of Bunbury  
 Acquired: *South West Survey* 1993  
 Photo: Paul Webster



Figure 67 Olga Cironis *Mylaup Beach* steel and found objects 43.5 x 51 cms  
 Collection: City of Bunbury  
 Acquired: *South West Survey* 1996  
 Photo: Paul Webster



Discussion amongst artists about who had been selected had become an on-going feature of the now much-anticipated exhibition. The catalogue essay, which was essentially an acknowledgment of everyone involved with the production of the exhibition, explained its purpose and benefit to the region. But until 2004 no *Survey* catalogue had explained the selection process, clarified the curatorial premise behind each successive exhibition, or discussed the works. So during my tenure as Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, I wrote a succinct explanation of the approach the selectors had taken and the predominant themes that appeared to be preoccupying that year's selection of artists – no artist's statements had been requested so the interpretation of themes was based on my familiarity with the region and its artists. It was not intended to be an in-depth critical essay, simply an attempt to introduce some form of analytical clarification to the selection and curatorial process:

The artists appear to be preoccupied with a miscellany of subjects, but somehow amongst the universal topics of home, family and environment, a distinctive flavour emerges and the sense of locale becomes palpable. A walk through the exhibition confirms this impression. Topics and styles range from the domestic and decorative to the compassionate and conceptual, all handled with differing degrees of humour or deliberation. Before long, the personality and ever-changing moods of the South West materialize. Bold use of colour contrasts with subtle tones and textures. Both reflect the ebb and flow of the region's paradoxical energies.<sup>14</sup>

In 2005 Galliano Fardin helped with the *Survey* selection process. Originally from Italy, Fardin lives in Lake Clifton in the Peel region, on the cusp of the South West. He is a respected artist with a long track record. A former *Survey* award-winner (1994), he has also exhibited in the *Bunbury Biennale* (1996 and 2009), and his work has been acquired for the City of Bunbury collection on both occasions (see chapter seven). Fardin gave great consideration to each *Survey* entry and showed great sensitivity towards each artist's apparent intent. He was drawn to work that demonstrated innovative and investigative use of materials and a 'raw' approach to medium and concept. I recall him suggesting that regionally-based artists have greater freedom than metropolitan artists

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<sup>14</sup> Diana de Bussy, introduction to *South Western Times Survey 2004* (Bunbury: Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, 2004), 1.



Figure 68 Alex Mickle *Hand to Mouth* cold cast bronze, wood, brick and steel  
85 x 11x21.5cms, 132 x 28 x28cms, 90 x 18 x 31cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *South West Survey* 2005  
Photo: Paul Webster

from following trends. Fardin saw naïveté as a positive characteristic rather than simply a sign of conventionality or lack of sophistication that somehow makes a work less significant than a conceptually-complex piece.<sup>15</sup> In the catalogue I wrote:

I know there will be work in the exhibition some people will question and perhaps even detest, but that is the nature and purpose of visual art. It is a medium for expression and debate. Year by year the Survey evolves and fluctuates. How dull if it were to become static and predictable ... And so Survey 2005 is a dynamic expression of the universal and the particular. Irrespective of geography, it's evident that we share universal fears and hopes for peace, the environment, humanity and our role in society. These general concerns become particular in the context of our locale and personal lives ... I have sought to reflect common themes by placing the works in groups, to create a thread of dialogue between highly individual images and objects. This is a deliberate attempt to suggest an undercurrent of debate ... the exhibition is designed to expose links and tensions between works by emerging and established artists. These links must find their resolution (or not) in the vision and mind of the viewer.<sup>16</sup>

My term as Director of Bunbury Regional Galleries ended in 2005, but in 2006 I was invited to scan the exhibition set-up and write the catalogue essay, where I noted:

Essentially the Survey is a manifestation of collective enterprise; curatorial decisions made by the gallery, personal decisions made by artists, and the process of selection. Every year someone new is invited to undertake this vital task and inevitably the process reflects their personal and professional preferences ... So is Survey 2006 representative of South West contemporary visual art and design? Well yes and no ... understandably the catalogue roll-call is a reflection of the number and nature of the entries received, and the selection process ... the inclusion of many new names is enlightening and to be encouraged, but many familiar names are absent ... However through its content and presentation, Survey 2006 offers a sound statement about the creative imagination of the region, and the Galleries' commitment to the development of visual arts practice and the cultural life of the South West.<sup>17</sup>

This commentary illuminates my thoughts, then and now. It also shows I am embedded in this particular artistic field and demonstrates an emerging desire to address perceptions of regional art production.

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<sup>15</sup> Diana de Bussy, introduction to *South Western Times Survey 2005*, (Bunbury: Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, 2005), 1–2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Diana de Bussy, introduction to *South Western Times Survey 2006*, (Bunbury: Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, 2006), 1.



Figure 69 Simon James *Embers* wood and woodstain 18 x 26cms, 24 x 27cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *South West Survey* 2007  
Photo: Paul Webster



Figure 70 Michael Wise *Black Night* automotive enamel, acrylic on aluminium 54 x 54cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *South West Survey* 2008  
Photo: Paul Webster



Figure 71 Kay Gibson *Occupied Territory II* acrylic on canvas 125 x 101cms, 125 x 35.5cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *South West Survey* 2009  
Photo: Paul Webster

## ***SURVEY 2010: ART IN THE SOUTH WEST***

As the *South West Survey* has evolved, sponsorship and prize money has grown and the number of awards on offer has increased, although these latter two conditions have fluctuated from year to year. New prizes that have been introduced include an acquisitive award offered by the City of Bunbury collection committee.<sup>18</sup> But the biggest development in the *Survey's* recent history occurred in 2009–2010, when Perth-based curator and critic David Bromfield was appointed to select artists for the 2010 exhibition, and gather material for a catalogue that would help to build a profile of contemporary art practice in the region.<sup>19</sup>

According to the curator's brief for *Survey 2010*, the gallery wanted to move away from an open invitation to residents of the South West to submit entries, and they saw the twenty-first anniversary of the founding of the gallery and the launch of the *Survey* as an opportunity for change. It was even suggested that the exhibition would have the potential to go on a national tour at the conclusion of its eight week run in Bunbury.<sup>20</sup> The successful curator was expected to deliver an exhibition and a comprehensive catalogue. A substantial fee was offered but no further explanation of expectations was provided. The birthday celebrations were a good catalyst to re-vamp the *Survey*, but rumblings were already afoot within the arts community that change was needed. For example, in 2005 I combined an open call for entries with an invitation to a carefully-selected group of artists. My intent was to re-fresh the exhibition and broaden its representation of 'regional talent' by including some of the well-known and well-respected artists who live in the South West who either had never or no longer valued the *Survey* as a legitimate site of exposure and recognition. Douglas Chambers, Mary Knott, Juliet Stone and Peter Kovacsy were amongst the people invited.<sup>21</sup> I also invited Douglas Kirsop who paints 'highly competent' landscapes, mostly of the Pilbara and Kimberley regions – the type of paintings Smith describes as 'restrictive regionalism'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *South Western Times Survey 2004 and 2005*.

<sup>19</sup> Sonya Dye, introduction to *South Western Times Survey 2009*, (Bunbury: Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, 1).

<sup>20</sup> *Expression of Interest, Curator's Brief, South West Survey 2010*, (Bunbury: Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, 2009). Working paper, from personal archive.

<sup>21</sup> *South Western Times Survey 2005*.

<sup>22</sup> See Smith, "Rethinking Regionalism: Art in the Northern Territory," 469.

In the months leading up to the launch of the exhibition in February 2010, Bromfield and his partner photographer Pippa Tandy toured through the region. They attended functions, visited galleries, and talked to artists in their studios. Other than some scouting visits around Bunbury in late July, their data-gathering schedule of visits ran from mid–August to early October 2009. Throughout the tour, Bromfield blogged his observations on his website. This blog and the ensuing exhibition catalogue provide valuable insight into his opinion of the South West art scene. In one of his earliest posts, he suggests the struggle to reconfigure inherited notions of landscape into compelling contemporary art is a central concern for South West artists.<sup>23</sup> During a visit to Bunbury in July 2009 for the launch of the *Biennale* he remarked:

As it happens I attended the first Biennale opening in 1993. It holds a sad memory for me ... We arrived at the galleries to be greeted by Bill Wright who had been asked to select work for the collection with the news that my friend Ian Burn had died rescuing some children from the surf. As it happens Ian was very keen on paintings like the one in our hostel bedroom.<sup>24</sup>

A photograph on the blog shows Bromfield looking at a conventional image of gum trees. Burn's interest in inter-war landscape painting was the premise of an exhibition at Bendigo Art Gallery, where he displayed realistic imagery with work that embraced a more conceptual approach. In an essay first published in 1982 for the exhibition, Burn suggests the popular appeal of these paintings lay in their depiction of recognisable locations, which inspired a sense of place and belonging. Through a more considered analysis, his aim was to re-instate the significance of regional landscape imagery in accounts of Australian art.<sup>25</sup> According to Smith, Burn used this occasion to reflect on the challenges and advantages of regional positioning (see chapter two).<sup>26</sup> Holmes suggests Burn's exhibition and catalogue essay set out to challenge two opposing opinions – a popular view the paintings' attraction is their well-crafted depiction of familiar scenes, and a critical view they reflect conservatism and parochialism.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Survey 2010 Blog," *Brown Art Consultants*, posted July 26, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Burn, "Popular landscape painting between the wars," 37–51. See Burn, *National Life & Landscapes*.

<sup>26</sup> Smith, "Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?," 4.

<sup>27</sup> Holmes, "Blindspot – regional art histories in Australia," 66.

Bromfield does not explain in his blog who Ian Burn was. So either he assumed his readers already knew, or it was a conscious establishment of his own knowledge and 'authority' to validate artists and artworks without any further explanation of why the hostel painting was significant in this context, except to say that he had helped Burn find similar works in country town charity shops that later appeared in his artwork.<sup>28</sup> I suggest Bromfield's comment also begins to establish a sense of the criteria of 'legitimacy' he used to build a picture of art production in the South West and select artists for the *Survey* following his regional tour – namely, a distinct difference between 'banal' tourist art and art as a 'revelatory' or 'critical enterprise'.<sup>29</sup> According to Bromfield's blog, he clearly thought tourism has had a detrimental effect on art production in some areas. For example, he claims the tourist market is responsible for the production of too many 'clichéd' views of local scenes, and during his visit to coastal areas near Margaret River he blogged:

Perhaps this is all people want and indeed all they will tolerate in local art especially if they are tourists who want an inoffensive reminder of their trip. If this is so it goes a long way to explain the absence of a single serious painter of our maritime landscape, sea, sand, sun and storms ... There is no marine equivalent of Howard Taylor. Yet the metaphysical and poetic potential of the ocean is immense ... If the tourist market can blinker one group of artists and their audience to this extent perhaps the *Survey* should take into account the effect of tourism on all the art of the South West – indeed on the very idea of what is legitimate in art here.<sup>30</sup>

This theme crops up frequently in Bromfield's blog. For example, during his visit to the 2009 *Bunbury Biennale* he suggests Tony Windberg has found a way to tackle landscape as a compelling contemporary subject (Figure 72):

In the current Biennale, Tony Windberg, among others, shows how to approach this problem so as to ensure a happy outcome, following, perhaps, the example of Howard Taylor, the greatest of South West artists reducing the landscape to tones, textures and single sensations.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Bromfield, "Survey 2010 Blog," *Brown Art Consultants*, posted July 26, 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Bromfield, "Survey 2010 Blog," *Brown Art Consultants*, posted August 29, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Bromfield, "Survey 2010 Blog," *Brown Art Consultants*, posted July 26, 2009.





Figure 72 Tony Windberg *Light Shift – Tuart 2009* ash, charcoal, oil and wax on canvas/linen panel  
106 x 51cms (each panel)  
Exhibited: *Bunbury Biennale 2009*  
Photo: Tony Windberg



Figure 73 Tony Windberg *Vanishing Point – Middleton Road A and B* 2010 engraved vinyl and mdf  
1780 x 1526 x 430 (both sections wall mounted)  
Exhibited: *Survey 2010 Over There: Art in the South West 2010*  
Photo: Tony Windberg

I found it interesting to read this particular post, for I was already investigating Tony Windberg as part of my research inquiry (see chapter eleven). Initially I wondered what that meant for my own research, but then I saw it was simply a corroboration of my argument. Moreover, Bromfield's blog provides an outsider's view. On the one hand, it is a view uncluttered by first-hand familiarity with the region and its art world, which makes it refreshing. But on the other hand, as his blog unfolded perhaps what I found most disturbing was the impression it gave of the outsider's sense of superiority and surprise when he found something beyond 'tourist banality'. For example, Bromfield blogged that his impression from many studio visits was the commitment and determination of the artists he met, and that encountering so much diversity would make the *Survey* selection process hard.<sup>32</sup> However, he goes on to say he was surprised by the number of 'seriously committed' artists he encountered during a drive down the South West Highway through Balingup and Bridgetown to Northcliffe:

It has been a revelation. There seem to be more committed artists here than anywhere we have been so far. Its [sic] a tougher life for many but the general spirit of the place is conducive to hard work and enthusiasm ... The black plague of tourism has yet to cast its pall of misery very far over the local culture. Moreover there are a surprising number of seriously committed artists here.<sup>33</sup>

Bromfield visited Douglas Chambers and John Austin on this part of his journey, and whilst his 'revelation' could be seen as a gratifying sign of recognition that 'serious' artists live in regional localities, I suggest his 'fascination' with the commitment of many artists reflects an unfortunately patronising misconception that regionally-based artists would somehow be less committed than artists who are based in metropolitan areas. Expressing his on-going scepticism about the relationship between art and tourism during a visit to Northcliffe's sculpture walk *Understorey*, Bromfield wrote:

The trees and the understorey are a perfect location for sculpture. Indeed many artists have worked with the relationship between art and landscape for many years ... These excellent works suggest an alternative approach to the relationship between visitors, art and artists. In the Margaret River gallery strip the primary emphasis is on lifestyles and sales. There is almost no dialogue, no contemplation, no aspiration, in the relationship of an audience to the artist that this produces.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., posted August 18, 2009.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., posted October 1–10, 2009.

Consequently I believe the art available near the South West Coast is inevitably overwhelmingly banal. It panders to the tourist ...or the visitor who simply wants an up-market souvenir ... From Bridgetown to Cathedral Rock, however, artists are generally more interested in art and the sophisticated art audience ... These differences are extraordinary; we were very surprised by them. It is likely that the richly various aspirations of these artists will lead to a better cultural outcome than an art based on the vagaries of the tourist market.<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps the reason Bromfield encountered a different artistic sensibility in these inland areas is because they are less expensive to live in, and although tourism exists as part of the economic mix it is less overt. 'Margaret River' has become an international brand and, as I reported in chapter three, it is where the majority of long-established commercial galleries are based. Bromfield's observation corresponds to Smith's description of art production in the Northern Territory, when he said a large amount of art and crafts produced for the tourist market (including highly-competent paintings of popular views) exists alongside more critically-engaged forms of realism.<sup>35</sup> This structure corresponds to Peter Wynn-Moylan's proposition that two forms of practice co-exist in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales – traditional art that is sold in commercial galleries or at the studio door, and more conceptual work.<sup>36</sup> In chapter three I suggested these characteristics reflect some aspects of South West art production, but like most art worlds, art production in the region is more nuanced than this two-fold structure implies. So whilst Bromfield's observation that the 'pressure of tourism' and popular demand for 'souvenirs' may well be driving some public perceptions of 'what art is for', more innovative and critically-engaged alternatives co-exist alongside the conventional views and craft objects, which is what Smith and Wynn-Moylan suggest happens, and Bromfield was finding out.<sup>37</sup> For example, he discovered artists in the Margaret River area whose work is not produced to satisfy popular demand or 'bourgeois' taste, such as Katherine Hall who I discuss in chapter ten.<sup>38</sup> However, it is probable that the abundance of 'tourist art' produced and sold in the 'Margaret River gallery strip' is precisely what Julian Goddard meant when

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, "Rethinking Regionalism: art in the Northern Territory," 469–470.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Wynn-Moylan, "A Country Practice," n.p.

<sup>37</sup> Bromfield, "Survey 2010 Blog," *Brown Art Consultants*, posted September 23, 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

he described the South West art scene as ‘folksy’. Whether this work is ‘banal’ or ‘folksy’ is a matter of what principle of legitimacy is used to evaluate products that overtly respond to the market place and popular demand, but it does not reflect the myriad forms of art produced in that area or elsewhere in the region that respond to a different motive. As mentioned earlier, the publication where Goddard’s description appeared is targeted at high-yield consumers of home décor products and tourist destinations, and it is probable this market may have dictated a focus on commercial galleries and, therefore, the extent of the area covered.<sup>39</sup> However, the problem with Goddard’s description is that, unlike Bromfield, he did not identify any conceptual or less commercially-driven forms of art practice and the rarity of published critique on South West art production added weight to the legitimacy of his comments.

According to (then) Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Sonya Dye, *Survey 2010* presented an opportunity to review the visual arts in the region:

The South West has a rich visual arts history yet little has been published to recognise the artists and their work. Contemporary South West practice has only occasionally been considered beyond its regional context ... *Survey 2010* evolved from a desire to address these issues, to celebrate the visual arts and the dedication of artists in the South West.<sup>40</sup>

However, the exhibition titled *Over There Survey 2010: Art in the South West* is known anecdotally as the controversial *Survey*.<sup>41</sup> Much of the criticism came from artists who were disgruntled the event had cost a substantial amount of money but no awards were presented. Moreover, the exhibition catalogue – that no doubt accounted for some of the costs – produced a mixed response. In his catalogue essay, Bromfield claims ‘art is everywhere in the South West’ but there is very little detailed information available and there has been no critical attempt at assessment.<sup>42</sup> Some artists have told me they saw the publication of the *Survey 2010* catalogue as an attempt to address this vacuum. However, others were disappointed by its content and idiosyncratic design

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<sup>39</sup> Whilst working for Museums Australia WA in 2012, I attended a meeting at SCOOP Publishing’s offices in Subiaco, where the balance between advertising and editorial was explained.

<sup>40</sup> Sonya Dye, foreword to Bromfield and Tandy, *Over There*, v.

<sup>41</sup> On the use of anecdote to assert ‘clout’ see Gardner, “On the ‘Evental’ Installation: Contemporary Art and Politics of Presence,” 953; Burn, *Dialogue*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Bromfield and Tandy, *Over There*, 1.





Figure 74 Juliet Stone *A Feeling of Touch on the Horizon* oil and beeswax on canvas 114 x 140cms  
Exhibited: *Survey 2010 Over There: Art in the South West 2010*  
Photo: Juliet Stone

In essence, Bromfield's catalogue essay fleshes out the themes and preoccupations he unearthed during his tour of the region and articulated in his blog. Two broad themes emerge from his findings:

- a preoccupation with the changing nature of the landscape and the relationship between humans and nature;
- and a constant conflict between the production of art as a commodity for the tourist market or as a critically-engaged enterprise.<sup>43</sup>

Bromfield suggests the need to make a living has forced some artists to curb their ambitions and as a result they produce conventional work that panders to the tourist market. He suggests the difference between 'localised practice' and 'complex ambition' is particularly evident in areas where tourism thrives, such as the coastal strip from Yallingup to Margaret River.<sup>44</sup> Bromfield claims this difference was manifest in a 'scandal' that erupted when he judged the *City of Busselton Art Award* at ArtGeo Gallery in 2009, where he split the first prize between Marina Troitsky's *Displacement No. IV* and Laurie Posa's *Red Tail Cockatoo* (Figures 75 and 76). Both works explore the affect of suburban development on the environment and natural habitats. According to Bromfield, his selection of Troitsky's small installation of found objects placed in a second-hand cabinet 'caused great anxiety' because it was 'feared' his 'provocative' choice might provide a pretext for the City of Busselton to cut the gallery's funding. Although he acknowledges there was no pretext for any funding cut, Bromfield's interpretation of this episode is now recorded in history and he uses it to suggest this anxiety is constant and pervasive throughout the region.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to the conflict between market-driven and critically-engaged work, and a preoccupation with landscape, another observation Bromfield makes about art production in the region is the scarcity of installation and multi-media work. He claims

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 2–4, 9, 11–12.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 3–4. Through my current association with ArtGeo, I understand the context of this particular incident. Since then the City of Busselton has re-vamped its annual art award and increased the prize money on offer, to attract a wider field of entries from within the region and further afield. See chapter three footnote 42.



Figure 75 Marina Troitsky *Displacement No. IV* 2009  
found cabinet and kangaroo bones  
121.8 x 73.3 x 57.5cms (doors ajar)  
Collection: City of Busselton  
Acquired: *City of Busselton Art Award* 2009  
Photo: Paul Webster



Figure 76 Laurie Posa *Red Tail Cockatoo* 2009  
oil on canvas 121.9 x 76.2cms  
Collection: City of Busselton  
Acquired: *City of Busselton Art Award* 2009  
(joint winners)  
Photo: Paul Webster



this is due to this conservative environment, a lack of supportive gallery space and the absence of a sympathetic audience.<sup>46</sup> I agree that many artists have been slow to adopt electronic media and digital technology as preferred forms of practice, and the notion of artwork as object remains dominant – a notion that is endorsed by institutions (see chapter seven). However, I contest Bromfield’s comment about the shortage of supportive gallery space. For example, Bunbury Regional Art Galleries includes exhibitions of electronic media in its schedule on a regular basis, and since organisational changes were implemented in 2013 ArtGeo has been much more receptive to digital and immersive technology. As the South West art scene continues to grow and evolve, I feel sure more venues will embrace innovative new media as Smith’s notion of the ‘image economy’ takes hold with artists who are drawn to interactive electronic media and digital technology as a way to explore their individual ideas and identities, as well as shared experiences of community and place (see Figures 61 and 62 chapter seven, and Figures 116 and 117 chapter eleven).<sup>47</sup> As this happens, new venues will emerge to complement what already exists – some conventional, some alternative, some temporary, and some in places that are not dominated by tourism. The foundation of a public gallery in Collie in 2015 suggests this is already occurring, but there is scope for much more to happen in this area. Yet despite finding an air of conservatism and an abundance of market-driven or tourist art production, Bromfield suggests:

The South West offers any number of possibilities for the development of special places by and for art and artists.<sup>48</sup>

He also claims that no-one believed their work had suffered because they live in a regional area and few artists indicated they felt left out of the ‘urban hierarchy’ or lacked opportunities to show their work. Indeed, he claims that many artists argued:

... the creative benefits of a regional location over a ‘centre’ whether that centre was Bunbury, Perth or New York.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Bromfield and Tandy, *Over There*, 18.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 6, 267–268; Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 11, 256–257, 296–297.

<sup>48</sup> Bromfield, “Survey 2010 Blog,” *Brown Art Consultants*, posted October 1–10, 2009.

<sup>49</sup> Bromfield and Tandy, *Over There*, 3.

Bromfield adds that neither the imitation of urban values (provincial subservience) nor the assertion of regional identity (defiant localism – my brackets) seem important to artists in the South West. Instead he claims he found:

... a museum of artistic attitudes of all kinds, actively in play, with and against each other ... a pick and mix of form, content, technique, memory, theory and history, a cultural landscape in the midst of a transformation.<sup>50</sup>

This last comment suggests that despite his scepticism and expectation of regional disadvantage, Bromfield believed the region could be, or perhaps already is, an ‘enabling zone of exchange’.<sup>51</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Bromfield’s catalogue essay is a valuable record of an outsider’s perception of the South West art scene. However, a surprising and disappointing aspect of his essay is the lack of interest or understanding he shows for the *South West Survey*’s history. This is evident in his contentious claim that ‘hapless curators’ and ‘uninformed strangers’ selected and judged past surveys, and prestige rather than artistic achievement or creative ambition dominated the event.<sup>52</sup> Through my first-hand knowledge of recent exhibitions (since 1999) and review of *Survey* catalogues (since 1988), it is clear that the curators, artists and gallery directors who have contributed to the *Survey*’s history as selectors or judges simply do not fit this description. For example, John Stringer and Galliano Fardin represent just two of the many members of the art world with substantial ‘cultural habitus’ who have shared their expertise, validating who and what is considered legitimate, just as Bromfield did. Bromfield’s comments also denigrate the many artists who have participated and won awards in the past, and the contribution the event has made to the cultural life of the region for many years.

As a ‘spectacle’ in its own context, the *South West Survey* offers artists a recurring opportunity for exposure and recognition in a ‘prestige’ exhibition, the possibility of financial reward, the potential of representation in a reputable public collection, and

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>51</sup> See Smith, “Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?,” 5.

<sup>52</sup> Bromfield and Tandy, *Over There*, 2.

documentation of their involvement in that process in an exhibition catalogue. Whilst the event may have its flaws and fluctuations in consistency and presentation, that does not lessen its significance as a site of artistic legitimization, signalled by its longevity and sustained intent to showcase regional art production for the benefit of regional audiences and visitors. By tracing its history, I have shown how the *South West Survey* has played an important role in the recent history of regional art production – that is, its making and its evaluation by individuals and institutions.

Whilst illustrations of acquisitions by the City of Bunbury collection used in this chapter show an eclectic mix of media and subjects, these images also show that sense of place and natural phenomena preoccupy many South West artists. Not only does this observation closely correspond to Bromfield's suggestion that South West artists have an on-going preoccupation with the changing landscape and the relationship between humans and nature, it is consistent with Smith's claim that the prominence of the landscape genre represents a 'restrictive' form of regionalism.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, I suggest signs of an on-going regional identification with the particularities of place is neither 'folksy' nor a sign of 'defiant localism', but simply a reflection of the enduring significance of landscape as a contemporary subject coupled with a shared sense of place. Therefore, whilst art produced within the conditions of contemporaneity may be informed by regional positioning it need not be constrained by it.

In his *Survey 2010* catalogue essay Bromfield claims that the absence of Indigenous artists from the 'commonplace profile' of contemporary regional art is 'striking':

... not so much because of their status as the first people but because of their continuous presence throughout the period of white settlement. They have occupied and engaged the same landscape. Their presence and memories are an integral part of one single history and so is their art.<sup>54</sup>

During his tour of the South West, Bromfield visited various sites with Bunbury Regional Art Galleries' Indigenous liaison officer Troy Bennell, including a place he is told was once an Aboriginal camp:

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<sup>53</sup> Smith, "Rethinking Regionalism: art in the Northern Territory," 469.

<sup>54</sup> Bromfield and Tandy, *Over There*, 4.

It is not for their archaeological significance alone that the destruction of such sites is regrettable. It is more that they continue to have cultural and social meaning for the present day.<sup>55</sup>

Bromfield describes a fridge decorated with Aboriginal emblems and sporting imagery by Charles 'Judin' Riley (b. 1955) as 'overworked with dot painting'. He suggests it is a comment on the inclusivity of popular culture with no 'secret sacred' meaning or sense of irony (Figure 77).<sup>56</sup> However, given he identifies the changing landscape as a key preoccupation of so many South West artists, his subsequent statement that 'South West Indigenous artists paint landscape in the Carrolup style' without any explication of what this means in the context of his other observations, comes across as dismissive.<sup>57</sup> Taking a lead from Bromfield's comment, the following chapter examines the significance of the Carrolup style of landscape painting as a legitimate form of contemporary art on its own terms.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.



Figure 77 Charles Riley Djuidin's *Dreaming* enamel and acrylic painted refrigerator 141 x 72.5 x 53cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *Survey 2010 Over There: Art in the South West*  
Photo: Paul Webster

## CHAPTER NINE

### POSTCOLONIAL PICTURESQUE: THE CARROLUP STYLE

**Many of the Noongar artists of the Southwest of WA paint country in a naturalistic style, though it rarely relies on the conventions of observation that underpin the European landscape tradition. The moody, sometimes fantastical feeling of many of their works echoes the tone of the Carrolup children artists' paintings and drawings of the 1940s and 50s, whose style has been an abiding source of inspiration for artists across several generations of Noongar People. These artists' works are also informed by an image of country captured in their mind's eye, imbued with a sense of familiarity, love, nostalgia and yearning.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Vivian Johnson, Tess Allas and Laura Fisher, *This Side of the Frontier: Storylines Full Report* (2009/2010), 22–23, accessed March 15, 2011, <http://www.storylines.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/STORYLINESFINAL.pdf>.

## INTRODUCTION

According to Terry Smith, the ‘postcolonial turn’ has generated an abundance of art shaped by all sorts of values, including anti-colonial sentiments. It circulates via the art market and exhibitions, generating a constant dialogue between local and international values.<sup>2</sup> Smith also suggests Aboriginal art that draws on traditional stories, symbolic motifs, sense of place and the relationships that Indigenous people have with their land has become one of Australia’s most prominent forms of visual expression.<sup>3</sup> In 2009, David Bromfield toured through the South West of Western Australia to select artists for his *Survey 2010* exhibition at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries. In the exhibition catalogue he identifies the landscape and the relationship between humans and nature as a theme that preoccupies many South West artists, and claims rapid urban development has re-established that significance.<sup>4</sup> Bromfield acknowledges the continuous presence of Indigenous people in a landscape that has been occupied by white settlers. He suggests their presence and memories are an integral part of history and so is their art, and he laments the destruction of Aboriginal sites.<sup>5</sup> Yet he claims Indigenous artists are absent from the ‘commonplace profile’ of contemporary regional art, and then rather dismissively states ‘South West Indigenous artists paint landscape in the Carrolup style’, without any further explanation of what this comment means in the context of his other observations.<sup>6</sup>

Taking a lead from Bromfield’s comments, this chapter draws on Smith’s propositions to examine how the naturalistic style of landscape painting called the ‘Carrolup style’ can be considered a legitimate form of contemporary art. To contextualise my argument, I begin with a brief history of the emergence of the ‘Carrolup art movement’ at an Aboriginal settlement in Katanning in the late 1940s and 1950s. I examine how a series of exhibitions that took place in Western Australia and elsewhere in the 1990s and 2000s generated renewed interest in the Carrolup style, and calls for it to be integrated into the history of Australian Aboriginal art. I embrace recent discourse to

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<sup>2</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 266–267.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 203–204, 212.

<sup>4</sup> Bromfield and Tandy, *Over There*, 4, 9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

discuss some of the terminology that is commonly used to describe Aboriginal art and the familiar dot painting technique that pervades the public imagination of what is authentic. Next I discuss the role Bunbury Regional Art Galleries has played in the process of validation through its involvement with a government-sponsored Indigenous arts development program, a series of exhibitions and its links with some of the artists who continue the Carrolup style. Throughout my account I draw on discussion and dialogue that has been recorded in exhibition catalogues to support my proposal that the continuation of the Carrolup style is a legitimate form of contemporary art on its own terms, with particular significance to Noongar artists and people.

### **RENEWED RECOGNITION OF THE CARROLUP STYLE**

According to the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, archaeological evidence shows that Noongar people have lived on land now known as the South West region for over 45,000 years and they have a strong connection to their country, which means caring for the environment and places of cultural significance. Traditionally they lived in harmony with their environment, sourcing food from the ocean, freshwater lakes or the Karri and Jarrah forests, harvesting according to their knowledge of six seasonal weather patterns to preserve natural resources.<sup>7</sup> A relationship with their country and traditions is an acknowledged source of inspiration for many Aboriginal artists throughout Australia, particularly in remote settings. But until a series of exhibitions began to renew art world interest in its contemporary significance, the story of an art movement that began in the 1940s and 50s at an Aboriginal settlement called Carrolup near Katanning has not featured prominently in the history of Australian Aboriginal art.<sup>8</sup> Katanning is in the administrative region known as the Great Southern and, therefore, falls outside the geographic boundary of my inquiry. However, the influence of the style of landscape painting that evolved at Carrolup transcends this boundary in a number of

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<sup>7</sup> The six Noongar seasons are: Birak–December to January, Bunuru–February to March, Djeran–April to May, Makuru–June to July, Djilba–August to September, and Kambarang–October to November. See “Food,” *Kaardijin Noongar – Noongar Knowledge: Sharing Noongar Culture*.

<sup>8</sup> In 1992 John E. Stanton suggested that although it was heavily publicised during its emergence in the 1940s, there had been little analysis of the impact of the Carrolup art movement or its contemporary significance and continuing production. See John E. Stanton, *Nyungar Landscapes – Aboriginal artists of the South-West: the heritage of Carrolup*, Western Australia, Occasional Paper no. 3, Berndt Museum of Anthropology (Perth: University of Western Australia, 1992), 5 (hereafter cited as *Nyungar Landscapes*).



ways. For example, when the Carrolup settlement closed in 1951, some of the children who had lived there were moved to Roelands Mission Farm, a residential home and training school near Bunbury for Aboriginal children in care.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, some of the contemporary artists who continue working in the Carrolup style have direct links with the original ‘child artists’ who developed the style. A brief look at the history of the beginnings of the Carrolup art movement helps to contextualise its contemporary embodiment and continuing significance to Noongars in the South West region. The settlement at Carrolup was established in 1915 by the Aborigines Department to segregate Aboriginal people from local townfolk. According to John Stanton, founding Director of the Berndt Museum of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia, European town-dwellers considered the Aboriginal people camped in Katanning to be a nuisance and sought their removal. So the State Government forced them to move to a new camp site at Carrolup where a settlement was established.<sup>10</sup> The settlement closed in 1922 and then re-opened as a farm school for boys in 1940. According to Stanton, the appointment of Noel White as school principal in 1945 was a pivotal moment in the school’s history. For along with his wife Lily, White encouraged the children to explore their creativity by drawing the local landscape. Native plants and animals, sunsets and night scenes were popular subjects drawn from observation, or ancestors and spirits who inhabit the land drawn from their imaginations. In 1947, a collection of drawings produced by the Carrolup children was exhibited in Perth where they were seen by Florence Rutter who was visiting from England. Rutter’s interest in helping the children by publicising their drawings resulted in further exhibitions in Sydney, New Zealand, Britain and the Netherlands in 1950–1951, and the publication of the book *Child Artists of the Australian Bush* in 1952.<sup>11</sup> According to Victoria Laurie, at its

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<sup>9</sup> In 1952, the Baptist Church took over Carrolup settlement and renamed it Marribank. Since the late 1980s, Marribank has been run as a cultural centre by the Southern Aboriginal Corporation, and it is home to the Marribank Artists Co-operative. See Stanton, *Nyungar Landscapes*, 5–8.

<sup>10</sup> For a history of this sorry period of forced removal and the government settlement scheme see Stanton, *Nyungar Landscapes*; Anna Haebich, *For Their Own Good: Aborigines in the south west of Western Australia 1900–1940* 2nd ed. (Perth: University of Western Australia Publishing, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> Stanton, *Nyungar Landscapes*, 5–24; Brenda L. Croft and Janda Gooding *South West Central: Indigenous art from South Western Australia 1833–2002* (Perth, WA: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 2003), 24–25. Exhibition catalogue (hereafter cited as *South West Central*); “Projects involving the Berndt Museum,” *Berndt Museum of Anthropology*, accessed November 16, 2011, [www.berndt.uwa.edu.au/generic.lasso?token\\_value=projects](http://www.berndt.uwa.edu.au/generic.lasso?token_value=projects).

peak in the 1950s the Carrolup movement attracted more international attention than the contemporaneous work of Albert Namatjira (1902–1959).<sup>12</sup>

Many of the Carrolup child artists continued to draw and paint prolifically throughout their lives and their knowledge was passed on to a new generation of artists through family connections or other forms of association. However, according to Brenda L. Croft and Janda Gooding, as adults some of them faced discrimination, health problems or other difficulties, and one of the leading members of the movement, Revel Cooper (1933–1983), met a tragic end.<sup>13</sup> Cooper's legacy lives on through other artists: Bunbury-born Tjyllyungoo Lance Chadd (b.1954) and Troy Bennell (b. 1971); Graham 'Swag' Taylor (b.1955) – also known as Tjinanginy – who has links with the Bunbury area through family; and Collie artist Philip Hansen (b. 1950) who spent some of his childhood at Carrolup. These four artists have links with Bunbury Regional Art Galleries through employment, the Indigenous arts development program and exhibitions, and their work is represented in the City of Bunbury collection (see Figures 80 to 83 discussed below).

Whilst the Carrolup style continued through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the story of its origins slipped into obscurity for several decades until a renewal of interest in Aboriginal art from the South West began in the 1990s with a series of exhibitions, starting with the Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation's *Nyungar Art from the South-West Region of Western Australia* in 1991.<sup>14</sup> This exhibition included works by Chadd and Taylor, referred to in this instance as Tjinanginy.<sup>15</sup> The Dumbartung show was followed by two exhibitions from the Berndt Museum of Anthropology collection: *Nyungar Landscapes – Aboriginal artists of the South-West: the heritage of Carrolup, Western Australia*

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<sup>12</sup> Victoria Laurie, "The Lost Prodigies," *Weekend Australian Magazine*, January 21–22, 2006, 28–31.

<sup>13</sup> Croft and Gooding, *South West Central*, 25, 28, 75. Revel Cooper's work is represented in several significant collections including the National Gallery of Australia, the Berndt Museum of Anthropology, the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the Janet Holmes à Court Collection. See "Revel Cooper," *Dictionary of Art and Design Australia*, accessed March 1, 2016, <https://www.daao.org.au/bio/revel-cooper/>.

<sup>14</sup> *Nyungar Art from the South-West Region of Western Australia* (Waterford, WA: Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation, 1991). Exhibition catalogue.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 8–9, 24–25

in 1992; and *Aboriginal Artists of the South West: Past and Present* in 2000.<sup>16</sup> *Nyungar Landscapes* helped to bring to light the story of Carrolup settlement as well as the story of the origins of the Carrolup style and its influence on contemporary artists such as Chadd and Shane Pickett (1957–2010).<sup>17</sup> *Past and Present* built on the ground work laid by *Nyungar Landscapes* and an idea developed by Noongar artist Sandra Hill. According to Stanton, Hill's aim was to challenge 'Wadjela' (non-Indigenous) preconceptions of Aboriginal art by establishing the legitimacy of South West Noongar art.<sup>18</sup> Hill claims a new style of contemporary art that tells stories about the affect of colonisation on people removed from their land developed from seeds sown at Carrolup:<sup>19</sup>

There was a strong philosophical reason for wanting to mount this exhibition. I was tired of hearing from visitors to galleries exhibiting contemporary South-West art saying, 'That's really nice, but it's not *real* Aboriginal art'. But this *is* the art of the South-West: it is how artists see their works in their environment, and how they tell their own stories, and express their own feelings about the experiences of their families in the past. These artists are putting something important together; they are making a vital statement about the processes of colonisation and their subsequent removal from their own lands. They are bringing these experiences right into the present. The art unites the past with the present—and the future.<sup>20</sup>

According to Stanton, *Past and Present* comprised more than fifty years of contemporary art from the South West, including work by the original Carrolup artists: paintings in the landscape tradition and the relationship of Aboriginal people with the land was a predominant theme, but portraits and social commentary also featured.<sup>21</sup> Stanton suggests that Revel Cooper, one of the leading exponents of the Carrolup style, depicted the South West landscape before and after 'Wadjela' settlement.<sup>22</sup> He acknowledges that Chadd, whose early landscapes paintings featured in the exhibition,

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<sup>16</sup> Stanton, *Nyungar Landscapes*; John E. Stanton, *Aboriginal Artists of the South West: Past and Present*, Occasional Paper No. 5, Berndt Museum of Anthropology (Perth: University of Western Australia, 2000), (hereafter cited as *Past and Present*).

<sup>17</sup> Stanton, *Nyungar Landscapes*, 26, 30–31.

<sup>18</sup> Stanton, *Past and Present*, 3, 31.

<sup>19</sup> Sandra Hill, introduction to *Past and Present*, 5–6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Stanton, *Past and Present*, 7–8, 21–31.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–11.

was influenced by Cooper, Reynold Hart (1938–1981) and Chadd’s uncle Parnell Dempster (1936–2000), another leading member of the Carrolup movement.<sup>23</sup>

*Past and Present* toured Australia for a number of years. But according to Ian McLean, neither *Past and Present* nor *Nyungar Landscapes* received much critical attention, despite their well-researched catalogues, because State galleries were not interested in hosting these exhibitions.<sup>24</sup> However, when Noongar art came under the spotlight again in *South West Central: Indigenous art from South Western Australia 1833–2002*, the landmark exhibition at the Art Gallery of Western Australia was considered a highlight of the 2003 Perth International Arts Festival.<sup>25</sup> *South West Central* was the first exhibition of its kind to be staged by the State gallery. The historical survey of Noongar art from the colonial period onwards then toured nationally.<sup>26</sup> According to McLean, the aim of the exhibition was to ‘negotiate a place’ for Noongar art in the history of Australian art – an aspiration amplified by its exposure at the State gallery.<sup>27</sup> Former Curator of Indigenous art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia Brenda L. Croft initiated *South West Central* before she left to take up a position at the National Gallery of Australia. The exhibition comprised work in a variety of media and styles by contemporary Noongar artists and early colonial watercolours by non-Indigenous artists depicting Aboriginal people in the landscape. According to Gooding, (then) Curator of Historical Art at the State gallery, some of these early images portrayed Aboriginal people ‘living in a state of nature’ before European settlement forced them from their land.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Stanton, *Past and Present*, 12, 34; Croft and Gooding, *South West Central*, 28.

<sup>24</sup> Ian McLean, “New histories of Australian art – South West Central: Indigenous art from South Western Australia 1833–2002,” *Art Monthly Australia* 158 (April 2003): 19 (hereafter cited as “New histories of Australian art.”)

<sup>25</sup> Ron Banks, “Away from the Dreamtime,” *West Australian Weekend Extra*, January 18, 2003, 12–13.

<sup>26</sup> Croft and Gooding, *South West Central*; Banks, “Away from the Dreamtime”.

<sup>27</sup> McLean, “New histories of Australian art,” 19–20.

<sup>28</sup> Janda Gooding, “Sights Un-Seen,” in *South West Central*, 10. Sandra Hill’s son Christopher Pease (b. 1969), whose heritage country stretches from Albany to Margaret River, would later draw upon similar ‘picturesque’ images to critique the subject of European colonisation from an Aboriginal perspective in a series of landscape paintings that reference that country. See “Australian Indigenous Art Triennial: Cultural Warriors: Pease, Christopher,” *National Gallery of Australia*, accessed 21 April 2014, <http://nga.gov.au/Exhibition/NIAT07/Default.cfm?MnuID=2&GalID=27668>; Darren Jorgensen, “Chris Pease,” *Artlink* 28, no. 2 (2008), accessed 21 April 2014, [www.artlink.com.au/articles/3122/chris-pease/](http://www.artlink.com.au/articles/3122/chris-pease/). Chris Pease is an award-winning artist who has exhibited widely. His work is represented in many

Three contemporary works by Sandra Hill referred to a more recent period of forced removal. Reflecting her own experience, Hill used personal documents, photographs and copies of legislation to reference the forced removal of children from their families – the Stolen Generations.<sup>29</sup> According to Croft, this ‘intensely personal’ work revealed the effect of a social engineering experiment on the lives of children who were removed from their culture and traditions.<sup>30</sup> The work by Hill that was shown in *South West Central* closely resembles *Going Back Home* – the piece acquired by the City of Bunbury collection in 1997 from the *Bunbury Biennale* (Figure 78, see also Figure 51 chapter seven).<sup>31</sup> On that occasion Hill claimed:

My work is a way of reclaiming my heritage, of telling my story and that of other Aboriginal people, particularly my tribal clan, the Noongar people of the south West. Many of my works are in a sense, a ‘visual historical essay’ due to the nature of the subject. At 6 years old I was taken from my family and fostered by a white family. 29 years later I was reunited with my mother and father. The years I spent researching my family, history, policies and legislation and my Aboriginal heritage have resulted in the artworks I create ... Each work tells a story ... It tells stories of identity, spirituality, shared grief and the profound sense of loss that has been experienced by many of my people ...<sup>32</sup>

Stories of separation from land and people evoke powerful images; the Carrolup story is part of this history. According to Croft, the spirit of the Carrolup era lives on in the work of Chadd, Bennell and others.<sup>33</sup> In an article on *South West Central*, McLean refers to the Carrolup style as the ‘Nyoongar or Carrolup Gum Tree School’ after the paintings of gum trees that had been made popular by settler artists like Hans Heysen (1877–1968). According to McLean, the paintings by settler artists combine the picturesque conventions of colonial images with an object that came to symbolise nationalist sentiment. He suggests artists like Albert Namatjira and the Carrolup artists

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significant public and corporate collections. See “Christopher Pease,” *Design and Art of Australia Online*, accessed April 21, 2014, <https://www.daa.org.au/bio/christopher-pease/>.

<sup>29</sup> Croft, “From Ink to Inkjet,” in *South West Central*, 32.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Croft and Gooding, *South West Central* 64, 65.

<sup>32</sup> Sandra Hill, “Artist Statement,” in *Bunbury Biennale 1997*, 15. See Tracie Pushman, *Family Matters*, (Cowaramup: Holmes à Court Gallery, 2014). Exhibition brochure. In 2015, Sandra Hill and her sons Chris Pease and Ben Pushman exhibited jointly in *Family Matters* at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries and the Holmes à Court Gallery, Vasse Felix. The catalogue essay was written by Chris and Ben’s sister Tracie Pushman.

<sup>33</sup> Croft, “From Ink to Inkjet,” in *South West Central*, 26.

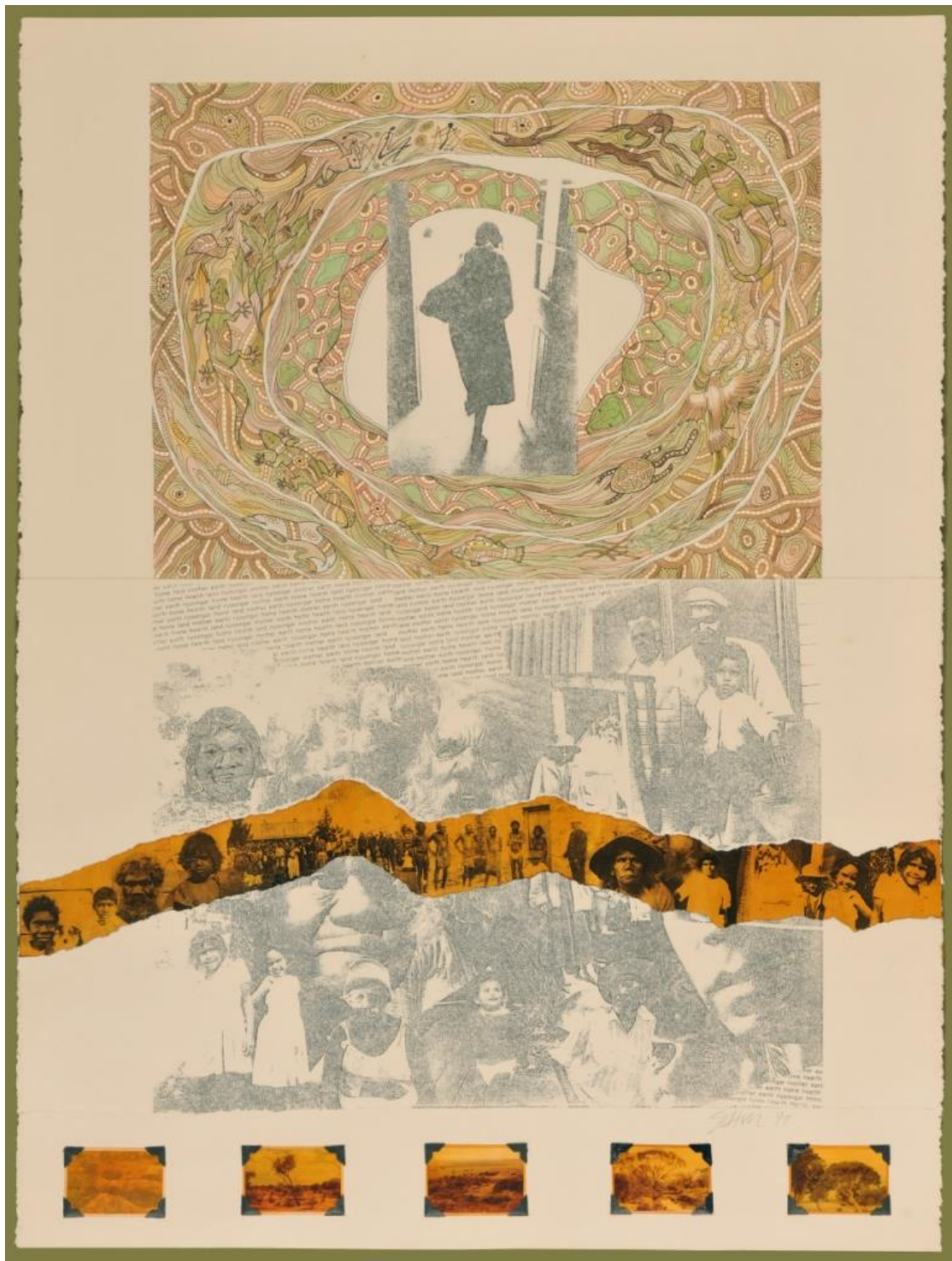


Figure 78 Sandra Hill *Going Back Home* 1997 transfer print and watercolour 120 x 100cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *Bunbury Biennale 1997*  
Photo: Paul Webster

appropriated this tradition for their own purposes. McLean identifies works by younger artists such as Chadd and Bennell as stylistically-related to the 'Carrolup Gum Tree School'. However, he suggests that the use of picturesque conventions by the 'Carrolup Gum Tree School' has arisen from a 'culture of de-colonisation' as a form of pictorial re-possession of the land:<sup>34</sup>

Instead of being Othered by picturesque conventions or repressed symbols of national identity, the Carrolup Gum Tree School uses these same conventions to give an agency to Indigenous aspirations. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century English and Australian art provided a perspective from which the aristocrat or explorer could move freely through the country as an act of possession. These same conventions now enable the Nyoongar to also pictorially possess and claim the land.<sup>35</sup>

In *Nyungar Landscapes*, Stanton claims that in both its original and contemporary forms the Carrolup style does not imitate European ideas about landscape or the work of Albert Namatjira. He acknowledges the children at Carrolup saw prints of Namatjira's work, but suggests the movement's origins were firmly embedded in a specific environment and socio-historical experience and Noongar people see the Carrolup style as distinct to the South West.<sup>36</sup> Stanton reiterates the importance of this context in *Past and Present*:

The school at Carrolup provided a vital context for the emergence of a new form of Aboriginal cultural expression, something that is intrinsically significant to Nyungar people living in the South West. It is even more surprising that it emerged from within such a negative context, one in which Aboriginal children of 'mixed descent', as it was termed, were forcibly taken away from their Aboriginal parents and placed in what was little more than a concentration camp.<sup>37</sup>

Following *South West Central*, interest in the Carrolup art movement and its contemporary embodiment soared after the discovery of a collection of paintings and drawings by the original child artists in America in 2004. They were unearthed at Colgate University's Picker Art Gallery in upstate New York by Australian National

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<sup>34</sup> McLean, "New histories of Australian art," 20–21.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>36</sup> Stanton, *Nyungar Landscapes*, 29–30.

<sup>37</sup> Stanton, *Past and Present*, 7.

University Professor Howard Morphy.<sup>38</sup> According to Laurie, a few Carrolup works had found their way into public and private collections after the exhibitions held in Britain and the Netherlands in the 1950s, and some had been sold to a New York art dealer, but hundreds of drawings had gone missing.<sup>39</sup> The box of drawings and paintings Morphy discovered had been purchased from Florence Rutter by New York art collector Herbert Mayer, who then bequeathed them to Colgate University in 1966. They remained in storage at Colgate until their rediscovery by Morphy in 2004.<sup>40</sup>

In 2006 a selection of these rediscovered works was exhibited in Katanning as a highlight of the Perth International Arts Festival. A simultaneous exhibition of work from the Berndt Museum collection was hosted by the Western Australian Museum in Perth. Both exhibitions were called *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*. They featured works from the Picker and Berndt collections by the Carrolup child artists as well as contemporary works by Chadd, Pickett and 'Swag' Taylor.<sup>41</sup> Since then, more exhibitions have followed in Perth (2007), Brisbane (2008) and New York (2009).<sup>42</sup> In May 2013, the Herbert Mayer collection of Carrolup art was transferred from Colgate to Curtin University and later that year an exhibition titled *Koolark Koort Koorliny (Heart*

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<sup>38</sup> "Drawings from Carrolup: Aboriginal Children's Art of the 'Stolen Generations'," (August 1, 2005), *Picker Art Gallery*, accessed March 15, 2011, [www.pickerartgallery.org/exhibitions/2005/australian.html](http://www.pickerartgallery.org/exhibitions/2005/australian.html); Tim O'Keeffe, "Rediscovery of Aboriginal art at Picker spurs opportunities," in *Colgate University News & Events* (August 1, 2005), accessed November 16, 2011, <http://www.colgate.edu/news/blog/archivesdisplay?nwID=3846>; Stephen Bevis, "Little black fingers," *West Australian Weekend Extra*, February 25, 2006, 8–10; Candice Silverman, "Claiming the past," *Sunday Times Magazine*, December 4, 2005, 10–11; Pushman and Smith Walley, *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, Occasional Paper no. 8, Berndt Museum of Anthropology (Perth: University of Western Australia, 2006). Exhibition catalogue.

<sup>39</sup> Laurie, "The Lost Prodigies," 28–31.

<sup>40</sup> "Artworks come back to country," *Cite 21* (Winter 2013): 3; Margaret McNally and Alana Blowfield, "Heart comes home," *Cite 22* (Summer 2013–2014): 11–15.

<sup>41</sup> Laurie, "The Lost Prodigies," 31; Pushman and Smith Walley, *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, 72–75, 107.

<sup>42</sup> "Noongar Native Title: Noongar works from the Curtin University of Technology art collection," *John Curtin Gallery*, Curtin University, Perth (2007), accessed November 7, 2011, [http://johncurtingallery.curtin.edu.au/gallery/access\\_gallery/2007.cfm](http://johncurtingallery.curtin.edu.au/gallery/access_gallery/2007.cfm); "Noongar Boodja: Contemporary Aboriginal Art, Ecology and Culture," *Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art*, New York State University (2008), accessed November 7, 2011, [www.newpaltz.edu/museum/exhibitions/past.html](http://www.newpaltz.edu/museum/exhibitions/past.html); *The Legacy of Koorah Coolingah*, Brisbane Powerhouse (2009), *Design & Art Australia Online*, accessed, February 21, 2016, <https://www.daa.org.au/bio/event/the-legacy-of-koorah-coolingah-the-legend-of-children-long-ago-2/>; "Beyond Carrolup: Indigenous Art from the south-west from the collection of Sue and Ian Bernadt," *Central TAFE Art Gallery*, Perth (2009), accessed November 7, 2011, [www.gallerycentral.com.au/?s=Carrolup](http://www.gallerycentral.com.au/?s=Carrolup).



*Coming Home*) was held at the University's John Curtin Gallery.<sup>43</sup> *Koolark Koort Koorliny* claimed to celebrate:

... the return to Western Australia of these extraordinary works, created as part of an inspired teaching program devised to alleviate the suffering of Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their parents and incarcerated at Carrolup in accordance with the Government's policy of *assimilation* in the late 1940s.<sup>44</sup>

In 2014 and 2015, *Koolark Koort Koorliny (Heart Coming Home)* toured to Albany and Katanning in the Great Southern region. The Katanning exhibition held in 2015 coincided with the centenary of the establishment of the Carrolup Native Settlement, and on that occasion its title was *Koolark Korl Kadjan (Spiritual Return Home)*.<sup>45</sup>

## TERMINOLOGY AND TECHNIQUE

McLean suggests that previously much of the art exhibited in *South West Central* would have been dismissed as 'kitsch' and populist, but now it was being celebrated because the artists are Indigenous. However, he also suggests that the Carrolup painters who are still active represent a 'rich' but little documented or appreciated 'third current' in Aboriginal art that is older than and distinct from the 'celebrated' acrylic desert paintings and avant-garde urban-based art. McLean suggests that 'much needs to be done' to situate it within the history of Aboriginal or Australian art.<sup>46</sup> In *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, Tracie Pushman and Robyn Smith-Whalley suggest:

The Carrolup collection featured the Koorah Coolingah exhibition has gone a long way in localising Nyungar art to the global audience. It is not the beginning of South West Nyungar art and in no way encompasses all the art of the region. However, what it has done and continues to do is draw attention to the importance of regional style, individual expression, the layout of the land in the South West and the adaptable nature and strength of Nyungar tradition and culture.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> McNally and Blowfield, "Heart comes home"; *Koolark Koort Koorliny (Heart Coming Home): The Herbert Mayer Collection of Carrolup Artwork* (Perth: John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, 2013). Exhibition catalogue.

<sup>44</sup> "Past Exhibitions," *John Curtin Gallery*, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://johncurtingallery.curtin.edu.au/carrolup/archive-exh.cfm>.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> McLean, "New histories of Australian art," 19, 21.

<sup>47</sup> Pushman and Smith Walley, *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, 67–69.

According to Pushman and Smith-Whalley, dot paintings from Northern and desert areas of Australia have become the familiar 'icon' for Aboriginal art and 'Aboriginality' in the international market and tourist industry.<sup>48</sup>

The power of the dot images have moved away from their significance in real terms for visitors to this country, and gone toward typifying 'Australiana' in the tourist industry because of the way non-Aboriginal people have promoted and managed this form of art.<sup>49</sup>

Their work to promote an alternative view builds on Sandra Hill's intent that *Past and Present* would challenge preconceptions of Aboriginal art and raise the visibility of South West Noongar art and the Carrolup style as 'real' Aboriginal art.<sup>50</sup> Her observation that audiences and art buyers seek evidence of authenticity but do not seem to understand how it exists in Noongar art from the South West art alludes to a perception of Aboriginal art that has been largely driven by market-led demand for art from remote areas and a familiarity with the dot painting technique. In *Koorah Coolingah*, Stanton describes the simultaneous exhibitions held in Perth and Katanning as 'yet another chapter in the story of recognition, renewal and respect' for the Carrolup movement.<sup>51</sup> He also suggests Carrolup could have become a national school of art if the settlement had not closed, which would have transformed our understanding of Aboriginal art. Stanton's proposition is based on the premise the dot-painting style that evolved at Papunya in Central Australia in the 1970s is often described as the beginning of the contemporary Aboriginal art industry. Yet it did not evolve until two decades after Carrolup.<sup>52</sup>

According to Julie Gough and Stephen Naylor, the 'overt commercialisation' of art produced in regional (remote) areas, coupled with 'tame commentary', contributes to

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Hill, introduction to *Past and Present*, 5; Stanton, *Past and Present*, 31.

<sup>51</sup> John E. Stanton, foreword in *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Laurie, 2006, 31. See Johnson, Allas and Fisher, *This Side of the Frontier: Storylines Full Report*, 7, 40. According to Johnson, Allas and Fisher, authors of the University of New South Wales' *Storylines* research project, an exhibition of 'non-traditional Indigenous art' at ArtSpace in Sydney in 1984 is usually taken the starting point of contemporary Indigenous art from settled areas. However, they suggest its precursors go back several decades. For a history of the Papunya story see Geoffrey Bardon and James Bardon, *Papunya A Place Made After the Story: The Beginnings of the Western Desert Painting Movement* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2004).

misconceptions about Aboriginal art. They claim mainstream audiences struggle to understand contemporary art made by fair-skinned Aboriginal people who do not live on their traditional lands or use its language.<sup>53</sup> Gough and Naylor define contemporary Aboriginal art as art made by living people. They suggest that most writing is descriptive rather than analytic or contextualised and that it tends to define artists as either 'traditional' or 'urban' according to their origins. For example, artists from regional areas with functioning Indigenous language are classified as 'traditional', whilst artists whose first language is English are defined as 'urban'. However, they envisage a time when something more nuanced exists beyond this 'market-contrived' model.<sup>54</sup>

I heard Gough and Naylor present their ideas at the 32<sup>nd</sup> International Congress in the History of Art in Melbourne in 2008 (CIHA). I also heard Joanna Mendelssohn and Vivien Johnson from the University of New South Wales talk about the *Dictionary of Australian Art Online* (now known as *Design and Art Australia Online*), which sets out to record Australian art histories as an 'open and collaborative' exercise using new technology as its platform.<sup>55</sup> From that introduction, I tracked down the *Storylines* research project on Indigenous art production south of the 'Rowley Line' – a line that theoretically divides remote Aboriginal country from settled areas. According to the authors, Vivien Johnson, Tess Allas and Laura Fisher, *Storylines* was the first sustained attempt to conduct such an investigation.<sup>56</sup> Some of their findings echo Gough and Naylor's discussion. For example, according to *Storylines*, the concepts 'remote' and 'urban' underpin mainstream perceptions of Indigenous art, yet many different forms of art are produced in many different contexts.<sup>57</sup> They suggest 'remote' actually describes

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<sup>53</sup> Gough and Naylor, "Circuit Breaking? Indigenous Australian Art and Critical Discourse," in *Crossing Cultures*, 822. According to Julie Gough and Stephen Naylor, 'contemporary Aboriginal art' is art made by living Aboriginal people.

<sup>54</sup> Gough and Naylor, "Circuit Breaking? Indigenous Australian Art and Critical Discourse," 821–823.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson and Mendelssohn, "Imagining the Future: Issues in Writing and Researching Art's Histories in a Digital Age with the DAAO," in *Crossing Cultures*, 968–971.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson, Allas and Fisher, *This Side of the Frontier: Storylines Full Report*, 42; "Conclusion," *Storylines – This Side of the Frontier: Indigenous Art in 'Settled' Australia*, accessed March 15, 2011, [www.storylines.org.au/the-results/conclusion/](http://www.storylines.org.au/the-results/conclusion/). The *Storylines* research project was conducted in 2007–09. *Storylines* was supervised by *Design and Art Australia Online* Editor-in-Chief Professor Vivien Johnson, and supported by the Australian Research Council and College of Fine Arts at the University of New South Wales. In "Lives of the 'settled' artists," *Artlink* 29, no. 4 (2009): 60–61, Tess Allas describes how material gathered during the three year *Storylines Project* was being uploaded onto the *Design and Art Australia Online* website.

<sup>57</sup> Johnson, Allas and Fisher, *This Side of the Frontier: Storylines Full Report*, 40–41.

artists who are unknown, but envisage something new emerging – a more expansive understanding of ‘connection to country’ in art from settled areas:

One of the most striking of *Storylines*’ discoveries about Indigenous art practice south of the Rowley line was the diversity of circumstances and forms of art making that challenge the dichotomy of ‘remote’ versus ‘urban’ underpinning the way Indigenous art is perceived in the mainstream art world. Most *Storylines* artist profiles were extremely localized and completely off the radar of city-based curators, galleries and art magazines and could be described as ‘remote’ from the Australian art world in a manner that tells a very different story to that usually evoked by that categorization.<sup>58</sup>

Johnson, Allas and Fisher propose that artists who imitate dot painting are struggling to be recognised by non-Indigenous society, but adopting this style of painting actually prevents them from being taken seriously by the mainstream art world.<sup>59</sup> They suggest that imitating dot painting is considered unacceptable in some Indigenous communities, citing an elder from East Gippsland in Victoria as evidence:

We tell our artists they shouldn’t do dots, it doesn’t belong to this country.<sup>60</sup>

For the purpose of their research, the *Storylines* project defines all currently-producing artists as contemporary, as well as artists whose deaths have occurred since the early 1980s. They include the descendents and followers of the Carrolup child artists in their definition, but exclude the original artists.<sup>61</sup> As stated above, in his *Survey 2010* catalogue essay, Bromfield claims Indigenous artists are absent from the ‘commonplace profile’ of contemporary art and then rather dismissively states, ‘South West Indigenous artists paint landscapes in the Carrolup style’ without any further exploration of what this means. Yet he endorses an artist whose art he describes as ‘over worked with dot painting’ by including his work in the exhibition.<sup>62</sup> Charles (Jdudin) Riley’s fridge decorated with Aboriginal emblems and motifs from popular sporting culture was subsequently acquired from *Survey 2010* for the City of Bunbury collection (Figure 79, see Figure 77 chapter eight).

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Johnson, Allas and Fisher, *This Side of the Frontier: Storylines Full Report*, 42.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 7, 22.

<sup>62</sup> Bromfield and Tandy, *Over There*, 4.



Figure 79 Charles Riley Djuidin's *Dreaming* enamel and acrylic painted refrigerator 141 x 72.5 x 53cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *Survey 2010 Over There: Art in the South West*  
Photo: Paul Webster

According to Stanton, all Aboriginal art is intrinsically contemporary to those who create it and the notion of a distinction between 'traditional' and 'contemporary' art risks offending artists and creating a dichotomy between 'remote' and 'urban'. He suggests the intention of the artist is paramount and their 'voice' is an important supplement to 'professional outsider' opinion.<sup>63</sup> On that basis, when Charles (Judin) Riley – a Noongar artist who was born in Wagin and now lives in Busselton – says that he enjoys dot painting and claims to incorporate designs from his 'dreaming' into his artwork, should we be listening to his voice or explaining that, according to others, those dots don't belong to his country?<sup>64</sup>

Nicholas Rothwell suggests critics of Indigenous art face multiple problems. He claims that, despite the growth of the market for Aboriginal art and volumes of scholarship, he is disappointed by the lack of critical discussion on the subject. Rothwell suggests Aboriginal art is admired rather than analysed.<sup>65</sup>

... we seem to feel no desire for an engaged response to Aboriginal painting ... Critical discussion, in its true role as a dialogue that flows between the inquiring public and the creating artist, is simply not found in the domain of indigenous art ... What role, in this troubling environment should criticism play? It is surely to guide the viewer, to argue and contest new art, even as it appreciates ... supports ... The tragedy in all this is that Aboriginal art needs no special dispensation ... Over the past generation it has proved itself one of the most distinctive creative currents of our time ... Where, then, are the critical appraisals that love and explain, and dare to judge?<sup>66</sup>

In this particular instance, Rothwell was talking about Aboriginal art produced in remote areas. However, his comments resonate with Gough and Naylor's suggestion that most writing on Aboriginal art is descriptive and guarded rather than analytical or interpretative, and their claim that even prestigious events such as the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award* hosted by the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory are at fault for exhibiting artists without critiquing their work.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> John E. Stanton, *On Track: Contemporary Western Australian Aboriginal Art*, Occasional Paper no. 6. Berndt Museum of Anthropology (Perth: University of Western Australia, 2004), 14, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Charles 'Judin' Riley, artist statement from ArtGeo Gallery archive.

<sup>65</sup> Nicholas Rothwell, "Crossing the divide," *Weekend Australian*, April 3–4, 2004, R18–19.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Gough and Naylor, "Circuit Breaking? Indigenous Australian Art and Critical Discourse," 820–824.

## **BUNBURY REGIONAL ART GALLERIES' ROLE IN THE VALIDATION OF THE CARROLUP STYLE**

During the period interest in Carrolup and its legacy has been growing, Bunbury Regional Art Galleries has played a significant role in the process of validation. In 1999, Bunbury-born Noongar artist Troy Bennell was employed by the gallery as a cultural festival organiser. When the gallery became involved in a government-sponsored program designed to encourage members of the local Aboriginal community to take up art as a form of income generation, Bennell was employed as its Indigenous Arts Development Officer to work with the South West Development Commission on this project. The program became known as the South West Indigenous Arts Development Strategy and aim was to build a market for South West Noongar art through exhibitions and the creation of a website. In addition to skills development workshops held at the gallery and the South West Institute of Technology in Bunbury, the plan was to establish an artists' database, protect intellectual copyright, promote Noongar art to the tourist market and identify further funding opportunities.<sup>68</sup> Chadd, Bennell, Pickett and 'Swag' Taylor were involved in the workshops, passing on their knowledge, and Bennell curated a solo exhibition of Chadd's work at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries in 2001.<sup>69</sup>

I was Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries for part of the time the Indigenous Arts Development Strategy was being delivered. Although its intentions were well-meaning and there were many good outcomes, the overtly commercial focus encouraged the production of a lot of work that was designed to appeal to the tourist market. Native animals and interpretations of the Noongar concept of six seasons were popular subjects. Some artists adopted the Carrolup style, which has its origins in

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<sup>68</sup> Colleen Egan, "Tourism taps into art-wine mix," *Australian*, January 18, 2002; *Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Budget Submission & Business Plan 2004–05*, 6, 9, 14, n.p.; *Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Budget Submission & Business Plan 2005–06*, 6–7, 14, n.p. Initially the program was funded through an agreement with the South West Development Commission. Later annual funding was obtained from various Federal Government sources. In 2004, during my tenure as Director, the agreement between Bunbury Regional Art Galleries and the Commission was formalised in a Memorandum of Understanding.

<sup>69</sup> In "From Ink to Inkjet," in *South West Central*, 28, Croft describes Tjyllyungoo Lance Chadd and Troy Bennell running workshops in Bunbury. On several occasions Shane Pickett also worked with Bennell on the Indigenous arts development program. Pickett's work was exhibited at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries many times, including the *Bunbury Biennale 2003*.

Noongar country, whilst others adopted the dot painting technique. No-one at the Development Commission seemed concerned by the implications of artists appropriating a style of painting that did not originate in the South West. Nor did they appear to understand that it takes time for an artist to build their reputation through exposure and recognition in a variety of activities such as acquisition by public collections, rather than simply from sales. In my role as Director, I tried to draw attention to the complexities of the situation. But as a 'Wadjela', I felt I was in a difficult position, as if somehow the work was beyond critique because it was being produced by Aboriginal artists. So I decided to seek advice from John Stanton, a recognised expert in the field of contemporary Western Australian Aboriginal art.<sup>70</sup> We discussed the situation with representatives from the South West Development Commission and Troy Bennell. As a result, the Commission decided to concentrate on nurturing a handful of artists who had already shown some potential, rather than try to cover a wide base.<sup>71</sup> However, Sonya Dye, a former Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, was later critical of this approach:

One of my criticisms early on was the way the Noongar Arts Strategy was going was [that] there was no foundation work being done. There was no development of a product ... you had three or four people sitting at the top who were quite good, but couldn't make an actual living ... they're producing one or two works a month, if that. You can't base an industry on that. What if it was successful? You don't have enough product. And you can't rely on that small number of people at the top. You've got to build from the bottom up.<sup>72</sup>

Dye's statement provides a clear indication of the market-led approach that was guiding Aboriginal arts development in the region. She acknowledges a different agenda underpinned the gallery's Indigenous arts development program during her tenure, because that was how they attracted funding.<sup>73</sup> At that time, Bunbury Regional Art Galleries received funding for the program through the Australian Government's

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<sup>70</sup> For a brief discussion on the anthropological work of Prof. Ronald Berndt and Dr Catherine Berndt see Marcia Langton, "The Art of Being Aboriginal," in *Crossing Cultures*, 39–40; "Berndt Museum of Anthropology," *Berndt Museum of Anthropology*, accessed February 15, 2011, [www.berndt.uwa.edu.au/](http://www.berndt.uwa.edu.au/).

<sup>71</sup> Author's diary entry, October 11, 2004. The artists chosen included Troy Bennell, who was then informally re-titled Indigenous artist-in-residence.

<sup>72</sup> Sonya Dye, in discussion with author, October 16, 2008.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*



Indigenous Cultural Support program (ICS).<sup>74</sup> According to Dye, they were able to attract this funding, which supports the preservation and development of Indigenous culture at a community level, because they invited people from across the South West and Great Southern regions to connect with each other and their culture by taking part in some form of cultural activity. However, she recoiled from any expectations a distinctive Noongar style could emerge from the gallery's Indigenous arts development program.<sup>75</sup>

One of the things that bothers me, and sometimes I hear out there in abstract ideas [is] 'how are we going to develop a South West Noongar style'. And it makes me cringe. Nothing is going to develop out of all of this and it might not be a singular identifiable aesthetic ... This is not Papunya. We do not live in geographical and social isolation, with such a distinct lack of influences around us, that a sameness or a similarity or a distinctiveness like that will evolve in that way. We are a metropolitan, or suburban and urbanised environment with so many different influences, a myriad of value systems and cultural influences. And there's all the media, the electronic media. People here aren't immune because they're Noongar. They're influenced by that and they are members of a community and a society... There's the Carrolup influence, because it's historically there. But I hope that's all it is. I hope it's not how people think they have to paint.<sup>76</sup>

Dye's suggestion that Aboriginal artists in the South West do not live in geographic isolation and they have ready access to a myriad of influences and media is appropriate. However, her claim that an identifiable regional aesthetic could not emerge because the South West is not remote presumes isolation is a prerequisite for that to occur. This view reflects the 'urban' versus 'remote' dichotomy that Gough and Naylor and *Storylines* challenge. It also conflicts with Sandra Hill's claim that the seeds sown at Carrolup led to the development of a distinct and identifiable South West art:

"That's Nyungar art", people would say, and this has led to a uniqueness of presentation, unique to the South-West ... Carrolup was a significant event in our history and in our heritage. It was the Carrolup art that first sparked the emergence of this new kind of contemporary art.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Annual Report 2007–08* (Bunbury: Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, 2008), 20. See "Indigenous arts, language and repatriation," *Australian Government Department of Communications and the Arts*, accessed March 7, 2016, <http://arts.gov.au/indigenous>.

<sup>75</sup> Sonya Dye, in discussion with author, October 16, 2008.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Sandra Hill, introduction in *Past and Present*, 5.

Despite Dye's misgivings, the Carrolup legacy endures and Bunbury Regional Art Galleries continues to play a significant role in its validation through exposure in exhibitions such as *Noongar Country*. Although the gallery had exhibited Noongar art prior to my tenure as Director, in 2004 I decided to devote the entire building to a series of exhibitions of Indigenous art. As far as I could tell, this had never happened before in the gallery's history. The exhibitions were scheduled to coincide with NAIDOC Week – the National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observation Committee celebration of Indigenous culture that takes place in the first week of July every year. In 2004 the gallery's six-week event was called *Three Countries* because the work came from East Arnhem Land, the East Kimberly and the South West.<sup>78</sup> *Three Countries* comprised *Boongarl Yirel: Ngalang Waangkininy (Us Talking)* – recent work by Indigenous artists from the South West; *Manikay (Song Cycle)* – East Arnhem Land bark paintings from the Janet Holmes à Court collection; *On Track: Contemporary Western Australian Aboriginal Art* from the Berndt Museum of Anthropology collection; and Indigenous art from East Kimberly and East Arnhem Land from the Worsley Alumina Dhalwalgnu collection. Paintings and drawings by children from Djidi Djidi Aboriginal Primary School in Bunbury were also shown. In 2005 the event was called *Noongar Country* to reflect its focus on art produced in the South West of Western Australia. *Noongar Country* comprised *Boongarl Yirel* and *Noongar Moorditj* – both featuring work by Indigenous artists from the South West; *Allawah Grove Settlement* – photographs from the Berndt Museum of Anthropology collection depicting South West Noongar people; and works by children from Bunbury's Djidi Djidi Aboriginal Primary School.<sup>79</sup> *Noongar Country* remains a regular feature on the gallery's exhibition calendar, although its timing does not always coincide with NAIDOC Week. Moreover, the City of Bunbury has acquired work for its collection from *Noongar Country*, including works by Bennell, Chadd, 'Swag' Taylor and Hansen (Figures 80 to 83).

According to Pushman and Smith-Whalley, the transfer of knowledge to new generations is characteristic of Carrolup's cyclical nature and **Troy Bennell** is a good

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<sup>78</sup> *Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Budget Submission & Business Plan 2004–05*, 6, 9, 14. n.p.

<sup>79</sup> *Bunbury Regional Art Galleries Budget Submission & Business Plan 2005–06*, 4–5, 6–7, 14, n.p.

example of how this occurs.<sup>80</sup> Bennell has links with the original Carrolup artists through family connections. For example, his mother's eldest sister was married to Revel Cooper. In an interview conducted for the Berndt Museum of Anthropology in 2005, recorded in *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, he describes how his mother grew up on a reserve in Collie and recalls watching Reynold Hart and Revel Cooper paint.<sup>81</sup> Pushman and Smith-Whalley suggest Hart's influence can be traced in Bennell's work through his influence on Lance Chadd (Hart's nephew) and Shane Pickett, who both taught Bennell the principals of the Carrolup style.<sup>82</sup> Bennell claims Chadd and Pickett were the main influences on his early work, which most closely embodies the Carrolup style.<sup>83</sup>

I was working at the art gallery, organising the Nyungar festival and yeah we had organised Lance [Chadd] to come down to do some workshops and from a two-day workshop with Lance I took it on and never looked back, using watercolour landscapes. A couple of months after the workshops I put an entry into the south west survey and won Second Prize and I think being the first Nyungar to win an art prize on Bunbury. From there we did a workshop with Uncle Shane [Pickett] – a couple of days in Bunbury again ...<sup>84</sup>

The watercolour Bennell exhibited in *South West Central* in 2003 illustrates the monochrome technique he learnt from Chadd at these workshops at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries. He describes this painting titled *South-west landscape* as follows:

My paintings show the calmness of the land. In a lot of my paintings, I paint dead trees, the trees would not be like that if people had left the land the way it should be. This painting shows the 'blackboy' bush; this plant was important to Nyoongars for food, fire and shelter. Lance Chadd/Tjyllyungoo has been the main influence in teaching me how to paint in his spiritual landscape style.<sup>85</sup>

Bennell has exhibited widely in Western Australia and overseas and his work is represented in the Art Gallery of Western Australia collection.<sup>86</sup> His nostalgic painting

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<sup>80</sup> Pushman and Smith-Whalley, *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, 77–78.

<sup>81</sup> Troy Bennell quoted in *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, 77, 79.

<sup>82</sup> Pushman and Smith-Whalley, *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, 77.

<sup>83</sup> Croft and Gooding, *South West Central*, 28.

<sup>84</sup> Bennell quoted in *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, 77.

<sup>85</sup> "Troy Bennell, artist statement 2002," in *South West Central*, 68.

<sup>86</sup> "Troy Bennell," *Dictionary of Australian Artists Online*, accessed March 1, 2016, <https://www.dao.org.au/bio/troy-bennell/biography/>.

of a camp site at sunset *Fire on Pingelly Reserve* was acquired by the City of Bunbury collection from *Noongar Country* in 2009 (Figure 80). In 2010 Bennell resigned from his position as Indigenous Arts Development Officer at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries to pursue his career as an artist, dancer and cultural advocate. He now runs Ngalang Wongi Aboriginal Cultural Tours.<sup>87</sup> Sandra Hill took over the position as Indigenous Cultural Liaison Officer in 2012–13. The program ceased in 2014 when funding expired and the City of Bunbury took over the management of the gallery.

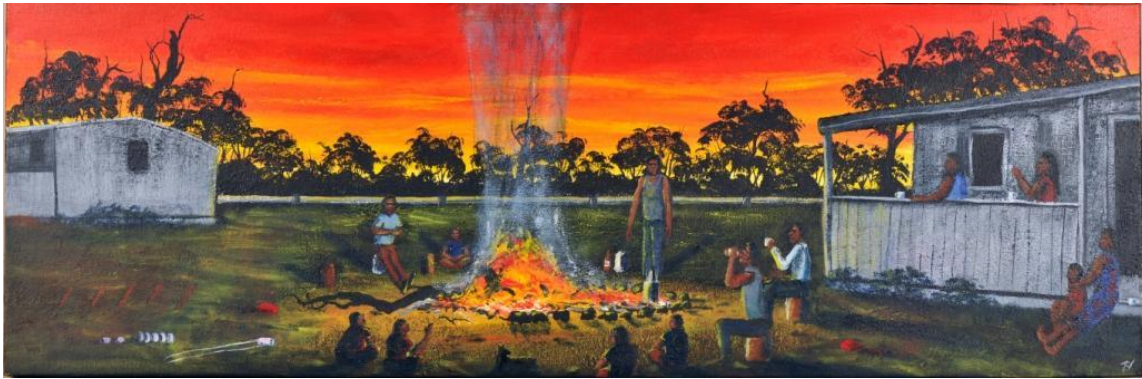


Figure 80 Troy Bennell *Fire on Pingelly Reserve* acrylic on canvas  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *Noongar Country* 2009 by BHP Billiton for the collection  
Photo: Paul Webster

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<sup>87</sup> “Ngalang Wongi Aboriginal Cultural Tours,” *Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Council*, accessed October 8, 2015, <http://www.waitoc.com/operator-info/ngalang-wongi-aboriginal-cultural-tours>.

**Tjyllyungoo Lance Chadd** is a self-taught artist who perpetuates the Carrolup style through his own work and his teaching. He was born in Bunbury but spent childhood in Meekatharra in the Mid West region then returned to the South West.<sup>88</sup> Chadd has links with the Carrolup child artists through family connections. In an interview recorded in *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, he says he learnt to paint in the Carrolup style through the influence of his uncles Reynold Hart and Alan Kelly (b. 1939) who were both at Carrolup.<sup>89</sup> He was also influenced by his uncle Parnell Dempster (1936–2000) and is related to Revel Cooper.<sup>90</sup>

I grew up around the Carrolup Mission style paintings with my two uncles mainly, Alan Kelly ...and Uncle Reynold [Hart] ... So I was always very interested in art and landscape ... the gouache type landscape that I do now and that I have been teaching ... its origins are in that old Carrolup Mission style. I'm quite proud of the fact that there are a lot of Nyungars learning that particular style of landscape now – just using one colour on white paper and because it's like another little art movement that's come out of Carrolup ... There's still a lot of people that are doing that particular style ... There are others like myself and Shane who have moved in a lot of different areas but we can always go back there and I teach that Carrolup style as part of my course at the TAFE in Bunbury ... we still maintain that style as well as other things so we keep it going as well the best we can.<sup>91</sup>

Chadd has exhibited widely in Australia and overseas and his work is represented in many collections. He has participated in numerous exhibitions and workshops at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries.<sup>92</sup> In 2002, Troy Bennell curated a solo exhibition of Chadd's work. The work shown in Bunbury resembled paintings exhibited in *South West Central*. On that occasion, Chadd acknowledged Albert Namatjira and Hans Heysen were influences, but an artist's statement claims his paintings affirm his affinity with the land of his heritage.<sup>93</sup> The painting acquired for the City of Bunbury collection from *Noongar Country* in 2010 depicts magpies in a South West landscape. The motif of the magpie has a particular significance to Chadd (Figure 81).

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<sup>88</sup> Stanton, *Past and Present*, 12.

<sup>89</sup> Pushman and Smith Walley, *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, 73, 75.

<sup>90</sup> Stanton, *Past and Present*, 12; Croft and Gooding, *South West Central*, 28; *Nyungar Art from the South–West Region of Western Australia*, 8–9.

<sup>91</sup> Tjyllyungoo Lance Chadd quoted in *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, 73, 75.

<sup>92</sup> "Lance Chadd," *Dictionary of Australian Artists Online*, accessed March 1, 2016, <https://www.daa.org.au/bio/lance-chadd/biography/>.

<sup>93</sup> Croft and Gooding, *South West Central*, 28, 48–49. The City of Bunbury collection acquired a watercolour titled *Blue Summer* in this style from Chadd's 2002 show at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries.



Figure 81 Tjlyungoo Lance Chadd Nyoongarah Wirdanginy 2010 acrylic on canvas 70 x 70cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: Noongar Country 2010 by BHP Billiton for the collection  
Photo: Paul Webster

According to *Storylines*, many artists paint ‘country’ to express a sense of loss and nostalgia for pre-colonial times.<sup>94</sup> This sentiment pervades much of **Graham ‘Swag’ Taylor’s** paintings of landscape and childhood memories. Taylor was born in Merredin in the Wheatbelt. He spent his early years living on a reserve near Kellerberrin. At the age of thirteen he was sent to Roelands Mission Farm. When he was seventeen he spent time in Fremantle Prison where he saw work by Carrolup artists, including Revel Cooper. Taylor claims learning the Carrolup style from them has been an on-going source of inspiration, and he has also been influenced by Namatjira and Chadd.<sup>95</sup>

Taylor recalls walking to the top of a hill at Roelands and looking towards Bunbury where his grandmother was born.<sup>96</sup> The *Storylines Project* records that he painted this view of his grandmother’s country as he imagined it would have looked before settlement.<sup>97</sup> When the painting called *Tijnang Koomba Kep (Look Big Water)* was exhibited in Perth in 2007 McLean described it as melancholy, as if Taylor’s good memories have been tainted by loss.<sup>98</sup> This melancholic mood pervades Taylor’s painting *Mission Boy*, which recalls an episode at Roelands when he was beaten for running away and then left alone in a bare room. In 2008 *Mission Boy* was shortlisted for the 25th *Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards* and in 2009 it was shown in *The Legacy of Koorah Coolingah* in Brisbane.<sup>99</sup> Taylor has also exhibited overseas and his work is represented in many collections. He has taken part in numerous exhibitions at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries.<sup>100</sup> Laura Fisher worked on the *Storylines Project*. She claims Taylor describes the naturalistic South West landscape tradition as ‘imagining where you want to be in country’ and painting it as you see it.<sup>101</sup> His painting *Peaceful Place*, acquired for the City of Bunbury collection from *Noongar Country 2011*, captures this sentiment (Figure 82).

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<sup>94</sup> Johnson, Allas and Fisher, *This Side of the Frontier: Storylines Full Report*, 22.

<sup>95</sup> “Swag Graham Taylor,” *Design & Art Australia Online*, accessed March 1, 2016, <https://www.daa.org.au/bio/swag-graham-taylor/>.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Johnson, Allas and Fisher, *This Side of the Frontier: Storylines Full Report*, 22.

<sup>98</sup> Ian McLean, “saltwaterfresh,” *Artlink* 27, no. 2 (June 2007), accessed March 2, 2016, <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/2977/saltwaterfreshwater/>.

<sup>99</sup> “Swag Graham Taylor,” *Design & Art Australia Online*.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Johnson, Allas and Fisher, *This Side of the Frontier: Storylines Full Report*, 22–23; Laura Fisher, “Romantic Landscapes,” *Artlink* 31, no. 2 (2011): 84.





Figure 82 Graham 'Swag' Taylor *Peaceful Place* 2011 acrylic on canvas 120 x 180cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: *Noongar Country* 2011 by BHP Billiton and donated to the collection  
Photo: Paul Webster



McLean describes the art of the 'Carrolup Gum Tree School' as:

... electric compositions in which all aspects of the scene are animated by a restless energetic spirit similar to magic realism.<sup>102</sup>

**Philip Hansen's** paintings embody this spirit. His vibrant colours reflect the high-keyed palette favoured by Revel Cooper.<sup>103</sup> Hansen was born in Katanning. He spent some of his childhood at Carrolup.<sup>104</sup> He now lives in Collie. In October 2011, his work was shown in *Revealed: Emerging Aboriginal Artists from Western Australia*, an exhibition of work from urban areas, regions and remote communities staged during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth in 2011.<sup>105</sup> The aim of *Revealed* was to showcase art grounded in country that is embedded with stories of place and connection.<sup>106</sup> According to the exhibition curator Carly Lane, 'being on the radar' of art world professionals helps artists build sustainable careers and leads to their representation in exhibitions, collections and many other opportunities for increasing visibility.<sup>107</sup>

Hansen exhibits widely and his work is represented in several collections. He has participated in many exhibitions at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries and his work is represented in the City of Bunbury collection (Figure 83). *Bushboy Hill – Kangaroo Dip at Dawn*, acquired for the collection from *Noongar Country* in 2012, illustrates Hansen's vibrant use of colour to depict an imaginary scene that typifies the style of Noongar landscape painting that McLean describes as magic realism.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> McLean, "New histories of Australian art," 21.

<sup>103</sup> See Croft and Gooding, *South West Central*, 44, 45.

<sup>104</sup> "Philip Hansen", *Dictionary of Australian Artists Online*, accessed March 1, 2016; <https://www.daa.org.au/bio/philip-hansen/biography/>.

<sup>105</sup> *Revealed: Emerging Aboriginal Artists from Western Australia*, 24 October to 12 November 2011 (Perth: Central Institute of Technology, 2011), 12, 26. Exhibition catalogue.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>107</sup> Carly Lane, "Reveal, Revealed, Revealing: The New in Western Australian Aboriginal Art," in *Revealed: Emerging Aboriginal Artists from Western Australia*, 8.

<sup>108</sup> McLean, "saltwaterfresh," in *Artlink*. See Fisher, "Romantic Landscapes," *Artlink*, 84.

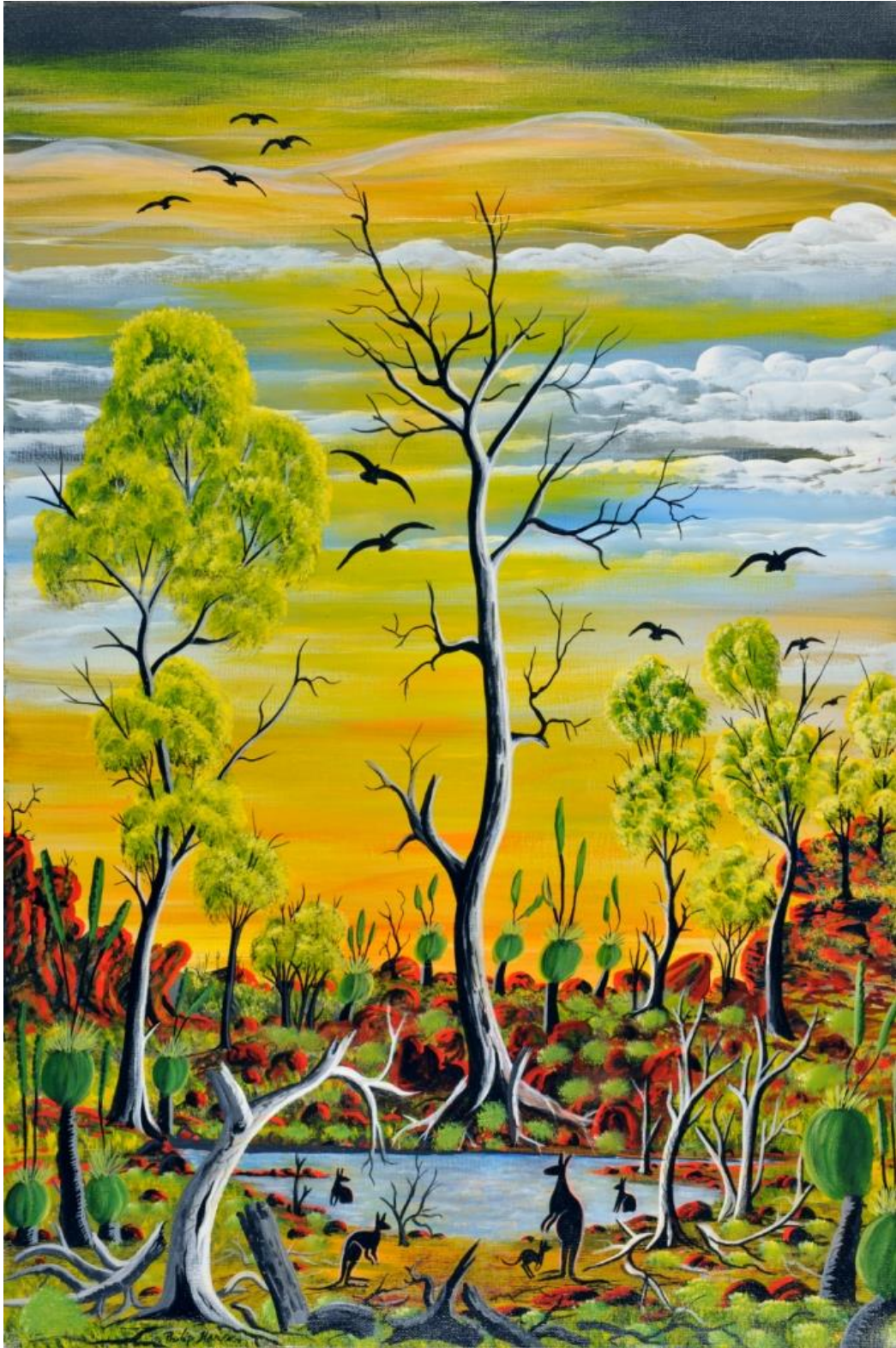


Figure 83 Philip Hansen *Bushboy Hill – Kangaroo Dip at Dawn* 2012 acrylic on canvas 76 x 50.5cms  
Collection: City of Bunbury  
Acquired: Noongar Country 2012  
Photo: Paul Webster

## CONCLUSION

Labels of identification will always be used by the art world to categorise artists and artworks. However, this chapter has shown that labelling Aboriginal art as ‘urban’ or ‘remote’, ‘traditional’ or ‘contemporary’ oversimplifies its origins, intent and the context of its production. Stanton suggests sense of country and belonging are central features of much Aboriginal art in remote and settled areas.<sup>109</sup> Sandra Hill claims Carrolup sparked the emergence of a new kind of contemporary art in the South West that tells stories about the process of colonisation and people removed from their land.<sup>110</sup> As a form of critique on the effect of settlement in a specific environment, I suggest the Carrolup style relates to Smith’s notion of contemporary art shaped by local and anti-colonial values. As a response to the significance of place within a recognised ideal of the picturesque landscape, it also relates to the concept of critical regionalism, creating a dialogue between local conditions and a far broader issue. Artists have chosen to use the Carrolup style of landscape painting to tell stories about their connection to country and reclaim their land symbolically. If, as McLean suggests, this agency has arisen from a ‘culture of de-colonisation’, then I propose the Carrolup style could be described as ‘postcolonial picturesque’.<sup>111</sup>

Through its circulation in a series of exhibitions and catalogues, and recent research, the story of the emergence of the Carrolup style and its continuation has gained exposure. Although its legitimacy has always been apparent to Noongar people, this increased visibility has helped to generate recognition from a wider audience. So whilst some people may continue to struggle to understand its validity as ‘real’ Aboriginal art because it employs a picturesque convention of the idealised landscape rather than dots to tell stories about connection to country, the inclusion of the continuing legacy of Carrolup within national histories of Aboriginal art may help to dispel this type of misunderstanding.

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<sup>109</sup> Stanton, *On Track: Contemporary Western Australian Aboriginal Art*, 11, 15.

<sup>110</sup> Hill, introduction to *Past and Present*, 5–6.

<sup>111</sup> McLean, “New histories of Australian art,” 21.

So in response to Bromfield's suggestion that there is a scarcity of Indigenous art in the 'commonplace profile' of South West contemporary art, I suggest the Carrolup style of landscape painting could be an example of what Smith calls:

... the kind of contemporary art that locates itself at the emotional core of a culture that seems to have nothing that is contemporary about it, yet persists in our time.<sup>112</sup>

Consequently, I propose the continuation of the Carrolup style can be considered a legitimate form of contemporary art on its own terms, with special significance to Noongars in the South West of Western Australia.

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<sup>112</sup> Smith, "Coda: Canons and Contemporaneity," in *Partisan Canons*, 321.

## **CHAPTER TEN**

### **KATHERINE HALL: CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS AND COLLABORATIONS**

**I think of my process as a practice of listening. I am not overly interested in telling a story through my work – though stories are told.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Katherine Hall, artist's statement, *Making Art*, 2009.



Figure 84 Katherine Hall 2007  
Photo: Diana McGirr

## INTRODUCTION

Katherine Hall is a well travelled and accomplished artist and educator who specialises in drawing as a process of investigation and self-discovery. She is interested in connections between people and landscapes and cross-cultural collaboration. In 2000 Katherine moved from Melbourne to the small coastal community of Gracetown near Margaret River, to focus on her art.<sup>2</sup> Drawing on Smith's proposition that exploring sustainable relationships with specific social and natural environments is a key trend in contemporary art, this chapter explores the evolution of Katherine's work from observation to conceptualised mark-making through a process she calls 'letting go' in response to cross-cultural encounters with Aboriginal people and their country. I begin with a short preamble to illustrate how Katherine's interest in art and Indigenous communities began, and how she reached the point where she decided to focus on her drawing full-time. The chapter concludes with an epilogue about a recent collaborative project and her current thoughts about her practice now that she is in a period of transition. I enlist Katherine's voice throughout the narrative to augment my account, drawing on interview dialogue, email correspondence and excerpts from artist's statements that express her intentions.

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<sup>2</sup> I refer to Katherine Hall by her first name to reflect our intersubjective relationship.

## EARLY ASPIRATIONS 1980–2000

Katherine was born on Christmas Island off the coast of Western Australia in 1961. Western Australia is her home State, but she has spent many years travelling – living, working, studying and drawing elsewhere. Initially, she trained in catering and hotel management, and left Australia in the early 1980s to work in Japan and Europe. In 1983-84 she studied drawing, painting and sculpture at the Studieförbundet in Sweden. She then went to Orkney in Scotland where she met her future husband Peter Spence. Katherine returned to Australia in 1985 and moved to Melbourne, where she attended the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA). Shortly before she graduated from the VCA in 1990 with a Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art) majoring in drawing, Peter joined her in Melbourne. When she finished art school, they set off travelling around Australia for twelve months. During this time, they spent three months at Pipalyatjara, an Aboriginal community in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in South Australia. In 1991 they went to live in Orkney for two years. Shortly before they returned to Melbourne, Katherine held her first solo exhibition titled *When Does the Boat Sail* at the Bu Gallery in Stromness, in October 1993. A review in the Orkney newspaper described the exhibition as ‘skilful’ landscape drawings, an exile’s wistful yearning for home.<sup>3</sup> Some years later, lured by her love of the ocean and family links with Western Australia, Katherine and Peter left Melbourne where they had been living and she had been working as a cook. They moved to Gracetown near Margaret River, where she set up a studio in their hill-top home overlooking the Indian Ocean and devoted her time to drawing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *The Orcadian*, October 28, 1993. Photocopy of newspaper article provided by Katherine Hall.

<sup>4</sup> Katherine Hall, *Forgotten Places*, January–February 2002 (Bunbury: Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, 2002). Exhibition brochure; Katherine Hall, unrecorded conversation with author.



## **OBSERVATION AND MEDITATION 2001–2003**

When Katherine first arrived in Gracetown her drawing style was based on a process of observation and response to her immediate surroundings. Drawing, she said in 2001, helped her understand the environment and find her place within it.<sup>5</sup> Ocean views, horizons and trees were her primary subjects. Charcoal, pastel, and pen and ink were her preferred drawing materials. The large charcoal drawing *Burial Ground* (Figure 85) illustrates the type of work Katherine produced during this period. At first sight the drawing of trees looks naturalistic – an unassuming representation of natural forms drawn in and from nature. White space bottom-right draws us into the composition, and our eye is led diagonally left to right through the receding line of trees. Criss-crossing limbs and shading suggest we are looking at real objects, but there is no depth-of-field. This is a stylised illusion of nature. It is based on observation, but the drawing is deliberately ambiguous. The response the drawing received when it was shown in the 2001 *Bunbury Biennale* marks the moment Katherine’s reputation began to grow. As discussed in chapter five, the *Bunbury Biennale* is considered one of the most prestigious exhibitions in the South West. *Burial Ground* is one of two works Katherine elected to exhibit in the 2001 *Biennale* when she was selected to participate. Her selection as one of six artists from the South West in a field of eighteen exhibitors, and the acquisition of *Burial Ground* by the City of Bunbury immediately raised her profile (see Figure 55, chapter seven).<sup>6</sup>

A few months later in January–February 2002, Katherine held a solo exhibition titled *Forgotten Places* at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries. The exhibition comprised sketches and studies of coastal bushland and ocean views, in charcoal, pastel, pen and ink, and a sand installation. Many of the works were in the linear style of *Burial Ground*. At the time I recorded an interview Katherine gave on ABC Radio South West shortly before the exhibition opened. Coupled with the information provided in an illustrated catalogue published by Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, this interview provides good insight into Katherine’s motivations and creative process. She talks about childhood

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<sup>5</sup> “Drawing with a passion,” *Busselton–Margaret River Times*, Thursday, July 5, 2001, 17.

<sup>6</sup> *Bunbury Biennale 2001*, 8 September to 14 October 2001.



Figure 85 Katherine Hall *Burial Ground* 2001 charcoal on paper 150.5 x 250cms  
City of Bunbury Collection  
Acquired: *Bunbury Biennale* 2001  
Photo: Paul Webster

memories of the South West, her love for the ocean, her sense of being in a familiar place, and her feeling of being part of the environment when she is drawing.<sup>7</sup> In the exhibition catalogue she describes drawing as a meditative process; attracted by the shapes of natural objects in her immediate environment, she claims to disappear into her drawing and into her surroundings.<sup>8</sup> In this meditative place of communion her intense observation evolves into a deeply reflective process. Drawing, she suggests, exists as questioning and expression: 'It is an act of listening, rather than telling.'<sup>9</sup> *Burial Ground* illustrates this 'listening' process. The drawing depicts natural forms, but the composition's spatial ambiguity can be read as an allusion to the contemplative frame-of-mind Katherine enters when she is drawing; so that rather than 'telling' a specific locale through descriptive representation, she creates a symbolic illusion of nature that reflects her approach and preoccupations.

The exposure Katherine received from her selection for the *Bunbury Biennale*, the acquisition of her work for the City of Bunbury Collection and *Forgotten Places*, plus her participation in Bunbury Regional Art Galleries' *South West Survey* in February 2001 and 2002, drew the attention of Paul Uhlmann, a respected painter and printmaker and Head of the School of Visual Arts at Edith Cowan University's South West Campus. In 2002, Paul invited Katherine to teach drawing part-time at Edith Cowan. That was when I met Katherine because I was also working at Edith Cowan teaching visual art theory. Katherine later became Head of Visual Arts, but in 2006 she felt strongly about changes that had been made to the degree and she left to concentrate on her own drawing practice. Her decision to leave coincided with the establishment of a new studio in Cowaramup, a few kilometres from her home in Gracetown (Figure 86). She describes her studio as a place of silence and retreat that complements her contemplative method of drawing as an act of listening.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Helena Webb, in discussion with Katherine Hall, *ABC Radio South West*, January 2001. Author's recording.

<sup>8</sup> Hall, *Forgotten Places*, n.p.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Katherine Hall, unrecorded conversation with author.

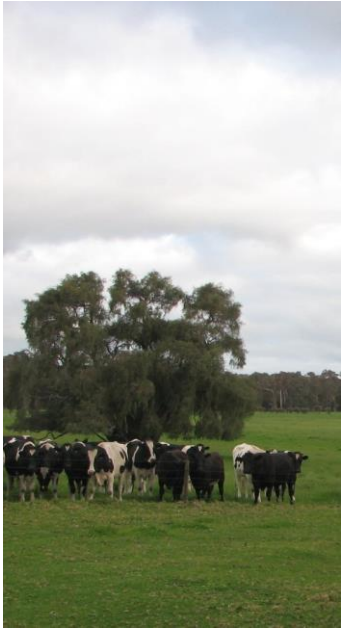


Figure 86 Katherine's studio in Cowaramup. The interior shows one of her ochre and charcoal drawings following her residency at Warmun Aboriginal Art Centre in 2003.  
Photos: Diana McGirr

## **'LETTING GO' 2003–2007**

In 2003, three years before she left her teaching job at Edith Cowan University and established her new studio, Katherine embarked on a journey that would lead to a radical transformation in her approach to drawing. This process began when she commenced a Master of Arts degree at Curtin University investigating the act of drawing. As part of her studies, she volunteered to work at Warmun and Waringarri Aboriginal Art Centres in the Kimberley region of Western Australia for three months. Katherine says she saw the residency as an opportunity to learn more about Indigenous people and their relationship with landscape, and as a way to address some personal fears and uncertainties:<sup>11</sup>

In the beginning extensive drawing of the area [Gracetown] helped to orientate me. At one point the obsession with the horizon was difficult to remove from my work. That vision which I see every day as I look out to sea from my home here in Gracetown. It was partly because of this block that I sought the residency in the Kimberley.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly before she headed for Warmun in July 2003, Katherine organised a landscape drawing workshop in Gracetown. She invited Wardandi Elder Vilma Webb (d. 2013) to share her knowledge of the flora, fauna and history of the area with a group of artists from Gracetown and Margaret River.<sup>13</sup> Gracetown had been a site of human tragedy, and according to Katherine, Vilma said the drawing project could help to heal the sorrow of the land.<sup>14</sup> Together with her experience at Pipalyatjara in South Australia in 1990, this episode shows that Katherine was already actively engaged in a cross-cultural exchange with Aboriginal people prior to her residency at Warmun.

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<sup>11</sup> Katherine Hall, "Volunteering: The Warmun Experience," *RRR Network News*, Katanning: Department of Agriculture (Autumn 2005): 12–13. Katherine's residency was arranged through the Indigenous Community Volunteer program. Waringarri Art Centre is in Kununurra in the far north of Western Australia. Warmun is about two hundred kilometres south of Kununurra, and was formerly known as Turkey Creek.

<sup>12</sup> Hall, *Making Art*.

<sup>13</sup> The Wardandi are members of the Indigenous Noongar population in the South West of Western Australia.

<sup>14</sup> Katherine Hall, *Drawing from the Land*, 2004, workshop report. Nine lives were lost in a rock fall in Gracetown during a school surfing carnival 1996.

Katherine's journey to Warmun included a flight from Broome to Kununurra across Kimberley country. Her description of this country evokes a sense of time and place:

Below the land changed from waterways cutting their way through the earth like veins in a leaf, amazing milky green colours on white sand, to deep cut snake like rivers in red earth scattered with low 'dot' like bushes. More change revealed dryer land and I travelled for some time over some quite flat country before the hills began, with their rings and lines. I was inspired to draw – and hoped that some of those images would stay with me and make their way into my cells to emerge in drawings to come. Later, Hector Jandany, the oldest and most respected artist at Warmun, informed me that the lines on the earth and around the hills are water marks from when all that area was under water.<sup>15</sup>

The description shows Katherine planned to spend some of her time in the Kimberley drawing. She also planned to share her skills with the Indigenous artists at Warmun, but it seems events took a different course. Firstly, she says she decided it was not her place to tell the artists to work differently when they were busy telling their stories their own way.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, she says she found the landscape so overwhelming she was unable to release her artist's block.<sup>17</sup> So she busied herself with the practical day-to-day activities associated with running the art centre: assisting the artists by cataloguing, photographing and packing their artworks; writing up their stories; helping in the shop; and showing a steady stream of visitors around the arts centre.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, it seems she was developing a deeper understanding of her place in the community's complex cultural and family structure:

My understanding is that in order to have a better understanding of their relationship to people coming into the community they place them within their family structure ... After I was there for a while, I was thinking, I've probably been slotted into this system and I was curious about it ... And eventually I asked somebody 'do I have a skin name?' ... And then somebody told me you are 'nangarri' ... It means crow... Then Nancy came up to me and said, 'I'm your Mum' ... It kind of placed me.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Hall, "Volunteering: The Warmun Experience," 12–13.

<sup>16</sup> Katherine Hall, in discussion with author, October 13, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> "Towering panels reflect journey in the Kimberley," *South Western Times*, Thursday, February 26, 2004, 4; "Landscape inspires cultural revelation," *Busselton–Margaret Times*, Thursday, March 4, 2004, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Hall, "Volunteering: The Warmun Experience," 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

In addition to the extraordinary cultural experience, Katherine's residency at Warmun represents a landmark episode in the evolution of her drawing practice. Despite her initial artist's block, the insights she gained from this experience ultimately led to the radical breakthrough she sought, but not until she realised her 'struggle to capture the Kimberley landscape' actually involved a process of 'letting go'.<sup>20</sup> Katherine's liberation was clearly perceptible when she unveiled her new approach to drawing at the 2004 *South Western Survey* (Figures 87 and 88). The untitled drawing comprises four large paper panels densely covered with short vertical marks. It signals her evolution from meditative observation of natural forms and landscape to a more conceptual and materially-driven process of expressive mark-making. It is visual evidence that Warmun profoundly re-shaped her approach to drawing, as well as her perceptions of Indigenous culture and people.<sup>21</sup> Every year the announcement of the winner of the *Survey's* premier award on opening night is a charged moment, creating murmurs of approval or surprise in the awaiting crowd. As Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries at that time, I had invited John Stringer to judge and present the awards, and in the catalogue I had written:

No doubt in time honoured tradition, this popular annual showcase will spark passionate debate amongst artists and audiences alike ... I'm sure everyone will have an opinion.<sup>22</sup>

When Stringer announced Katherine as the recipient of the *Survey's* premier award he described her drawing as 'impressive in its scale and extreme simplicity'.<sup>23</sup> His evaluation of her work was a clear sign of approval from a significant figure in the art world. Katherine said she had deliberately chosen to leave the drawing untitled to speak for itself, hoping that while it may not tell the story, it would speak about the Kimberley and her experience, and let people find their own emotional response.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Towering panels reflect journey in the Kimberley; "Landscape inspires cultural revelation".

<sup>21</sup> "Landscape inspires cultural revelation".

<sup>22</sup> de Bussy, *South Western Times Survey 2004*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> "Abstraction and innovation," *Augusta–Margaret River Mail*, February 25, 2004; "Landscape inspires cultural revelation".

<sup>24</sup> "Towering panels reflect journey in the Kimberley"; "Landscape inspires cultural revelation".



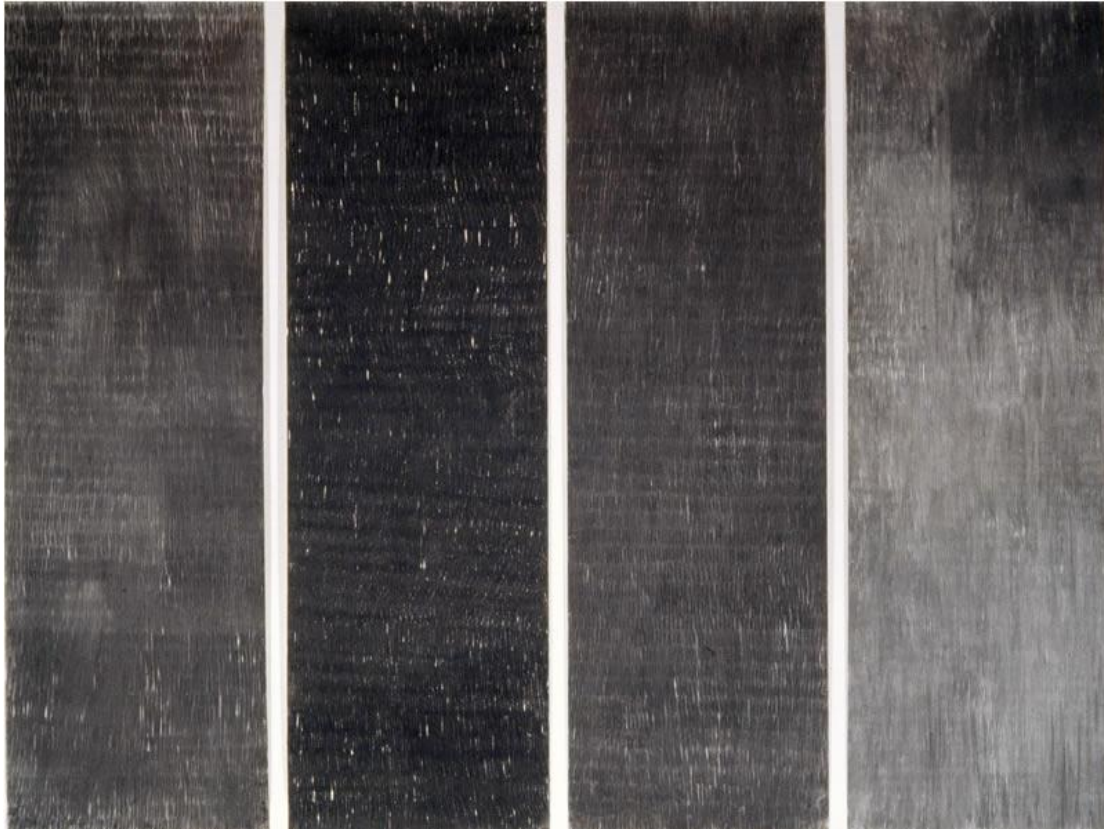


Figure 87 *Untitled* 2004 charcoal on paper (dimensions unavailable)  
 Photo: Katherine Hall



Figure 88 Scanned newspaper cutting from *Busselton-Margaret River Times* showing Katherine Hall sitting beside *Untitled* after winning the premier award at the 2004 *South Western Times Survey*.



Curators often debate whether the explanation of artworks is an imposition or an aid to understanding. Poorly-placed information can be distracting, but from the perspective of a curator and former gallery director who believes audience development extends beyond visitor numbers, unobtrusive information can help to illuminate an artist's intentions. Information provides a way in for people who may be unfamiliar with non-representational art forms. Positioned in isolation on a wall in an alcove in the former chapel, Katherine's towering charcoal panels could be appreciated for their formal visual properties, intense repetitive patterning, and her handling of the medium without reference to any cultural source. However, knowing the drawing had evolved out of a profound creative journey adds a layer of understanding and meaning and detracts nothing from the work's visual properties.

Katherine claims her three month residency in the Kimberley was the most significant episode of the two-year investigation that led to her Masters degree.<sup>25</sup> In addition to fresh insight, she brought tangible objects back to the South West from the Kimberley, in the form of some ochre given to her by senior Warmun artists Hector Jandany (1927–2006) and Patrick Mung Mung (b. c1944).<sup>26</sup> Katherine used these materials to create a new body of work in ochre and charcoal for her graduating exhibition. The exhibition titled *Line Mark Time* was held at Fremantle Arts Centre in 2004. In an accompanying pamphlet she thanks Hector Jandany and Patrick Mung Mung for giving her permission to use their local ochres and acknowledges how the change of environment had produced such a major shift in her work.<sup>27</sup> Katherine's University mentor, artist and lecturer Paul Moncrieff, wrote a supporting statement suggesting drawing is often considered a preliminary activity that precedes the production of 'serious' art work, but Katherine had chosen to investigate the act of drawing and use it to document a personal response to particular sites. He claims the subtle tonal qualities of Katherine's large scale drawings are a measure of her immersion in this process and command of the medium.<sup>28</sup> Whilst Moncrieff does not clarify what he means when he

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<sup>25</sup> Katherine Hall, *Line Mark Time*, 2004. Exhibition brochure.

<sup>26</sup> See Frances Kofod, "Hector Jandany: 1927–2006 painter, teacher of culture," *Artlink* 26, no. 4 (2006), 76–77.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, n.p.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Moncrieff, in *Line Mark Time*, n.p.

says that the drawings cannot be compared to a conventional response to site, he suggests they offer a rewarding sensory experience that results from ‘letting go’ of representation.<sup>29</sup> Visually and materially, Katherine’s drawings are a symbolic dialogue between people and country, and her use of earth-bound materials says a great deal about her interaction with a particular landscape and culture.

In 2005 Katherine exhibited again in the *Bunbury Biennale* at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, and in a group show called *Eight* at Vasse Felix Winery and Gallery in Cowaramup – now known as the Holmes à Court Gallery. *Eight* was co-curated by Judith Roche – one of the artists – and Anne Meredith Wylie who was then Curator of the Janet Holmes à Court collection. According to Roche, the exhibition comprised a group of artists who had chosen to stay in the South West on completion of their tertiary studies despite the perceived limitations of being in a regional environment, such as distance from the metropolitan art scene. She suggests that if the region exerts any influence on art production landscape might be the common theme of a cohesive yet varied body of work.<sup>30</sup> Katherine exhibited two series of drawings in *Eight* using the ochres given to her by Hector Jandany (Figure 89). These drawings employ the same intense, rhythmic mark-making method she used to produce the untitled charcoal panels that won the *Survey* in 2004 and the body of works she exhibited in *Line Mark Time*. In her artist’s statement for *Eight* and the 2005 *Bunbury Biennale* she claims:

Drawing can be seen as marks intentionally made which tell of the action of making. One mark speaks of a moment in time. A combination of marks speaks of a process, an activity a relationship. The suggestion of time by the accumulation of marks speaks of a moment midway between past and future, that moment constantly forming and constantly passing away.<sup>31</sup>

Unfortunately neither catalogue explains the origin of Katherine’s ochres and yet their materiality is an intrinsic characteristic of her work. They embody the relationship between her drawing process and the people, places and ideas that inspire her work.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Judith Roche, introduction to *Eight*, 30 July to 11 September 2005, Vasse Felix Winery & Gallery. Exhibition brochure.

<sup>31</sup> Katherine Hall, in *Eight*, n.p.; Katherine Hall, in *Bunbury Biennale 2005*, n.p.



Figure 89 *Untitled* 2005 (5 panels) charcoal and ochre on board (dimensions unavailable)

Photo: Katherine Hall



Figure 90 Katherine Hall's *Drawing* exhibition at Perth Galleries, June 2007

Photo: Diana McGirr

The evolution of Katherine's drawing from contemplative observation to symbolic mark-making coincides with its circulation beyond the South West. Her inclusion in the *Bunbury Biennale* in 2001, 2005 and 2007 had already exposed her work in a wider context. Katherine's selection for the *BankWest Contemporary Art Prize* at Perth Institute of Contemporary Art in 2004 and 2006 further endorsed her reputation.<sup>32</sup> A solo exhibition titled *Drawing* held at Perth Galleries in North Fremantle in June 2007, and her subsequent inclusion amongst the artists they represented, provides further evidence of the recognition and exposure she was receiving (Figure 90).<sup>33</sup>

### **MINE AND TWO WAYS 2008–2010**

In early 2008, Katherine accepted a job in Western Australia's energy and resources industry to help sustain her studio practice. She worked off-shore on an oil rig on the North West Shelf on a twenty-eight day fly-in-fly-out roster. Although she says she sometimes resented being away from home and lacked time for drawing whilst working off-shore, Katherine turned this challenging situation to her advantage, spending valuable time in the studio when she was home reflecting on issues close to her heart, including an on-going investigation of the relationship between people and country.<sup>34</sup> Katherine drew on her off-shore experience and the 'extraordinary environment' of the oil rig to produce a body of work for her first solo exhibition interstate.<sup>35</sup> The exhibition titled *Mine* was held at Mossenson Galleries in Melbourne in June 2009 (Figure 91). Mossenson, a respected commercial gallery with premises in Perth and Melbourne, specialises in Aboriginal art. Katherine's show was scheduled purposely to coincide with an exhibition of work by senior artists from Waringarri and in a symbolic gesture her drawings were installed alongside their works<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> "BankWest Contemporary Art Prize," *Perth Institute of Contemporary Art*, accessed September 23, 2010, <http://pica.org.au/view.php?l=BankWest+Contemporary+Art+Prize&2=173>.

<sup>33</sup> *Perth Galleries*, accessed September 23, 2010, [www.perthgalleries.com.au/artists/hall.htm](http://www.perthgalleries.com.au/artists/hall.htm). Perth Galleries closed at the end of 2012 when the owner, Norah Ohrt, went to live in Spain.

<sup>34</sup> Katherine Hall, unrecorded conversation with author.

<sup>35</sup> Katherine Hall, artist's statement, *Mine*, April 2009.

<sup>36</sup> *Mossenson Galleries*, accessed September 23, 2010, [www.indigenart.com.au/\\_common/frames.asp?content=content/about.asp](http://www.indigenart.com.au/_common/frames.asp?content=content/about.asp).



Figure 91 Collage of images showing Katherine Hall unmasking one of her art works for *Mine* at her studio in Cowaramup and the works on exhibition at Mossenson Galleries in Melbourne in June 2009. Photos: Diana McGirr and Katherine Hall

Though *Mine* is a series of works which reflects thoughts about the mining industry, the medium and process comes from a way of working which arose from a three month residency in the Kimberley. Here the use of ochre and iron oxides raise questions of ownership and difference. The work explores my personal experience of indigenous and cultural issues, mining and the environment. These are being played out through the materials and the inspired patterning of the structures which dominate the daily skyline off shore.<sup>37</sup>

According to Katherine, the view from the floating platform was filled with cranes silhouetted against the horizon. This panoramic spectacle inspired a series of works about perception and how it changes depending on the way we see things. She suggests different visual viewpoints are a metaphor for personal change:

A fascination with positive and a negative space, probably arising out of my drawing background, encouraged me to see these cranes as patterns, leading to a series of works reflecting a play with symbols and shapes ... A lot of the images might be seen in different ways ... like the box which at first appears to be open at the top, then suddenly appears on its side.<sup>38</sup>

*Mine* can be read from a number of perspectives. At first this body of work appears far removed from the semi-naturalistic drawings Katherine produced before 2003, such as *Burial Ground*, where observation of landscape was the principal consideration. In *Mine* she adopted an approach to drawing that treats the formal properties of line and shape as the principal visual concern. Yet the optical effects she produced with geometric forms made up of squares and triangles can be viewed as a logical evolution from the landscape drawings and the way those earlier works played around with natural shapes and shallow depth-of-field. It is then possible to imagine the artist 'disappearing' into her surroundings on the oil rig, lying on her back and gazing up into the starry night sky through the structure of a crane. The relationship between the drawings produced for *Mine* and the works Katherine produced after her residency at Warmun provides another reading on a more conceptual level. For example, she claims a series of small drawings called *Building Blocks* were an extension of the process she developed on her return from Warmun (Figure 92).<sup>39</sup> Through her use of materials mined from the earth

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<sup>37</sup> Hall, *Mine*.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*.





Figure 92 *Building Blocks* 2009 acrylic and ochre on board 15 x 15 x 4.5cms (multiples)  
Photos: Diana McGirr

by senior Warmun artists, she integrates her ideas into a body of work that contextualises and personalises an otherwise formal investigation of geometry.<sup>40</sup>

In 2009 Katherine exhibited new drawings in the *Bunbury Biennale*. They included a series of mixed media abstract panels called *28 Days (a series of small explosions)* – which referenced her fly-in-fly-out roster, the value attributed to natural resources and the issue of ownership – and a triptych called *Two Ways* (Figure 93) after an expression she had heard from Hector Jandany.<sup>41</sup>

*Two Ways* is a term I heard being used at Warmun Art Centre. It refers to the two different ways of doing things – the white way and the way of the Aboriginal people. It was used in a very understanding way, though with a slight jesting reference to the ignorance of white Australia, which seems to only know one way. *Two Ways* allowed me to make cultural blunders without being totally rejected from the community.<sup>42</sup>



Figure 93 *Two Ways* 2009 mixed media on board 15 x 15 x 4.5 (3 components)  
Photo: Katherine Hall

Katherine embraced the concept of ‘two ways’ when she visited the island of Rote off the west coast of Timor to work with a group of volunteers who were looking for ways to improve living conditions and health education in the village of Nemberala. Her role was to run a workshop for children using art as a medium to explore these issues. In 2010, she drew on her experience at Warmun and Rote, and the concept of ‘two-

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<sup>40</sup> Katherine Hall, email correspondence with author, May 23, 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Katherine Hall, in discussion with author, October 13, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Katherine Hall, in *Bunbury Biennale 2009*, 19.



ways', when she spoke at an international conference in Sarawak about using drawing as a medium for crossing cultural barriers and building trust:<sup>43</sup>

Art traverses cultural barriers, and as such I believe it is integral to a discussion of displacement, division and renewal. As a vehicle for addressing culturally-sensitive issues, it creates non-confrontational spaces for building trust. There are no prescribed outcomes. Through its openly investigative processes, it becomes a communication strategy for exploring and revealing multiple perspectives.<sup>44</sup>

## EPILOGUE

Katherine continues to work in the oil and gas industry off the coast of Western Australia. For a while she commuted between Gracetown, Dampier and Melbourne. Despite this extreme travelling schedule, she maintained a studio and continued to draw and occasionally exhibit in the South West. In January 2013 she took part in a two-day collaborative event called *Dying to be with you* with three other artists on the property in Cowaramup that housed her studio. They shared stories about life and loss and laid white-painted sticks on the ground in a line facing west, to symbolise the journey all souls on earth take to the ocean through an underground aquifer called the Yarragadee (Figure 94). The installation was an interpretation of a story Katherine had heard from Wardandi elder Vilma Webb.<sup>45</sup> I was invited to take part on the second day. Towards evening Vilma's daughter Vivian Webb-Brockman performed a traditional smoking ceremony. Then she and her daughter Mitchella Hutchins shared the Yaragadee story with us all. Peter Spence documented the process on camera and Katherine produced a series of sketches that became part of an exhibition called *South West Stories* held at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries in 2013. She exhibited another series of sketches in the 2013 *Bunbury Biennale*, claiming a return to the sketchbook brought her pleasure when she found time to draw at dusk or dawn during her busy fly-in-fly-out schedule.<sup>46</sup> Later that year, shortly before she embarked on another work

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<sup>43</sup> Katherine Hall, "Two Ways: Crossing the divide with contemporary art," Abstract, *Displacement, Division and Renewal: Borneo Conference 2010*, The Research Unit for the Study of Societies in Change (RUSSIC) and Curtin University in Sarawak Conference, Miri Sarawak, Malaysia 8–9 July 2010, accessed October 19, 2010, [http://research.humanities.curtin.edu.au/conferences/DDR/abstracts\\_accept.cfm](http://research.humanities.curtin.edu.au/conferences/DDR/abstracts_accept.cfm).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Katherine Hall, artist's statement, 2013.

<sup>46</sup> Katherine Hall, in *Bunbury Biennale 2013*, 26.

roster, Katherine wrote to me explaining how collaborative projects had become her preferred form of practice:

I think it was the [Sarawak] conference that made me consolidate the idea that I wanted to work with people in this collaborative art space way ... The most significant work ... to date ... is the "dying to be with you" work Australia day 2013 ... I'm not sure Galleries are the place for this work and feel they are becoming a place of the past ... Work keeps getting in the way of any art at this point ... I suppose the statement about enjoying returning to the sketch book is about a return to the things which I consider important to me in my practice and that is ... among other things... being in touch with nature and being in touch with me. This sums up where I am with my practice now. I'm reassessing and I'm wanting it to be real to me and if that means not 'producing' work ... for a gallery then yes. I think it is good for me to have a break from 'producing' for someone else. Right now I am producing it for me... for me to be in the creative space.<sup>47</sup>

In March 2014, Katherine decided to give up her studio in Cowaramup. She retained her job in the oil and gas industry with the intention of finding time to work on her art practice when ashore, but a transient lifestyle and changes in her life pushed it aside. She now travels from Queensland to Dampier. When I spoke to her in February 2016, she suggested the break was helping her to 'let go' and transition from object-making into wanting to make work with an ephemeral or intangible impact. Katherine says she will always draw, as it is part of her being. She refers to *Dying to be with you* as a cathartic experience that signified both an end and a beginning.<sup>48</sup> Whatever form of visual or symbolic expression she pursues, I suggest that whether she continues drawing and mark-making as a contemplative act of listening or decides to participate in other collaborative projects, the concepts of 'two-ways' and 'letting go' will prevail in her work as she finds ways to respond to new places, people and cultural landscapes.

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<sup>47</sup> Katherine Hall, email correspondence with author, October 3, 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Katherine Hall, telephone conversation with author, February 12, 2016; Katherine Hall, email correspondence with author, February 18, 2016, October 2, 2016.



Figure 94 *Dying to be with you* 2013 installation, Cowaramup  
Photos: Helen Seiver

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

**TONY WINDBERG:**

### **'MAN VERSUS NATURE' – A CONTEMPORARY CONCERN**

**There's a theme that's been building up quite strongly over the years about our in ability to adapt to the landscape and our environment, and our insistence on bringing alien concepts and alien culture and trying to graft them onto the Australian landscape.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Windberg, in discussion with author, March 30, 2007.



Figure 95 Tony Windberg outside his studio  
Photo: Tony Windberg

## INTRODUCTION

Tony Windberg is a multi-award-winning artist who specialises in realistic landscape paintings, drawings and mixed-media works that explore the theme of 'man versus nature'. Once again drawing on Terry Smith's proposition that exploring sustainable relationships with specific social and natural environments is a key trend in contemporary art, and his subsequent claim that a growing concern for the environment and the natural world is a current trend, this chapter explores how Tony interprets the concept of nature as awe-inspiring yet foreboding as a contemporary response to specific environments and the issue of land use in regional Western Australia.<sup>2</sup>

Now immersed in the South West locality of Northcliffe, Tony's life-long affinity with nature has matured into a critical reflection on land use in this particular setting. I begin with a discussion of his emerging interest in environmental issues and the impact of human activity on the landscape. This leads to a discussion of his experience of social and physical environment of the Mid West and Gascoyne regions of Western Australia, where he draws on European visual motifs to explore notions of beauty and irony in the landscape. I then look at his response to changing land use in the South West. The chapter concludes by looking at how Tony has built his reputation through the circulation of his work State-wide and nationally in exhibitions and art awards and his continual interest in the environment and changing land use practices. Once again, I enlist the artist's voice throughout the narrative to augment my account, drawing on interview dialogue, email correspondence and excerpts from artist's statements that express his intentions.

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<sup>2</sup> I refer to Tony by his first name to reflect our intersubjective relationship.

## EMERGING THEMES 1987–2001

Tony Windberg was born in Melbourne in 1966. He spent his early life in Victoria where his budding interest in the natural sciences and art was nurtured by daily bush walks before school. He was twelve when the family moved to Perth in Western Australia. Tony says that for a long time he was disenchanted with the light and the landscape in Western Australia compared with Victoria, but a change of heart occurred in 1987 when he was walking in the South West forest:

This particular painting ... was based on an experience in Walpole when I was in the Karri forest, and not necessarily looking for ideas, but I turned round and the idea hit me in the face. I was standing next to this wall of Karri tree and within that ... you had the whole of nature. You had the fire scale, old bark peeling off to reveal the new. So it was a microcosm of everything that was around.<sup>3</sup>

Tony captured the impact of this revelatory experience by painting the base of a solitary tree-trunk in meticulous detail to symbolise the entire forest and its resilient capacity for renewal (Figure 96). Representing a broader issue in a single object or landscape feature became a recurring theme in his work. When Tony exhibited *Karri* and a companion piece called *Tuart* in a graduate show in Fremantle called *Resilience*, the exhibition prompted the following response shortly before it went on tour to Bunbury, Geraldton and Albany:

I hope this exhibition will stimulate comment and the best kind of criticism when it visits the regional galleries ... Getting art out of Perth is a most important matter, since groups of artists who are continually chewing on each other's fat leads to an unhealthy kind of inbreeding that does not suit the needs of this State in any way.<sup>4</sup>

Tony graduated from the Western Australian Institute of Technology (now Curtin University) in 1986 with a Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art). He recalls that the program placed a lot of emphasis on the value of drawing, but realism was not in favour at the time.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, he has drawn on his flair for realism to make a living from sales, commissions, prize money and teaching ever since. Initially, he developed an obsession

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<sup>3</sup> Tony Windberg, in discussion with author, March 30, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> *Fremantle Arts Review*, 1987, 12; *West Australian Magazine*, 1989, 5. Photocopies of exhibition reviews provided by Tony Windberg.

<sup>5</sup> Tony Windberg, in discussion with author, March 30, 2007.





Figure 96 Karri 1987 oil on canvas 122 x 122cms  
Exhibited: *Resilience* 1987–1990  
Photograph: Tony Windberg



with trees which led to a series of works and a sell-out solo exhibition in Perth in 1989. Buoyed by that success, he continued to make a tenuous living from commissions, which helped him to survive a slump in the art market following the stock market crash in 1987.<sup>6</sup> Then, when his passion for painting trees began to pall, he received a commission from Argyle Diamonds. On a research trip to the Kimberley in the far north of Western Australia, he flew over the company's open-cut diamond mine and the hinterland, which inspired a series of twenty-five aerial landscapes:<sup>7</sup>

I had a fantastic day. I essentially got free reign over what I wanted to do. And while I was up there – ‘well we’ve got these regular flights going from the mine to Kununurra, do you want to take’ – yes, why not. You go up there and you’re the only person in the plane. ‘Well, we can fly direct, or we can go over the lake. Or we can go over the hill. We can go wherever you like. Where would you like to go?’ Leaping all over the place. It was awesome – a helicopter flight the next day. It was great. And they weren’t too put out that there were only one or two paintings of the actual mine itself, which I kind of enjoyed, and that sort of kick started this idea – the first exhibition to do with the trees was all about the pristine untouched landscape. And now I’m very much dealing with our great big footprint all over the land.<sup>8</sup>

Although Tony claims the excursion to the Kimberley ignited his interest in the affect of human activity on pristine landscapes, according to Ted Snell the genesis of this theme was already apparent in his student work:

Tony Windberg was a student at WAIT when he recorded his communion with the Island in *Exploring the Island – Five Days in Winter* ...It is a wry comment on the ‘touristification’ of Rottnest by the authorities who erect viewing platforms and lookouts at every opportunity ... Nevertheless it is possible to escape the prescribed paths, as Windberg indicates, and head into the relatively unexplored darkness of the interior.<sup>9</sup>

Through most of the 1990s, Tony produced works inspired by the landscape in its natural state and revisited the subject of trees (Figure 97). Then, for a brief moment at the end of the decade, he experimented with urban night scenes, culminating in a

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Tony Windberg, in discussion with author, March 30, 2007. The works were intended for the company boardroom in Perth but some were sent to America to be used as backdrops in gem displays.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ted Snell, *The Artists’ Rottnest* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1988), 92, 95.

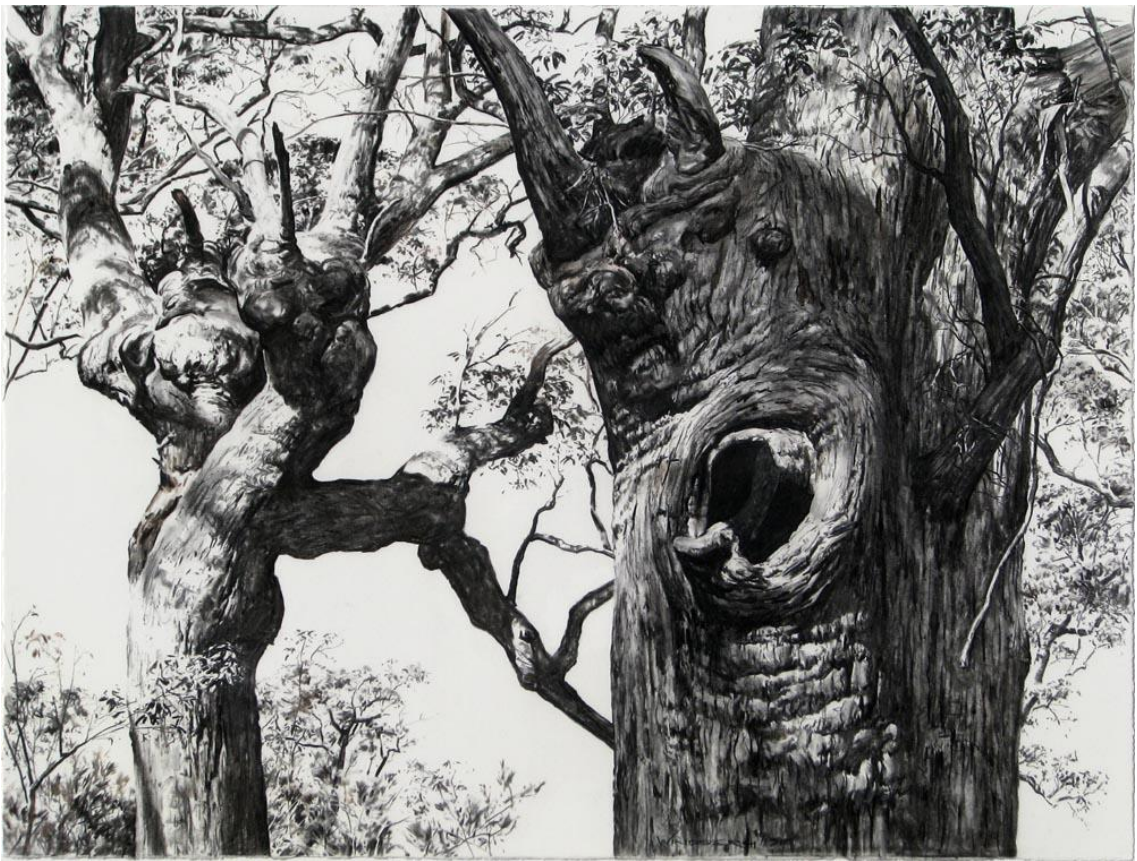


Figure 97 *Red Tingle* 1998 charcoal on paper 56 x 74cms  
Exhibited: *Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Award* Grafton Regional Art Gallery 1998  
Photo: Tony Windberg

multi-panelled painting called *Flux* which won the inaugural *City of Perth Art Award* in 1999.<sup>10</sup> Tony won this award for a second time in 2001 with a triptych of three urban landmarks called *Visitors* (Figure 98). He claims the prominence of figures in this painting was prompted by life drawing classes he was teaching at the time, yet insists it is a work about landscape: the neat lawn and fallen log may suggest nature is under control but wispy smoke in the distance signals the threat of bushfire on the city outskirts.<sup>11</sup> The response to *Visitors* was mixed. Tony's former lecturer Ted Snell was one of the judges of the art award. Snell described it as 'beautifully painted ... constructed with great flair.'<sup>12</sup> However, art critic David Bromfield said it was 'a well worked piece of graphic photo realism, like three overblown kodak prints joined together.'<sup>13</sup>

Bromfield's criticism was a sharp contrast to the flattering remarks he made in 1992 about four 'exquisite' and 'tenderly worked' watercolours Tony had exhibited in a group show called *Artists for D'Entrecasteaux* about the affect of mining on national parks.<sup>14</sup> Bromfield makes it clear he dislikes art prizes in his review of the *City of Perth Art Award*. He suggests their role is to create a market for art which then generates a 'pecking order' of artists. He also rather caustically claims the 'right outcome' can strengthen the standing of 'underqualified and inexperienced local experts' who judge art awards.<sup>15</sup> Bromfield's comment illustrates how opinion and professional rivalry can affect an artist's reputation. Meanwhile, Tony concedes that realism allows the viewer to relate to a scene because it looks real, but he insists his work is illusionary, not photorealist – a style of hyper-real painting that sets out to simulate the effects of photographic reproduction deliberately.<sup>16</sup> His scenes use real landmarks to create an illusion of reality but they are imaginary. When asked about this episode, Tony said:

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<sup>10</sup> In 2004 the *City of Perth Art Award* became a bi-annual national event, alternating with the *City of Perth Photo Media Award*, and open to artists from anywhere in Australia to submit two-dimensional work in any media on a prescribed city-related theme.

<sup>11</sup> *The Artist's Chronicle* (January 2002): 9, photocopy.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> David Bromfield, *Grim and Grimmer Perth's premier art competitions*, accessed March 8, 2007, [http://members.iinet.net.au/~postpub/8ball/issue%2013/Comps\\_.html](http://members.iinet.net.au/~postpub/8ball/issue%2013/Comps_.html).

<sup>14</sup> David Bromfield, "On Show," *West Australian*, January 18, 1992, 8. Photocopy of review provided by Tony Windberg. D'Entrecasteaux is a national park in the South West of Western Australia.

<sup>15</sup> Bromfield, *Grim and Grimmer Perth's premier art competitions*, n.p.

<sup>16</sup> Tony Windberg, in discussion with author, March 30, 2007.

I'd printed the Bromfield online article out at the time and pinned it up proudly. He had fair points to make, but his assertion that it was basically a dodgy imitation of American photo-realist style did miss the point I felt. His reference to the images/figures being like banal postcards I actually quite liked – probably closer to the point! ... Recently, you may recall Ted pointed out that judging is not a subjective exercise at all.<sup>17</sup>

Tony was referring to a comment Snell made at the launch of the *City of Albany Art Prize* in 2009, where Snell was a member of the judging panel and Tony's painting *Decomposition I* was highly commended (see Figure 108, discussed below).



Figure 98 *Visitors* 2001 oil on canvas 75 x 152cms (3 panels)  
Winner: *City of Perth Art Award* 2001  
Collection: City of Perth  
Photo: Tony Windberg

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<sup>17</sup> Tony Windberg, email correspondence with author, March 9, 2010.

## THE NORTH WEST 2002–2005

In 2002, Tony moved to the gold-mining town of Meekathara in the Gascoyne region of Western Australia. One year later he moved to Karratha in the Pilbara region. The Pilbara is rich in iron ore and the purpose-built town of Karratha services this industry, along with the neighbouring port of Dampier which also services oil and gas ventures that operate further north. He claims the impression of this resource-rich environment revived his interest in ‘our uneasy and tenuous relationship with the landscape’:

And so there’s a theme that’s been building up quite strongly over the years, about our inability to adapt to the landscape and our environment, and our insistence on bringing alien concepts and alien culture and trying to graft them onto the Australian landscape. So going to Karratha was very much – rammed that home ... When I first arrived in Karratha, when I drove up from Meekatharra in the middle of January in about 45°, and I went to the top of the hill, surveyed the land, the rolling spinifex, the pulsating heat, light, and then a road, and then the sprinklers on lawns and the cut and paste of suburbia, of Perth, plopped out here. It’s just incredible. And so that conformity, and regularity, and that security and fear of the landscape, I used in a painting later on ...<sup>18</sup>

Tony’s self-portrait *Out Back – Karratha Self Portrait* is an ironic commentary on the transient nature of contemporary life in Karratha (Figure 99). The title is a play on words for a place that looks like any neighbourhood in Perth, but the tonal qualities of the medium he used – iron oxide and conte crayon – clearly alludes to the red Pilbara dust. The drawing is composed like a grid to accentuate the sense of suburban conformity. An empty white plastic chair sits on a concrete veranda at the back of a featureless brick and tile house. It embodies detachment. Fairy lights and a barbeque hint at human habitation, but the ragged palms and dying lawn evoke arid indifference. Tony deals with a similar theme in *Convergence – Karratha* and *Genesis* (Figures 100 and 101). Both paintings are based on his observation of peoples’ behaviour and regional weather patterns. Each composition pairs a tarpaulin-covered boat with a storm cloud to create a visual dialogue between the forms of the man-made object and nature. In the first version, *Convergence – Karratha* painted in 2003, the boat is draped in a white tarpaulin set against an iron-red Pilbara backdrop. This compositional structure has a dual effect. It draws attention to the shape of the shrouded vessel and the incongruous

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<sup>18</sup> Tony Windberg, in discussion with author, March 30, 2007.





Figure 99 *Out Back – Karratha Self-Portrait* 2003 conte crayon, iron oxides on paper 77 x 57cms  
Winner: *Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Award* 2004  
Collection: Grafton Regional Art Gallery  
Photograph: Tony Windberg



Figure 100 (top) *Convergence* – *Karratha* 2003  
acrylic and oil on linen and canvas panels 56 x 244cms  
Winner: *Cossack Art Award for a Northwest Landscape* 2003  
Photos: Tony Windberg



Figure 101 (bottom) *Genesis* 2005  
oil and oxides on canvas and linen panels 84 x 51 cm (2 panels)  
Winner: *Worsley Alumina Award' South Western Times Survey* 2006

notion of boating in an arid environment. With its watery function obscured, the boat becomes an ethereal object of beauty that mimics the shape of the puffy storm cloud in the adjacent panel. In the aptly-titled *Genesis* painted two years later in 2005, cloth and cloud appear dense and portentous. However, Tony suggests the earlier version is more successful due to its subtlety and tonal qualities:<sup>19</sup>

Karratha is a very dry place. For half the year it seems we watch the billowing clouds build up on the other side of the hills and it never does rain on Karratha. Everyone jokes 'it won't stop raining on the other side of the highway'. Karratha also, apparently, has the highest per capita boat ownership in Australia. There's a huge amount of wealth up there and a lot of boating activity going on. Well, there's a lot of boats but not necessarily boating activities. It seems every second driveway's got a boat and they're covered against the elements. So the purpose of the boat is to recreate in the environment. And you've got a particular theme. And just as forms, as semi-abstract forms, that was the initial appeal ... I'm essentially wanting to make it seductive and beautiful ... And quite deliberately referring to Renaissance art and that obsession with drapery. It seemed every artist had to prove their worth by how well they could paint folds, and drapery. And I love that as a symbol of taking this cultural imposition on Australia and the landscape, and the Australian people.<sup>20</sup>

Tony often draws on historic European conventions to investigate ideas. For example, in *Frontier* (Figure 102), he has borrowed the motif of the awe-struck 'figure in the landscape' from the German Romantic artist Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840) to depict a figure contemplating an abandoned pit in Meekathara. Metaphor, symbolism and allusion are important characteristics of his work. There is always a subtle subtext signifying human endeavour to harness nature or modify the landscape. But he uses humour or irony to mitigate the gravity of his subject-matter, and he is clear the 'message' cannot overwhelm his desire to make something beautiful that works as art first. Thus, in *From the Edge – Meekathara* (Figure 103) a piece of machinery is both a symbol of destruction and an object of beauty:

I look for the beauty in destruction ... You know the initial impact on seeing something like that is 'what an amazing form', and the way the water is spraying down the rust. On many aesthetic levels it's beautiful. What it represents is

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.





Figure 102 *Frontier* 2002 oil on canvas 76 x 76cms  
Exhibited: *From the Edge* Gunyulgup Galleries 2002  
Photo: Tony Windberg



Figure 103 *From the Edge - Meekathara* 2002 conte crayon on paper 56 x 153cm (2 panels)  
Exhibited: *Fleurieu Art Prize* South Australia 2004  
Photo: Tony Windberg

abandonment and everything like that. So on one hand you've got an object in the landscape, which is, to me, a very seductive subject-matter and yet the repercussions of what it means and why it's there are really about a type of environmental destruction.<sup>21</sup>

Tony's investigation of cultural imposition on landscapes and people is illustrated by his interest in 'Indigenous matters' and his response to the history of the Burrup Peninsula. In a reference to people who are no longer there, he superimposes suburban imagery engraved into old kitchen linoleum over a blurry painting of the Burrup Peninsula shimmering in the heat haze in *Day Vision* (Figure 104).<sup>22</sup>

The group that were based in the Burrup Peninsula, in that area, were wiped out in about 1860, in a horrendous massacre. Ask people who are doing the fly-in-fly-out, or living in Karratha for about two years about local history and there's a sense of couldn't care less, don't want to know. And that kind of disparity between, white and black Australia is just profound. And the Burrup Peninsula of course is where the power house of Western Australia, the power house of Australia. The gas industry is superimposed on the top of a land covered by these incredible petraglyphs, rock carvings, by a people that were wiped out within a decade. I think it was around that sort of timeframe ...<sup>23</sup>

Shortly before he left the Pilbara in 2005, Tony became involved with an arts project with the Bujee Nhoor Pu art group in Cossack near Roebourne, about thirty kilometres north from Karratha. The project was part of a government proposal to re-name Millstream-Chichester National Park, 150 kilometres from Roebourne. The Department of Environment and Conservation (formerly known as the Department of Conservation and Land Management or CALM, and now the Department of Environment, Parks and Wildlife), ran the park on behalf of a Council that includes representatives from the Yindjibarndi and Ngarluma Aboriginal communities. CALM had agreed to fund the project in partnership with the Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi Foundation, which was formed in 2000 to manage compensation for use of the Burrup Peninsula and parts of their country in the Shire of Roebourne by the energy resources

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

sector.<sup>24</sup> Tony's plan was for the Bujee Nhoorr Pu artists to collect ochres from the park and use them to make works for an exhibition at Millstream Homestead Visitor Centre. But the project ran into difficulties over a cultural misunderstanding about the use of ochres gathered in the park.<sup>25</sup> The Fortescue River flows through the park and this country is the traditional home of the Yindjibarndi people. The country towards the coast to the north is the traditional home of the Ngarluma people.<sup>26</sup> The problem arose because the Yindjibarndi were not comfortable with ochres from their country being used by Ngarluma people for a non-traditional purpose. Tony claims this episode taught him a valuable lesson about collaboration and consulting with Elders first when dealing with such matters.

That had been overlooked and the idea of using pigments and rocks from that land is a very contentious one. And what the Elders were very concerned about was that it would be the thin end of the wedge, and before too long there would be yellow bulldozers in there. And that wasn't the intention, but it was hard to allay those fears.<sup>27</sup>

As a result, Tony's original plan was rejected. However, a solution was found when the Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi Foundation agreed to fund a short-term skills development project using iron oxide bought from an art supplies shop.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Tony Windberg, in discussion with author, March 30, 2007. See *Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi Foundation*, accessed October 8, 2009, [www.isx.org.au/projects/1150429857\\_16557.html](http://www.isx.org.au/projects/1150429857_16557.html). The Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi Foundation Ltd. supports programs benefiting the social, cultural and economic well-being of Ngarluma and Yindjibarndi people.

<sup>25</sup> Tony Windberg, in discussion with author, March 30, 2007.

<sup>26</sup> "Millstream–Chichester National Park brochure," (November 2008), Government of Western Australian Department of Environment and Conservation, accessed December 6, 2010, [www.dec.wa.gov.au/component?option=com\\_hotproperty/task/view/id,48/Itemid,99999999/](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/component?option=com_hotproperty/task/view/id,48/Itemid,99999999/).

<sup>27</sup> Tony Windberg, in discussion with author, March 30, 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Tony Windberg, *Oxides for BujeeNhoorr Pu* (2005). Project report.



Figure 104 *Day Vision* 2003 engraved vinyl, oil on canvas 52 x 100cms

Photo: Tony Windberg

## THE SOUTH WEST

In late 2005, Tony left the Pilbara and moved to the South West of Western Australia when he was offered an opportunity by to be the artist-in-residence on a rural property on the edge of the Karri forest near Northcliffe.<sup>29</sup> Drawn to the area by his memory of the Karri forest and a sense of coming full circle, he set to work renovating a derelict farm house and an old tobacco grading shed which would become his studio. By early 2006 the house was ready for Tony to move in with his wife Amanda.

When I first met Tony at his studio one year later in 2007, he claimed he was still getting the Pilbara out of his system: 'playing around with ideas' in his visual diary, taking photographs and collecting materials from the forest were as far as he had gone at that stage to absorb his new environment.<sup>30</sup> Gradually, as he has engaged with his surroundings, a distinct change in focus has become discernable in his work and new subjects have crept into his repertoire. Yet he stays true to his ideals and claims to avoid the picturesque, despite the scenic qualities of his location.<sup>31</sup> One of the first paintings Tony produced in Northcliffe that gives a sense of his changing focus is *The Cutter* (Figure 105). Originally painted in 2007 and re-worked in 2009, *The Cutter* resumes his investigation of wrapped and shrouded objects to symbolise the imposition of foreign land use practices on another country. The composition is based on an amalgamation of local landscape features in nearby Nannup. In the foreground a man diligently slashes around a stack of hay rolls loosely draped with a green tarpaulin, but he is unaware of smoke from a bush fire on the hill behind:

The modified Australian landscape is an ongoing theme in my artwork. While rural and urban land practises [sic] frequently seem to verge on the edge of viability and environmental sensitivity, there is a growing awareness of our impact and vulnerability. My depiction of ash clouds is generally suggestive of nature as a threat. It also shows nature out of control: our attempts to tame the land don't always go as planned. The ominous ash clouds in *The Cutter* are obvious to the

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<sup>29</sup> The term 'artist-in-residence' usually denotes an artist who is offered space to work in a particular location or institution in return for some form of mutually beneficial exchange. Tony helps out on his friends' property in return for a rent-free house and studio.

<sup>30</sup> Tony Windberg, in discussion with author, March 30, 2007.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.





Figure 105 *The Cutter* 2009 oil on canvas 66 x 61 cms  
Highly Commended: *Vasse Art Prize* 2007 (2007 version)  
Also exhibited: *Bunbury Biennale* 2007  
Photo: Tony Windberg

viewer, yet the figure seems oblivious to the implication of danger. The ambiguities of his actions could be seen as an exercise in futility or, conversely, one of vigilance and foresight.<sup>32</sup>

The motif of the wrapped object as a metaphor for superimposed values and land use practices began to appear repeatedly in Tony's work. His imagery ranges from monumental stacks of silage bales and bound tree trunks with ironical titles like *Ascension* (see Figure 60, chapter seven) and *Redemption*, to decomposing silage bales and picturesque rural scenes. The concept of 'man versus nature' remains ever-present. For example, at first glance *Containment I, II and III* depicting solitary silage bales have the unassuming appearance of picturesque landscapes or studies in form and composition (Figure 106). But soon the rustic idyll is shattered as the insidious threat of bush fire becomes apparent as their principal theme.<sup>33</sup> In a similar vein, Tony claims that *Redemption's* bound tree-trunk represents a country 'denuded of vegetation' and 'deprived of its protective skin' through land degradation (Figure 107).<sup>34</sup> Decay is also the subject of *Decomposition I* – a 'mockingly beautiful' portrayal of an unravelled silage bale (Figure 108). Monumental and majestic as it disintegrates, 'like an elaborate billowing sail on a stranded craft, going nowhere', the reference to Théodore Géricault's (1791–1824) doomed vessel *The Raft of the Medusa* is flagrant.<sup>35</sup>

Tony exhibited *Decomposition I* in the 2009 *City of Albany Art Prize*, where it received a 'highly commended' from selector and judge Ted Snell. The painting also appeared in his 2010 solo exhibition *Compositions* at Gunyulgup Galleries in Yallingup. When I contacted Tony soon after *Compositions* to ask if he had seen an exhibition of contemporary American art that was held at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in 1989, because I saw some parallels between his ideas and the work exhibited in that show, he replied:

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<sup>32</sup> Tony Windberg, artist's statement, *The Cutter*, 2007.

<sup>33</sup> Tony Windberg, artist's statement, *Compositions: Solo Exhibition Gunyulgup Galleries*, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Tony Windberg, artist's statement, *Atonement*, 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Tony Windberg, in *City of Albany Art Prize* (Albany: City of Albany, 2009), 20; Tony Windberg, artist's statement, *Compositions: Solo Exhibition Gunyulgup Galleries*. *Decomposition I* was one of thirty paintings selected from 308 entries for the 2009 *City of Albany Art Prize*. This national acquisitive art prize held in the Great Southern region is one of the premier awards offered in Western Australia.





Figure 106 *Containment I, II and III* 2010 oil on marine ply panel 29 x19cms  
Exhibited: *Compositions*, Gunyulgup Galleries 2010  
Photo: Tony Windberg



Figure 107 *Redemption* 2008 oil on linen 102 x 138cms  
Exhibited: *City of Whyalla Art Prize* 2007 as *Atonement* with brown wrap  
Also exhibited: *South West Survey* 2009 as *Illumination* with green wrap  
Photo: Tony Windberg



Figure 108 *Decomposition I* 2009 oil on canvas 92 x 92cms  
Exhibited and Highly Commended: *City of Albany Art Prize 2009*  
Winner: *Most Popular Vote City of Whyalla Art Prize 2009*  
Also exhibited: *Compositions Gunyulgup Galleries 2010*  
Photo: Tony Windberg

Yes, saw that show at AGWA ... funny, just thought about it the other day, but forgot title ... made an impression of sorts, but I can't think of any image specifically ... Another artist who'd seen the exhibition first thought it'd be right up my alley ... It seemed like an affirmation that I could continue down the 'real' track, that within the constraints of creating an illusion of reality, there was still much to tweak and manipulate, and certainly a lot that could be said.<sup>36</sup>

The exhibition titled *Romance and Irony in Recent American Art* was a collection of works by a group of contemporary artists from New York. In the catalogue, the American curator Louis Grachos claims the language and moods of Romanticism had re-emerged in a revived narrative tendency, whereby contemporary artists filter subjects found in Friedrich and Gericault and place them in incongruous contexts that are Romantic in style only.<sup>37</sup> In Grachos' view, the combination of contemporary imagery, incongruous contexts and art historical references transform traditional metaphors into complex intellectual puzzles that reaffirm the power of story-telling and differ distinctly from the 'banal' narratives of photo-realism.<sup>38</sup> Grachos' comment brings to mind Bromfield's criticism of Tony's 2001 painting *Visitors* as 'well worked photo realism.'<sup>39</sup> It also illustrates how the intent of an artist and the opinion of a critic can so easily be at odds. According to John Stringer, then Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, who had spent time in New York, an obsession with mood and description distinguishes this group of American artists from other contemporary artists. He claims their work signifies a return to observation grounded in the visible world and the potential for art to be a vehicle for narrative and comment.<sup>40</sup>

'Artists are using a new visual language outside the indulgent, formal and theoretical analysis of art for art's sake'. Looking beyond their own individual psyches, they comment on a collective reality that is in a state of ecological, economic and moral crisis.'<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Tony Windberg, email correspondence with author, February 9, 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Louis Grachos, "Romantic Currents in Contemporary Art," in *Romance and Irony in Recent American Art* (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1989), 6. Exhibition catalogue.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–7.

<sup>39</sup> Bromfield, *Grim and Grimmer Perth's premier art competitions*, n.p.

<sup>40</sup> John Stringer, "Out of Time," in *Romance and Irony in Recent American Painting*, 8.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

The recurring relevance of realism brings to mind Smith's description of some critically-engaged paintings he encountered in the Northern Territory in the early 1990s. Smith suggests 'critical realism' moves beyond 'restrictive regionalism' (the popular market for local views), because it draws on the complexities of international art language to respond to local conditions and wider issues, creating unexpected surprises.<sup>42</sup> Tony Windberg's critically-engaged realistic treatment of regional landscapes corresponds to the approach described by Grachos and Smith. For he uses visual motifs from historic European paintings to make statements about contemporary land use practices that illustrate a far broader concern for the effect of human activity on the environment. His work represents a form of 'critical regionalism':

One persistent aspect in my approach is the notion that regional local subject matter has for me broader implications. In keeping with this, in the Gunyulgup exhibition, I've deliberately kept much of the content very close to home, but the story that hopefully unfolds is of the larger Man vs Nature theme harking back to Romanticism. Our obsession with dominating, controlling, rearranging the elements in the landscape.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Smith, "Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?," 469–471; Smith *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 212.

<sup>43</sup> Tony Windberg, email correspondence with author, February 9, 2010.

## NEW PERSPECTIVES AND VIEWPOINTS

Since moving to the South West, trees have reappeared in Tony's work. They feature in paintings he has entered in exhibitions and art awards in Western Australia and further afield, including the 2006 *Waterhouse Natural History Art Prize* at the South Australian Museum (*Transcience* – not illustrated), the 2008 *BHP Billiton Port Hedland Art Award* (*Eucalyptus Marginata – Light Shift* – not illustrated), and the 2009 *Bunbury Biennale* (Figure 109). But whilst he pursues this subject alongside a continuing interest in the affect of human habitation and changing land use on the environment, Tony's principal focus since the beginning of 2010 illustrates a striking new approach to materials and technique. These new works were first seen in *Survey 2010* – curated by Bromfield at Bunbury Regional Art Galleries – and later that year in a solo exhibition called *Viewpoints* held at Gallery East in Perth<sup>44</sup> In a statement for *Survey 2010*, Tony claims:

The shifting nature of land use in the Northcliffe area since the Group Settlement schemes of the 1920s was marked by a grafting of European culture, land practices, ideas and spiritual values. There is now a distinct duality evident in the landscape; one aspect is distinguished by the removal of vegetation, and the other in its implicit Nature worship.<sup>45</sup>

A conflict between logging and forest conservation has existed in the South West since the 1970s. Additionally, a lot of land has been planted with Tasmanian Blue Gums since deregulation of the dairy industry made dairy farming less viable. Tony comments on the complexities of this issue by re-visiting the technique of engraving on linoleum engrained with a false wood effect to explore ideas about perception and illusion:

I also enjoy the transformation from pictorial illusion (from distance) to acknowledgement (up close) that it really is paint, a physical, textural 'stuff'. It's been made by the artist ... An interesting extension of this pictorial illusion/reality notion is what I'm doing with the lino pieces. With shift[s] from far to near the surface changes from ambiguous texture, to apparent wood, to obviously imitation wood, resplendent with tacky faux embossed grain ... yet maintaining [a] strong perception of 'reality' (enhanced by viewer's desire to fill in the 'gaps') ... to realise its all in their head, like a magician revealing the trick.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Bromfield and Tandy, *Over There*, 6–7, 144–145. Tony's exhibition *Viewpoints* at Gallery East ran from 24 September to 17 October 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Tony Windberg, "Artist Statement," in Bromfield and Tandy, *Over There*, 144.

<sup>46</sup> Tony Windberg, email correspondence with author, March 9, 2010.





Figure 109 Tony Windberg *Light Shift – Tuart* 2009 ash, charcoal, oil and wax on canvas/linen panel  
106 x 51 cms (each panel)  
Exhibited: *Bunbury Biennale* 2009, *Tree Lines* Gallery East 2012, *Remnants* Collie Art Gallery 2016  
Photo: Tony Windberg

Connecting the investigation of a subject with specific technique and materials was a conscious development of similar ‘magician’s tricks’ Tony used in works he had produced in Karratha such as *Day Vision* (Figure 104).<sup>47</sup>

The technique was actually inspired by the petroglyphs on the Burrup while I was living in Karratha. The earlier lino images reference this more directly ... ‘Day Vision’ Karratha rooftops engraved into kitchen floor off-cut with a painted panel of a heat-dissolved image of the Burrup Peninsula.<sup>48</sup>

In the new work he uses the illusion of space conveyed by the picture surface to play with ideas about perspective, so that the viewer takes an active part in the process of perception. For example, in *Vanishing Point – South West Highway* (Figure 110), he uses separate picture planes constructed like a concertina to create the illusion of a single image. The complete picture only exists in the viewer’s eyes, depending on where they stand. In *Glade* (Figure 111), Tony plays around with ideas of visual perception and vanishing points by placing two panels at a forty–five degree angle. The artifice of the faux-wood surface heightens the illusion. As the viewer approaches the image, the wood grain texture emerges and the ruse is exposed.

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<sup>47</sup> Tony Windberg, email correspondence with author, March 10, 2010.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.



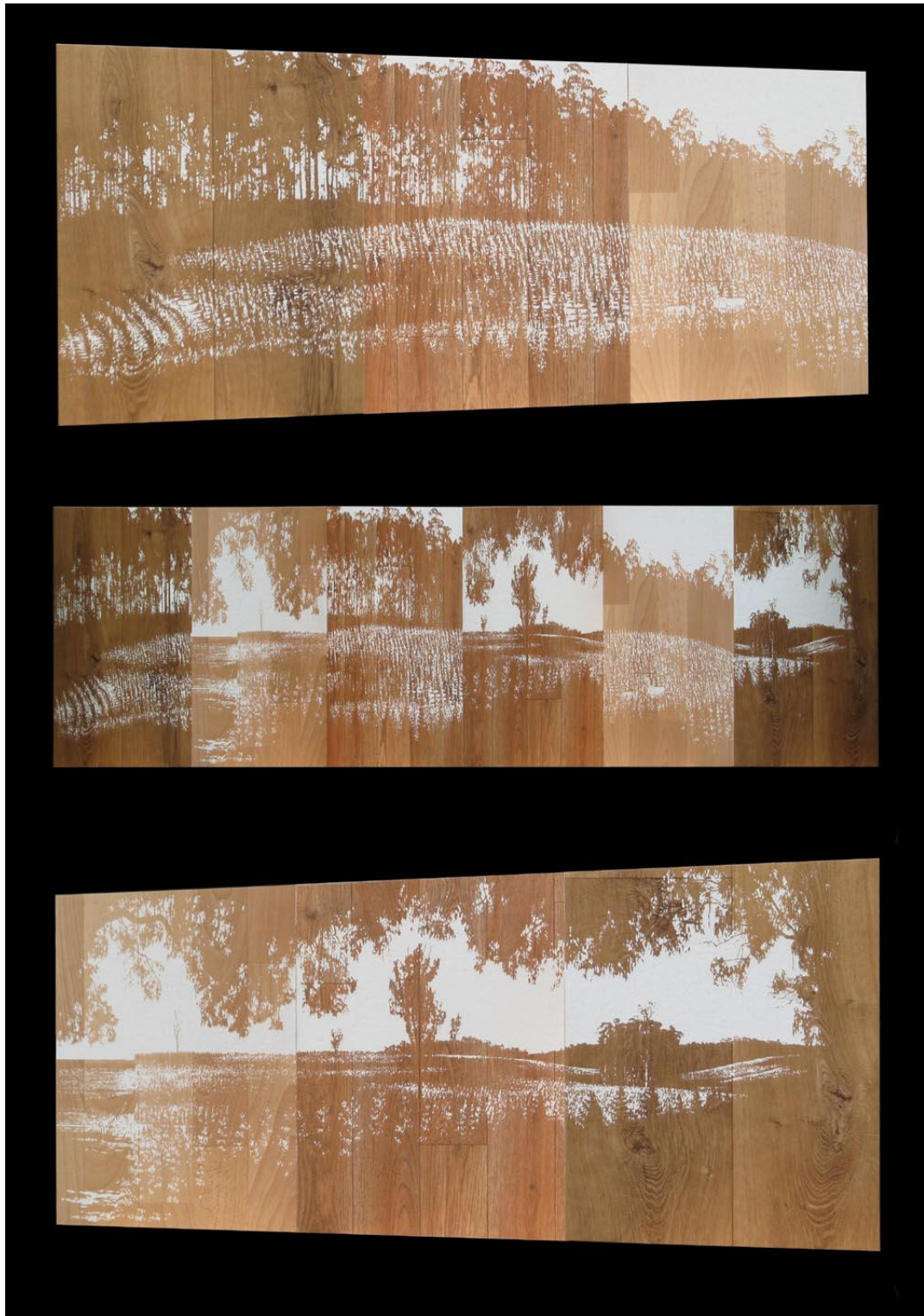


Figure 110 *Vanishing Point – South West Highway* 2010 engraved vinyl on mdf 45.9 x 144.4 x 29.6cms  
Photo: Tony Windberg



Figure 111 *Glade* 2010 engraved vinyl, painted mdf 460 x 2520 x 52cms (combined dimensions)  
Collection: City of Bunbury, acquired *South West Survey* 2011  
Also exhibited: *Viewpoints* Gallery East 2010  
Photo: Tony Windberg

## BEING REGIONAL AND BUILDING REPUTATION

I had a brief but interesting chat with Ashley Jones at Gunyulgup [Galleries] ... I was passing on my apologies for not making it to your [exhibition] launch – and he made some interesting comments about your focus on competitions re providing work for his gallery ... as you said in our interview, the competitions give you exposure, critical profile and income. I guess he might see that as secondary or competition – so it all comes down to your/his objective.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to solo shows held in commercial galleries such as Gunyulgup or Gallery East, Tony has been entering art award exhibitions to his build his credibility and generate income since leaving art school in 1987.<sup>50</sup> He entered his first event in the Eastern States in 1991.<sup>51</sup> His decision to enter Grafton Regional Art Gallery's *Jacaranda Drawing Award* in 1998 and the *City of Perth Art Award* in 1999 marks the start of a period when his exposure in art awards escalated. When asked if his decision to exhibit in the Eastern States was deliberate, Tony replied:

The isolation in Western Australia can be a bit of a hindrance. I get the sense that to be taken seriously you need to be taken seriously over East first ... I guess part of being an artist is building up your credibility on your CV, and whatever benefits that has, later on down the track.<sup>52</sup>

Tracing Tony's participation in art award exhibitions from the start of his career until 2014 illustrates how much the circulation of his work within Western Australia and further afield has increased, especially between 2000 and 2009 (Table 2, Appendix 3).<sup>53</sup> These exhibitions include national art awards open to artists from across Australia, invitation-only events and region-specific exhibitions.<sup>54</sup> In all instances, Tony was either

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<sup>49</sup> Tony Windberg, email correspondence with author, March 9, 2010.

<sup>50</sup> Tony Windberg won the *Ansett WA Landscape Prize* in 1987.

<sup>51</sup> In 1991, Tony Windberg was selected for the *Faber-Castell Drawing Prize* at the Rex Irwin Gallery in Sydney. In 1994 he was runner-up and highly commended in the *Lloyd Rees Memorial Youth Art Award*, also held in Sydney.

<sup>52</sup> Tony Windberg, in discussion with author, March 30, 2007.

<sup>53</sup> Table 2 does not include any solo shows or group exhibitions that did not involve some form of selection or judging process for an art award. See Tony Windberg, selected biography, 2016.

<sup>54</sup> National art awards Tony has entered include the *Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Award*, *Fleurieu Art Prize*, *Waterhouse Natural History Art Prize*, *Heysen Prize for Australian Landscape*, *City of Whyalla Art Prize*, *City of Albany Art Prize*, *Cossack Art Award*. Invitation-only events include the *City of Joondalup Invitation Art Award*. Region-specific events (Western Australian art) include the *Bunbury Biennale*, *South West Survey*, *Vasse Art Prize*, *City of Perth Art Award*, *City of Vincent Art Award*, *Minnawarra Art Award*, *Mid West Art Prize*, *BHP Billeton Iron Ore Port Hedland Art Award*.

an award-winner, highly commended or a finalist chosen in a pre-selection process. Consequently, his work has been subject to scrutiny by members of the art world throughout the country. Based on this evidence, I suggest the circulation of Tony's work in Western Australia and further afield, coupled with the hosting of national events in regional locations and the 'effective mobility' of critics and curators who select and judge art awards across the country, challenges the idea of a 'hierarchy of cultural legitimacy' based on territorial boundaries or metropolitan-regional dominance.<sup>55</sup> Yet I agree with Bromfield that art awards can lead to the perception of a 'pecking order'.<sup>56</sup> In spite of that, clearly the cachet and prize money attached to certain awards is a lure:

You know the big carrot there is the massive \$50,000 which they dangle. As an artist, you leap at things like that.<sup>57</sup>

Tony suggests that 'being regional' can work in an artist's favour if they live and work in a place that is recognised as artistic, but being 'lumbered' in a category that includes 'tourist art' and not being taken seriously is problematic. He suggests that being removed from what is happening in the wider art world could be seen as a disadvantage of a regional location, but says he enjoys the relative isolation and feels no need to follow trends 'slavishly'.<sup>58</sup> His remarks bring to mind Snell's comment that trying to identify Howard Taylor as regional was 'foolish':

Even though the karri forest around Northcliffe continues to be the inspiration for his work, Howard employs this source material to explore issues that relate the phenomena of perception to the formal problems of picture making.<sup>59</sup>

As discussed in chapter four, Taylor lived and worked in Northcliffe for over thirty years, observing and interpreting the effects of light and climatic conditions on the natural phenomena he encountered in the area (Figure 43). According to Snell and

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<sup>55</sup> For use of the expression 'effective mobility' see Smith, "The Double Dynamic of Biennials," n.p.

<sup>56</sup> Bromfield, *Grim and Grimmer Perth's premier art competitions*.

<sup>57</sup> Tony Windberg, interview with author, March 30, 2007. In this instance Tony was referring to the 2000 *Fleurieu Art Prize*.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Snell, *Howard Taylor: Forest Figure*, 118

Dufour, he was interested in the way we look at objects and how we perceive them.<sup>60</sup> Dufour suggests the works Taylor produced whilst living on the outskirts of Perth and in Northcliffe that explore the particularities of place illustrate a sense of isolation and insulation that is characteristic of regional styles, but not unique to Western Australia. He also suggests that Taylor's continual focus on landscape locates his work within the legacy of a European tradition and the history of Australian preoccupation with the genre: however, his work does not denote a distinct regional style.<sup>61</sup> Conversely, Quin suggests the work of Howard Taylor and Guy Grey-Smith – who also drew on the landscape of the South West region as source material – constitutes a regional school of national significance that offers an alternative to other Australian modernists who pursued the landscape tradition.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, despite Snell and Dufour's hesitancy, I suggest being considered regional is not incompatible with having a concurrent national or international reputation. Moreover, by combining the particularities of place with the language of modernism their work evokes the concept of critical regionalism. Given his immersion in the same environment and corresponding interest in perception, I felt compelled to ask Tony about the affect of Taylor's legacy:

How can you be at Northcliffe as an artist and ignore the presence of Howard Taylor? ... It's like being in a big Howard Taylor painting ... I admire him immensely for his integrity. I like the fact that he stuck to his guns. He pursued his ideas. And wasn't influenced by whatever was trendy and fashionable elsewhere. That sense of regionalism – for the same reason I admire Tim Winton as a writer ... He's a stick in the mud for his West Australian subject matter ... I love that ... and finally the rest of the world is saying isn't he brilliant ... And the other thing, there's often a sense of 'bugger this', he's [Howard Taylor] done it before, therefore I can't do it. For instance, the play on light, basically taking the landscape as a literal starting point and then abstracting that, but getting to the essence of that illusive quality of light in another way ... I'll be on the veranda, and I'm seeing a particular light effect through the veil that occurs between the veranda and the valley across, about two, three hundred metres away. And, I'm zoning on all sections and, it's a Howard Taylor painting god-dam-it! Not necessarily a literal take, but you can see ... the starting point.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Dufour, *Howard Taylor: Phenomena*, 18; Snell, *Forest Radiance: Howard Taylor*, n.p.

<sup>61</sup> Dufour, *Howard Taylor: Phenomena*, 33.

<sup>62</sup> Quin, "Guy Grey-Smith: Modern visions of the West," 41.

<sup>63</sup> Tony Windberg, in discussion with author, March 30, 2007.

Tony's critical engagement with the environment and the issue of perception persists, and his work continues to circulate in exhibitions within Western Australia and further afield. At the end of 2012, he held a solo show at Gallery East called *Tree Lines* which explored 'the illusion of nature and the nature of illusion'.<sup>64</sup> For example, in a work titled *Woods/Wald* he creates the illusion two picture-planes are angled away from the wall by tapering each panel and separating them with a precisely-measured space (Figure 112). The effect of Tony's tricks with visual perception is apparent in photographs illustrating the installation of *Woods/Wald* at Collie Art Gallery in early 2016 (Figure 113). In one view, the precisely-measured tapering angle of the two panels gives the impression they protrude into the gallery space. In another view, shadowing shows the panels are not angled off the wall. According to Tony, the English-German title of this work is a reference to his heritage as well as an allusion to the transplantation of European pictorial conventions onto the Australian landscape. He suggests 'woods', the English translation of 'wald', implies gentle, green distant places rather than the 'brutally burnt and battered' setting that inspired the work.<sup>65</sup>

In 2013, Tony exhibited *Woods/Wald* in the *Waterhouse Natural Science Art Prize* at the South Australian Museum. He also took part in a number of art award exhibitions in regional Western Australia including the *South West Survey*, selected by Melbourne-based curator-author Andrew Gaynor, where he won the premier award with *Harvest – Red* and *Harvest – Gold* (Figures 114 and 115 on show at Collie Art Gallery in 2016). Tony describes the installation of these two works in *Tree Lines* at Gallery East in 2012 as follows:

Their tapering was a counter-perspective device: from the gallery centre they appeared rectangular ... the underlying point being that nothing was as it seemed, including the scene which is essentially a thin veneer of remnant vegetation.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> "Tree Lines: New works by Tony Windberg," *Gallery East* (November 9–25, 2012), accessed February 18, 2016, [www.galleryeast.com.au/painting/windberg/main.htm](http://www.galleryeast.com.au/painting/windberg/main.htm).

<sup>65</sup> Tony Windberg, email correspondence with author, February 19, 2016.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*





Figure 112 *Woods/Wald* 2012 Karri and Casurina charcoal, Karri ash, earth pigments, Marri resin, acrylic binders, gesso on linen on mdf 120 x 200 x 5cms  
Exhibited: *Tree Lines* Gallery East 2012, *Waterhouse Natural Science Art Prize* South Australian Museum 2013, *Remnants* Collie Art Gallery 2016  
Photo: Tony Windberg



Figure 113 *Woods/Wald*  
Exhibited: *Remnants* Collie Art Gallery 2016  
Photo: Diana McGirr





Figure 114 Tony Windberg *Harvest – Gold* (top) and *Harvest – Red*  
Exhibited: Remnants Collie Art Gallery 2016



Figure 115 Tony Windberg *Wood/Weld*, *Harvest – Gold*, *Light Shift – Tuart* and *Harvest – Red*  
Exhibited: Remnants Collie Art Gallery 2016  
Photos: Diana McGirr

In 2013, Tony also participated in the *Bunbury Biennale*. On this occasion, a watercolour by German-born South Australian artist Hans Heysen (1877–1968) was the starting point for a series of mixed-media panels depicting trees titled *Winter Dawn*:

His trees were imprinted on me at an early age, and I soaked up the assertion that he had captured the character of the Australian landscape. *Winter Dawn* is a landscape of multiple views framed, like Heysen's art, by pictorial conventions drawn from elsewhere. For me, these too are familiar scenes of the diminishing 'bush' seen through European eyes.<sup>67</sup>

In 2013 and 2014, Tony received two public art commissions.<sup>68</sup> The first called *Meeting Points*, produced for the City of Joondalup, investigates the imposition of urban development on the natural environment and the contrast between order and chaos. In two wall-mounted diptychs positioned at angles to create a three-dimensional effect, he uses materials and pictorial devices to mimic depth and movement (Figures 116 and 117).<sup>69</sup> According to Tony, *Meeting Points* is a kinetic work that achieves a sense of movement by using layers of fly-screen mesh over digital photographs to imitate the moving water of Lake Joondalup and a haze of smoke in remnant bushland. Known as moiré, this effect occurs when different sized and spaced lines or dots are superimposed onto each other.<sup>70</sup> Like *Visitors* (Figure 98), Tony uses fire as a metaphor to represent nature out of control – a threat to metropolitan and rural areas.

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<sup>67</sup> Tony Windberg, in *Bunbury Biennale 2013*, 48.

<sup>68</sup> The commissions Tony received in 2013 and 2014 were from the City of Joondalup and the Western Australian Government, the latter was a 'Percent for Art Commission' for Cape Naturaliste College in Vasse near Busselton.

<sup>69</sup> Tony Windberg, *Detailed Concept Response (draft\_3)*.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 116 *Meeting Points* 2013 digital photographs and fly mesh  
City of Joondalup Public Art Commission  
Photo: Tony Windberg

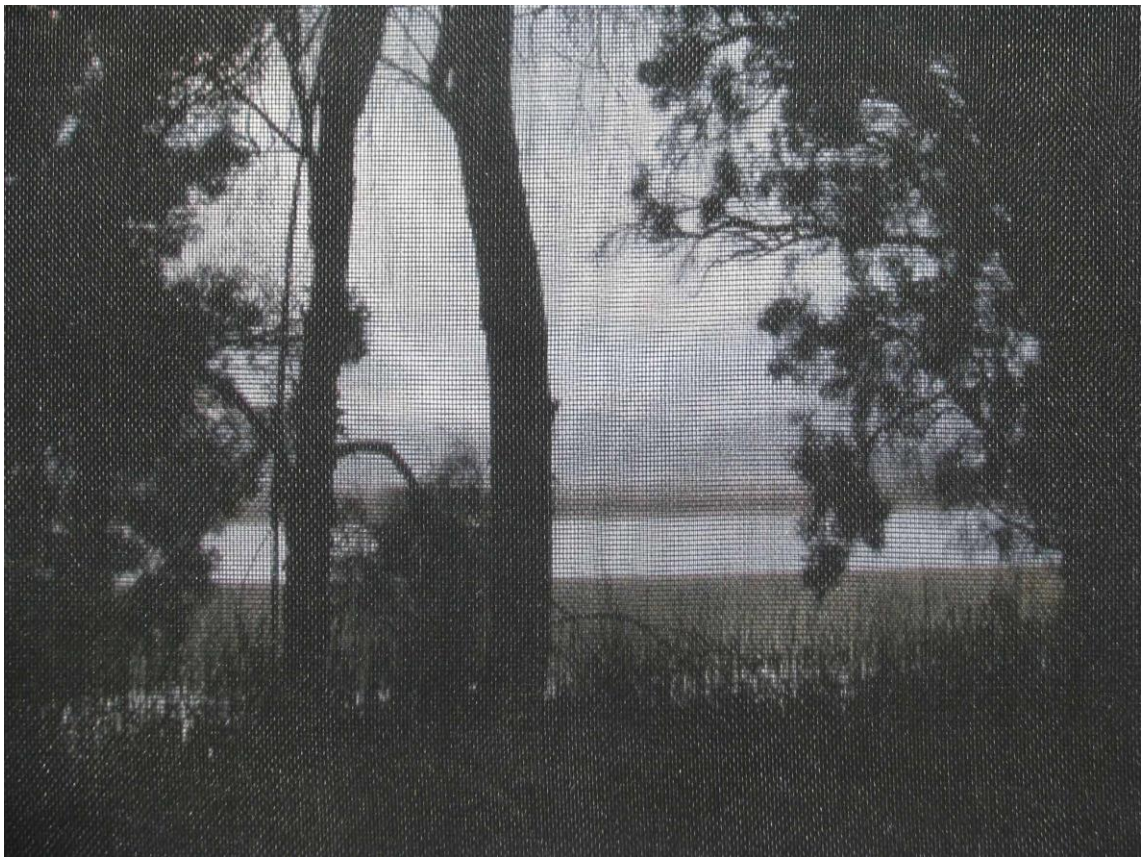


Figure 117 *Meeting Points* (detail – right-hand panel) 2013  
City of Joondalup Public Art Commission  
Photo: Tony Windberg

Tony's installation at Cape Naturalist College in Vasse near Busselton titled *Waterline*, uses digitally-modified photographic images of remnant vegetation and wildlife to, once again, explore changing land use and habitat loss. In this instance, the imagery is printed onto glass panels situated in concrete garden beds to convey an impression of the site prior to clearing. As the viewer moves around the garden beds, the images distort.<sup>71</sup>

From a specific viewpoint, clear tree-shaped windows in one panel align with trees in the other two. The game for the viewer is to find this position, and to be involved in the act of visual revegetation.<sup>72</sup>

In 2015, Tony received a Western Australian Department of Culture and the Arts Development Grant which will enable him to produce a new body of work called *Control Point* for an exhibition in Mandurah at the end of 2016. According to Tony:

These works will focus on the themes of order and chaos, and construction and destruction in the Australian landscape, sparked by the Northcliffe fires of February 2015. Fire has long been an artistic metaphor in my work for nature out of our control, and it also serves as a source of materials. These natural ashes, charcoals and resins will be combined with unconventional materials sourced from hardware stores in a playful and potent visual mix.<sup>73</sup>

Throughout his career, Tony has responded to particular regional landscapes in Western Australia using the concept of 'man versus nature' to explore nature as awe-inspiring but foreboding, and changing land use practices. In both *Meeting Points* and *Waterline*, he uses images of plant and animal species that are particular to each area to illustrate local characteristics. Yet each work deals with the broader theme of urban development and habitat loss. I anticipate his latest project will once again result in a body of work that reflects his interest in local issues and broader themes. Whether he draws inspiration from Howard Taylor's treatment of bush fires on atmospheric and light conditions remains to be seen.<sup>74</sup> Meantime, I suggest Tony's long-standing concern for the natural environment conforms to a trend in contemporary art identified by

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<sup>71</sup> "Cape Naturalist College Year Seven Accommodation 2014," *Government of Western Australia Percent for Art Scheme* (Perth: Government of Western Australia Department of Culture and the Arts, 2014).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Tony Windberg, email correspondence with author, February 12, 2016.

<sup>74</sup> See Dufour, *Howard Taylor: Phenomenon*, 56, 127, 151.

Terry Smith.<sup>75</sup> I also suggest his treatment of landscape and land use is a form of critical realism that conforms to the concept of critical regionalism. Moreover, I suggest that being regionally-based enables him to respond to this topic in ways that relate to but remain unfettered by contemporary trends.

To conclude: Tony Windberg has claimed that being regional can work in an artist's favour if they live and work in a place that is recognised as artistic.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, it seems fitting to close this chapter with the artist's voice describing what this means and how gaining recognition from exposure in institutions and exhibitions is beneficial. The words are taken from a speech Tony made at the launch of the 2012 *South West Survey* – a year he did not participate sandwiched between two occasions where he won the premier art award:

It's interesting to note to what degree this exhibition reflects what might be called a "regional perspective." The issue of regional *disadvantage* is real. Now I'm convinced, from having lived in the city and the country, that there's really *no* difference between 'city' people and 'country' people! ... its our habitat that's the real difference ... For regional artists, it's not easy being in touch with a city-centric art world ... I should say though, that cultural isolation has its *benefits* too. For some, it's a blissful ignorance of current trends – think of the late and great Howard Taylor, whose studio was quite a few k's [sic] out from the town of Northcliffe ... I've been exhibiting with Bunbury Regional Art Galleries for some time, namely the Bunbury Biennale and previous South West Surveys. And the exposure has been excellent ... I'm sure many opportunities of *all* sorts will arise for others too ...<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*.

<sup>76</sup> Tony Windberg, in discussion with author, March 30, 2007.

<sup>77</sup> Tony Windberg, opening speech, *South Western Times Survey 2012*.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

### **BEING REGIONAL: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

**... in contemporaneity, there is not one story, but many stories.  
More to the point, today's stories will not necessarily add up into  
a shared history ...<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, "The Double Dynamic of Biennials," n.p.

## INTRODUCTION

Changes in the writing of art history from European-focused narratives of successive styles and movements, and scrutiny of subjects, symbols and themes, to histories that take account of social contexts and conditions, has enabled a massive transformation to occur in the way art historians are able to consider art that is produced in regional art worlds. This transformation began some decades ago and it continues today, as recent discourse in the art world has shown. According to Smith, the construction of history is a work in progress: this transformation alerts us to its 'provisionality' and it enables art historians at any cultural periphery to contest established interpretations and participate in an on-going discussion.<sup>2</sup> As global discourse grows increasingly mindful of the validity of regional contexts and perspectives, I suggest that regional narratives from any field of artistic production are eligible to be part of this process of transformation, irrespective of the size or location of the field, not as representations of 'defiant localism' or 'provincial subservience' but as legitimate contributions to a bigger picture that embraces distinctiveness and connectivity, as Smith advocates.<sup>3</sup> Otherwise regional art production will remain on the perceived periphery of what is considered central and more significant by louder voices.

As I have stated, my research was initiated by a perception there is a paucity of publications and a lack of critique on art production in the South West of Western Australia. This initial motive was spurred on by a description that claimed the region's art scene is 'folksy' and 'not-up-to-speed' with what is happening in metropolitan centres around the world, which brought up the issue of artistic legitimacy and the implications of regional positioning.<sup>4</sup> This final chapter brings my thesis to a close by drawing together the evidence and insight I have used throughout my discussion to achieve my research aim: to offer an alternative view of South West art production by arguing that 'being regional' is a legitimate position in today's art world, on its own terms and as part of a globalising tendency that recognises the validity of regional contexts and perspectives.

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<sup>2</sup> Smith, "Inside out, outside in: changing perspectives in Australian art historiography," n.p.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Goddard quoted in Briggs, "Beyond the boundaries," 113.



To achieve this aim, I have drawn upon recent discourse about new ways of writing art history that endorse the validity of regional contexts and perspectives. I merged these ideas with theories about the operations of art worlds and notions of regionalism that endorse the value of local knowledge and significance of place. In particular, I have drawn on Smith's ideas about key currents in contemporary art and possible lines of inquiry for writing its history – primarily his conviction that multiple forms of art production and art history co-exist simultaneously all over the world, and his propositions that:<sup>5</sup>

- the 'postcolonial turn' has generated an abundance of art shaped by all sorts of values that circulates via the art market and exhibitions, especially biennales, generating a constant dialogue between local and international values;
- this current includes artists whose practice explores specific social and natural environments, within a framework of ecological values;
- there is a need for narratives written from local, regional and global perspectives to help us understand art as it is produced and circulates; and
- a possible line of inquiry is to outline the role the art world plays in highlighting what counts as current art.<sup>6</sup>

For this to occur in an appropriate and relevant manner, I devised a research strategy that enabled me to integrate theory with fieldwork and use methods endorsed by critical ethnography to draw on lived experience, local knowledge, multiple voices and the particularities of place. This approach enabled me to augment and 'crystallise' my narrative with alternative views, respond to circumstances as they arose, and write in an accessible style of language, which makes my thesis more reflexive, collaborative, engaging and relevant. Consequently, my thesis has drawn upon what has been said and done locally as well as further afield to illustrate how regional art production (making and validation) in the South West of Western Australia reflects local conditions and relates to contemporary trends elsewhere.

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, "Writing the History of Contemporary Art," 919; Smith, "For a History of Contemporary Art," n.p.; Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 256.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, "Writing the History of Contemporary Art," 920–921; Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 258–259, 266–267.

In each chapter I have revealed the role the art world plays in highlighting what counts as current art. I have illustrated how artists and artworks acquire artistic legitimacy from institutions and individuals through instances of exposure and recognition, such as inclusion in a significant exhibition or catalogue, or acquisition by a major collection. I have also revealed the continuing significance of landscape as a contemporary subject, which is illustrated by a widespread preoccupation with the region's natural phenomena, concern for the environment and changing land use, and the relationships that people have with particular places.

In this final discussion I summarise the five case studies I have presented as illustrative examples of contemporary art production in the South West. I reassert my proposition that 'being regional' is a legitimate position, and recommend that recognising the particularities of place and benefits of regional positioning offers a sound basis to acknowledge the South West as a 'zone of exchange and possibility' for contemporary art production.<sup>7</sup> I conclude my thesis with some suggestions for publications on South West art production that could begin to remedy the gap in published material and critique that initiated my inquiry.

## **THE CONTEMPORANEITY OF SOUTH WEST ART PRODUCTION**

To provide a sense of place as a backdrop for my discussion, in chapters three and four I profiled the South West region and its art world, and revealed that the perception there is a paucity of publications and lack of critique on South West art production has foundation. In chapters seven to eleven I examined specific instances of institutional practice and individual art production. I began with a discussion about two long-established recurring exhibitions hosted by Bunbury Regional Art Galleries – the *Bunbury Biennale* and the *South West Survey*.

Drawing on theories about the operations of art worlds and recent discourse that claims biennales and landmark exhibitions play a major role in the institutionalisation of contemporary art, chapter seven examined how artists and artworks acquire artistic legitimacy through their inclusion in the *Bunbury Biennale*, which was established in 1993

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<sup>7</sup> Smith, "Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?," 5.

to help build the City of Bunbury collection through the acquisition of contemporary Western Australian art.<sup>8</sup> Through this example, I illustrated that selection for the exhibition and possible acquisition by the collection provides a significant opportunity for artists and artworks from throughout the State to be endorsed by curators and other art world agents in an event that both emulates and differs from similar exhibitions that occur in other metropolitan and regional art worlds. Tracing the history of the *Bunbury Biennale* illustrated that the attribution of artistic legitimacy to whomever and whatever is considered contemporary is clearly influenced by the decisions of the individuals appointed to make selections and recommendations for inclusion and acquisition. For example, two former Directors of the *Biennale of Sydney*, Bill Wright and Nick Waterlow, were involved in the selection and judging process early in the event's history, and internationally-renowned curators have been involved on other occasions. So whilst it is a stretch to suggest the *Bunbury Biennale* has on occasions been 'plugged into' the international biennale circuit, in these particular instances individuals with experience of this circuit brought their expertise to the region. Their presence doubtless added cachet to the event and the endorsement of artists and artworks on those occasions.

Tracing the history of the *Bunbury Biennale* also illustrated that since 1999 the exhibition has developed an increasingly regional (non-metropolitan) focus that appears to have been intentional. This could represent 'defiant localism' – an assertion of the legitimacy of art produced outside the metropolitan centre – or simply be recognition that whilst art produced within the conditions of contemporaneity may be informed by regional positioning it need not be constrained by it.<sup>9</sup> As Smith suggests, greater emphasis on promoting the art of the host region reflects the potential of an event to shape our capacity to understand local art production in a wider context.<sup>10</sup> On that basis, the *Bunbury Biennale* provides an opportunity for regional art production to be understood on level terms with art produced in metropolitan settings or studios. For as Smith

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<sup>8</sup> *Global Art and the Museum*; Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?; Bunbury Biennale 1993*.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," 4–6.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, "The Double Dynamic of Biennials," n.p.

assures us, art worlds everywhere are local and biennales enable a connectedness between them that has nothing to do with provincial subservience to a centre.<sup>11</sup>

With regards the significance of landscape as a contemporary subject, a sequence of images illustrating acquisitions for the City of Bunbury collection shows the extent to which an engagement with nature-based subject-matter preoccupies artists who live and work in the South West. This observation corresponds to Smith's suggestion that regional positioning enables artists to respond directly to landscape and natural phenomena. He proposes that the dominance of the landscape genre represents a 'restrictive' form of regionalism, but critically-engaged work that responds to local conditions as well as broader issues represents a form of 'critical regionalism'. Smith also suggests that concern for the environment and the natural world is a growing trend.<sup>12</sup> These images also reveal that this subject matter has been endorsed frequently by selectors from within and outside the region, and that the notion of artwork as object retains currency in this particular context. Consequently, this case study revealed that the legitimacy of contemporary art produced in regional and metropolitan studios relates as much to the collective decisions and actions of the people involved in its production – the artists, curators and collectors whose choices and actions determine what will or will not be endorsed – as its geographic location.

Chapter eight drew on the same theoretical discourse to discuss another recurring exhibition hosted by Bunbury Regional Art Galleries. The *South West Survey* was established in 1987 as an annual showcase for regional art practice. Since then, this event has given artists who live and work in the South West an opportunity for exposure and recognition through their selection and endorsement by curators and critics, and possible acquisition by the City of Bunbury collection. In this case study, I traced the history of the *South West Survey* and illustrated some of the acquisitions the City has made over the years. Then I focused my discussion on *Over There Survey 2010: Art in the South West* – a landmark exhibition curated by Perth-based curator-critic David

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, "Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?," 5; Smith, "Rethinking Regionalism: Art in the Northern Territory," 469–471; Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 274–295.

Bromfield. In 2009, Bromfield toured through the South West to gather ideas and material for the exhibition and a complementary catalogue documenting current art practice in the region. This ‘landmark’ event occurred during the lifetime of my research, and so it provided a timely opportunity to compare Goddard’s description of the South West art scene, which encouraged me to address the issue of artistic legitimacy and regional positioning as an intrinsic aspect of my inquiry, with Bromfield’s impression.

According to Bromfield, two broad themes prevail in the South West:

- a preoccupation with the changing nature of the landscape and the relationship between humans and nature; and
- a constant conflict between the production of art as a commodity for the tourist market or as a critically-engaged enterprise.<sup>13</sup>

He claims the ‘pressure of tourism’ and popular demand for ‘souvenirs’ has led to the production of a lot of ‘banal tourist art’, which is particularly evident in areas where tourism thrives, such as the coastal strip from Yallingup to Margaret River.<sup>14</sup> There are clear parallels between Bromfield’s impressions of that area and Goddard’s.<sup>15</sup> Yet as Bromfield observes, there are also artists in Margaret River whose work is not driven by the motive to satisfy popular demand or ‘bourgeois’ taste. His proposal that a conflict exists between art produced as commodity and critically-engaged enterprise corresponds to Smith’s description of art production in the Northern Territory, where a large amount of art and craft produced for the tourist market (including highly-competent paintings of popular views) exists alongside more critically-engaged forms of realism.<sup>16</sup> This two-fold structure corresponds to Wynn-Moylan’s proposition that two forms of practice co-exist in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales: traditional art that is sold in commercial galleries or at the studio door and more

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<sup>13</sup> Bromfield and Tandy, *Over There*, 2–4, 9, 11–12.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Briggs, “Beyond the boundaries,” 113–117.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, “Rethinking Regionalism: art in the Northern Territory,” 469–471.

conceptual work.<sup>17</sup> However, whilst these characteristics reflect some aspects of South West art production, like most art worlds art production in the region is more nuanced than this structure implies. The problem with Goddard's appraisal is that, unlike Bromfield, he did not identify any other forms of art production and his description implies the regional art scene is a homogeneous entity centred on a handful of commercial galleries.

In chapter two I provided an outline of some of the commercial galleries that exist in the South West, to illustrate where artists can exhibit and sell their work. But I have not discussed the role of the art market in my thesis. My interest lay elsewhere because I believe too much focus on valuing art as a commodity or commercial enterprise has contributed to a misunderstanding about what else exists and occurs in the region. Consequently, my thesis is based on the premise that other forms of art production and not-for-profit institutional practice required investigation, rather than activities that are largely market-driven. However, I suggest the question of artistic validation through the vagaries of personal taste and a volatile marketplace could make an interesting future research topic from the perspective of cultural economics.<sup>18</sup>

Meanwhile, Bromfield noted the scarcity of installation and multi-media work as a form of art production in the South West. He suggests this is due to the conservative environment, a lack of supportive gallery space and the absence of a sympathetic audience.<sup>19</sup> Whilst I agree that the notion of art as object remains a dominant form of practice that is currently endorsed by institutions through exposure in exhibitions and acquisition by public collections, and practice focused on digital technology and electronic media is scarce, Bromfield's comment about the shortage of supportive institutional infrastructure does not take account of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries exhibition program which supports this form of media. Recently, ArtGeo has been much more receptive to digital and immersive technology but, undeniably there is scope for growth in this area of practice in conventional and alternative venues. So as the South

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Wynn-Moylan, "A Country Practice", n.p.

<sup>18</sup> Several commercial galleries in Perth, the South West and the Great Southern region closed during the timeframe of my investigation.

<sup>19</sup> Bromfield and Tandy, *Over There*, 18.

West art scene continues to grow and evolve and a new generation of artists embrace Smith's concept of the 'image economy', I feel sure they will employ innovative new media to explore their sense of self, place and shared experiences.<sup>20</sup>

Bromfield identified the relationships between people and nature and the changing landscape as a key theme that preoccupies many South West artists. Therefore, I was surprised when he simply stated 'South West Indigenous artists paint landscape in the Carrolup style', without any further explication of what this means in the context of his other observations about the presence of Aboriginal people and their art being an integral part of history, lamenting the destruction of their sites, and the absence of Indigenous artists from the 'commonplace profile' of the region's contemporary art scene.<sup>21</sup> Taking his comments as a lead, in chapter nine I discussed how the Carrolup style of landscape painting can be considered a legitimate form of contemporary art on its own terms, with special significance to Noongar artists and people. To explore this subject, I drew on Smith's proposal that the 'postcolonial turn' has generated an abundance of contemporary art shaped by all sorts of values, including anti-colonial sentiments. Smith also suggests Aboriginal art that draws on traditional stories, symbolic motifs, sense of place and the relationship that Indigenous people have with their land has become one of Australia's most prominent forms of visual expression.<sup>22</sup>

The government settlement where the Carrolup art movement began in the 1940s and 50s falls outside the boundaries of the South West region (as defined by State legislation). However, the influence of the Carrolup style and its legacy transcends this boundary. Many of the Noongar artists who continue the Carrolup style have direct links with the settlement and the original child artists who developed the style and some of them have links with Bunbury Regional Art Galleries through its former Indigenous arts development program and an on-going series of Noongar art exhibitions, from where their work has been acquired for the City of Bunbury collection. Despite Bromfield's apparent scepticism, Noongar artists maintain that the Carrolup style of

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<sup>20</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 6, 267, Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Bromfield and Tandy, *Over There*, 4, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 266–267; Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 203–204, 212.



landscape painting is important to them in its original and contemporary forms because it illustrates their connection to country and memories of a landscape and way of life that existed before European settlement.<sup>23</sup> For example, the premise supporting the exhibition *Past and Present* was developed by Noongar artist Sandra Hill because she was tired of hearing visitors to galleries say it was not 'real' Aboriginal art. Yet it is how some Noongar artists tell their stories and express their feelings about the process of colonisation and their subsequent removal from their land.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Tracie Pushman (Sandra Hill's daughter) and Robyn Smith-Whalley suggest that the Carrolup collection that featured in the exhibition *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, hosted by the Western Australian Museum in Perth and the Powerhouse Museum in Brisbane, drew attention to the importance of regional style, which helped to counter popular perceptions driven by the international art market and tourism industry that dot paintings from Northern and Central Desert areas of Australia represent the quintessential symbol of Aboriginal art and 'Aboriginality'.<sup>25</sup>

According to John Stanton, former Director of the Berndt Museum of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia, listening to the artist's voice is important to augment professional outsider opinion.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, I proposed that contemporary forms of the Carrolup style which tells stories about connection to country using picturesque conventions to symbolically reclaim land that traditionally belonged to Noongar people represents a legitimate form of contemporary art on its own terms, with particular significance to Noongar artists and people. As a form of critique on the affect of settlement in a specific environment, the Carrolup style relates to Smith's notion of contemporary art shaped by local and anti-colonial values. Moreover, through its adaptation of a recognised ideal of the picturesque landscape to illustrate the significance of place, it also relates to the concept of critical regionalism, creating a dialogue between local conditions and a far broader issue. Consequently, through its continuation and circulation in a series of exhibitions and catalogues, the Carrolup style

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<sup>23</sup> Stanton, *Past and Present*, 5; Sandra Hill, introduction in *Past and Present*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Sandra Hill, introduction in *Past and Present*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Pushman and Smith Walley, *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*, 67.

<sup>26</sup> Stanton, *On Track: Contemporary Western Australian Aboriginal Art*, 14, 16.

has generated a dialogue between local and international values, which enables it to challenge widespread perceptions of authenticity based on notions of urban/regional, traditional/contemporary, and the market-driven prominence of dot paintings, and contribute to a more nuanced history of Australian Aboriginal art.<sup>27</sup>

Whether colonized, inhabited, contested, cultivated, excavated or enjoyed in its pristine state, the environment is integral to the South West region's sense of place. It is often portrayed as picturesque and prosperous – one replete with natural resources and attributes. Yet it is also recognised internationally as a biodiversity hotspot, and changing land use creates conflict in some localities between the demands of economic progress and preservation of the social and natural environment. Therefore, Smith's proposition that a growing concern for the environment and the natural world is a contemporary trend clearly resonates in a region where the continuing significance of landscape is an enduring preoccupation.<sup>28</sup> Amongst the many artists whose practice explores specific social and natural environments, I chose to write about two who illustrate this theme in different ways – Katherine Hall and Tony Windberg.<sup>29</sup>

Chapter ten's narrative about the evolution of Katherine Hall's practice illustrates how cross-cultural encounters and collaborations have influenced her approach to drawing and other intangible or ephemeral activities. Katherine is interested in connections between people and landscapes. In this case study, I described how her drawing has evolved from observation to conceptualised mark-making through a process she calls 'letting go'. Katherine's artistic and personal journey is the outcome of a number of cross-cultural encounters with Indigenous people. Her work takes material and symbolic form. It can be read in many ways – as a metaphor or visual investigation, as an expression of Katherine's interiority, or as a form of communication and exchange. Yet her drawings always retain an intrinsic earthbound quality because of the way she uses materials to augment her ideas. These materials include charcoal and ochres received from Aboriginal elders at Warmun. Through her artwork and collaborative experiences,

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<sup>27</sup> Gough and Naylor, "Circuit Breaking? Indigenous Australian Art and Critical Discourse," 821–823; McLean, "New histories of Australian art".

<sup>28</sup> Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, 274–295.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 256–259, 266–267.

Katherine embraces opportunities to draw inspiration from others and elsewhere, and share her knowledge and insights. Her practice has extended beyond the South West region into other zones of exchange, such as the Kimberley and Timor. Consequently, her materially-grounded drawings and collaborative practice represents an example of contemporary art production that combines the particularities of place with a critical-engaged interest in other cultures.

The current trend of exploring sustainable relationships with specific social and natural environments also resonates with Tony Windberg's interpretation of the concept of 'man versus nature'. In chapter eleven I discussed how he embraces this concept to respond to specific landscapes and environments in regional Western Australia from a critically-reflective mindset. Whilst Tony's preference for realism may challenge some perceptions of what is considered contemporary art, his treatment of landscape takes his work beyond a preoccupation with nature into the realm of critical realism, to express a deep concern for the effect of human activity on the environment. Metaphor, symbolism and allusion are characteristic features of his work. There is always a subtext signifying human endeavour to harness nature or modify the landscape. But Tony is clear the 'message' cannot overwhelm the objective – to make something beautiful that works as art first. Humour and irony mitigate the gravity of his subject-matter and a highly-tuned artistic sensibility makes his scrutiny of different settings both compelling and subtle. He combines visual motifs and references from historic European paintings with contemporary imagery to transform observation into critique. He traverses the particular and the global by integrating a response to specific locations with broader environmental concerns that transcend geographic and temporal boundaries. Consequently, his work represents a form of critical regionalism and a conscious concern for the environment.

Signs that Tony set out to achieve a balance between his artistic sensibilities, intellectual ideals and professional aspirations have been evident from the start of his career. Since he moved to the South West in 2005, recognition of his work has grown through his participation in a national circuit of art award exhibitions. Whilst Tony suggests that being labelled 'local' can work in an artist's favour if they live and work in a place that is

recognised as artistic, being 'lumbered' in a category that includes 'tourist art' and not being taken seriously is problematic.<sup>30</sup> I suggest the problem may not be labelling itself, but the perceptions or meanings attached to labels such as 'regional' when a metro-centric perception of a hierarchy of cultural legitimacy disregards the significance of place and the value of local knowledge.

## **THE BENEFITS OF BEING REGIONAL – SOME RECOMMENDATIONS**

Whilst the scope and scale of the region discussed in my thesis does not compare to a region comprising several countries, such as Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Central and South America, Central Europe, the Middle East or Oceania, where Smith claims scholars are busy examining the nuances of what is happening in contemporary art practice, I have argued a case that illustrates how some examples of art production in the South West of Western Australia reflect local conditions and relate to contemporary trends elsewhere.<sup>31</sup> Through discussion, illustration and some comparison I have revealed that what is produced and what occurs in the region reflects the particularities of place as well as broader issues and practices that occur elsewhere. I propose this evidence counters the description that spurred my inquiry. Therefore, I am satisfied that I have achieved my research aim, by offering an alternative view of South West art production that illustrates 'being regional' is a legitimate position in today's art world, on its own terms and as part of a globalising tendency that recognises the validity of regional contexts and perspectives.

On that basis, I propose the concept of critical regionalism is a compelling framework to consider contemporary art that engages a sense of regionality with a wider outlook that reflects global concerns, such human relationships with specific social and natural environments, changing land use practices and the effects of human activity on the environment, or postcolonial critique of the impact and aftermath of colonial settlement. I also propose that the principles of legitimacy used to validate art production must take account of the particular contexts and conditions that shape it and which, in turn, it reflects. Moreover, these principles should not be constrained by a metro-centric

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<sup>30</sup> Tony Windberg, interview with author, March 30, 2007.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, *What is Contemporary Art?*, 259.

perception of what constitutes artistic legitimacy. I propose this is a fundamental condition of contemporaneity, if local, national and global perspectives are to dialogue with each other and acknowledge the similarities and differences – a dialogue built on possibilities of ‘lateral traffic’ rather than preconceived notions of legitimacy based on lingering perceptions of centre-periphery dominance. Then ‘being regional’ can be seen as a position, an opportunity and a zone of possibility, rather than a predicament – one that recognises the interplay and interdependent relationship between metropolitan and regional art worlds.<sup>32</sup>

The topic of recent art production in a ‘sub-regional’ art world like the South West of Western Australia could easily be overlooked in a global dialogue about the validity of regional contexts and perspectives because it might be considered too distant, localised and inconsequential. However, distance and size should not discredit the artistic legitimacy of the art, ideas and cultural practices that occur on their own terms and that relate to trends and concerns occurring elsewhere. I have discussed to illustrate the conditions of contemporaneity in this particular setting. Through his considerations of regionalism, the production of contemporary art worldwide and writing its history, Smith has conjured a vision of the contemporary art world that offers all kinds of possibility to recognise difference and connectivity.<sup>33</sup> By contextualising my thesis within a dialogue that advocates such possibilities, my research has not only made a worthwhile contribution to the emerging art history of the South West region, it has taken a step towards positioning art production in the South West of Western Australia within a wider cultural discourse that recognises the value of local knowledge and significance of place, and as a potential candidate for future comparative studies.

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<sup>32</sup> See Smith, “Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?” 8; Burn et al., *The Necessity of Australian Art*.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, “Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middleground Or Limboland?” 8; Smith, “Inside out, outside in: changing perspectives in Australian art historiography,” n.p.

## CONCLUSION

Where to from here? My thesis did not seek to remedy the paucity of publications on South West art production that provided the initial motive for my inquiry. However, my discussion has laid the groundwork for further investigations and future publications. Clearly there are many different approaches to writing histories and critiques artists and art production – monographs, anthologies, catalogue or curatorial essays, photographic essays, reviews, art criticism, surveys and blogging, to name a few. They give voice to different perspectives such as the critic, curator, collector and the artist. Inevitably, publications have different functions and appeal to different audiences. For example, a collection of curatorial essays is less likely to appeal to a general audience than a beautifully-illustrated photographic anthology like Ian Lloyd and John McDonald's *Studio: Australian Painters on the Nature of Creativity* or Sonia Payes' *Untitled: Portraits of Australian Artists*, both of which provide insight into the creative process.<sup>34</sup> However, a high production-value publication of that ilk is costly to produce and purchase. Whilst possibilities exist for them to be subsidised, or perhaps even financed through a 'crowd-funding' exercise, the latter option raises the question of subject-selection and editorial control, and whether financial contributions from artists might lead them to think that guarantees their inclusion. A publication produced on that basis is simply a form of marketing.<sup>35</sup> Websites and blogs are cost-effective. But as arts commentator Andrew Frost points out, they are ephemeral and can involve complex copyright issues.<sup>36</sup> Also, whilst blogs, websites and online articles provide extremely useful resources, they involve a different approach to searching and reading than a bookshop or library browse for a hard copy publication whose longevity is, potentially, more assured.

Consequently, well-defined objectives for the purpose of any publication and its intended market or audience are of paramount importance. Good quality images are essential when the subject is visual art, but so is narrative substance and scholarship,

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<sup>34</sup> Lloyd and McDonald, *Studio: Australian Painters on the Nature of Creativity*; Payes, *Untitled: Portraits of Australian Artists*.

<sup>35</sup> In October 2016, Margaret River Region Open Studios launched a publication promoting artists who paid to be included. See Carmen Jenner and Gabi Mills, *Artists of the Margaret River Region* (Margaret River, WA: M & P Publishing, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Frost, "From here to everywhere: the evolution of blogging".

especially if a publication intends to lay claim to having any critical or historical significance.

So what form of narrative could a publication on South West art production take? A ‘Terry Smith-style’ historical survey of major regional currents might document and analyse the unfolding nuances of art production in the South West or address specific themes, such as an emerging sense of place and its expression in different times and media.<sup>37</sup> A *Seven Days in the South West* scenario might look at various cultural practices and pockets of activity, including what is happening with a younger generation of artists and alternative venues.<sup>38</sup> According to Amelia Barikin, well-researched monographs provide useful ‘fragments’ that help to build histories of contemporary art.<sup>39</sup> Many individual artists who have lived and worked in the region would make interesting subjects for monographs. For example, *Peter Kovacsy: A Studio Practice* is a book with narrative and critique that explores the artist’s practice within the context of Western Australia’s fine woodcraft and studio glass movements.<sup>40</sup> A series of publications of this ilk could examine individual artists or groups of artists who work in specific media, such as ceramics, glass, woodcraft, printmaking, sculpture or public art, whilst situating their practice in a wider context.

Recently, Bunbury Regional Art Galleries has begun to commission curatorial essays from different authors to accompany their exhibitions.<sup>41</sup> In like manner, in its role as the region’s peak visual arts institution, perhaps the regional gallery might consider publishing a series of occasional papers that offer a range of critical perspectives on topics that illuminate the specificities of regional art practice and its relationship with what is happening elsewhere. South West Noongar art would make a compelling topic. A history of the City of Bunbury art collection that provides insight into its significance and collecting priorities at different times would be a valuable cultural resource.

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<sup>37</sup> See Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*.

<sup>38</sup> Thornton, *Seven Days in the Art World*.

<sup>39</sup> Amelia Barikin, “Zombie History: Contemporary Art in the Jungles of Cosmic Time,” in *Three Reflections on Contemporary Art History*, eds. Nicholas Croggon and Helen Hughes (Melbourne: Discipline, 2014), 119, 123–124, <https://itunes.apple.com/au/book/three-reflections-on-contemporary/id953102117>.

<sup>40</sup> Roberts, *Peter Kovacsy A Studio Practice*.

<sup>41</sup> McGirr, *The Afternoon of Extravagant Light: Juliet Stone*.



I began with Peter Kovacsy's proposal that there is a market for books that traverse the boundaries of art history and tourism.<sup>42</sup> As my thesis draws to a close, I stand by my original premise – there is a publishing gap on art production in the South West waiting to be filled. Clearly subjects exist. So perhaps the greatest barriers are funding and finding a publisher? Nevertheless, whatever treatment is chosen, there is scope for more than one style of publication, and new ways of writing art history multiply the possibilities to reach specialist and general readers.

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Kovacsy, e-mail message to author, August 1, 2005.

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Every reasonable effort has been made to acknowledge the owners of copyright material. I would be pleased to hear from any copyright owner who has been omitted or incorrectly acknowledged.

## **APPENDIX I**

### **DOCUMENTS RELATING TO ETHICS APPROVAL, INFORMED CONSENT AND COPYRIGHT PERMISSION**

Division of Humanities



Faculty of Built Environment,  
Art & Design

- Departments:
- Architecture & Interior Architecture
  - Art
  - Construction Management
  - Design
  - Urban & Regional Planning

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CRICOS Provider Code 00301J

8<sup>th</sup> December 2006

Diana Roberts  
PO Box 571  
Donnybrook WA 6239

Dear Diana,

This letter is to inform you that your Ethics Form C Application has been approved within our Faculty. Your Reference No. is **BD-27-2006**.

Thankyou

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kristie Stephens".

Kristie Stephens  
Admin Support Officer  
Built, Environment Art and Design



INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

**SOUTH WEST CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART & DESIGN PRACTICE:  
AN EXPRESSION OF THE INTELLECTUAL & IMAGINATIVE LIFE OF THE REGION**

*"If a community has any kind of independent, intellectual and imaginative life, the production of art in the present is an integral part of the way in which it talks among itself about the things that matter to it. Such a community can be a single city, a metropolis, or a nation. Whatever its size, if it has any vitality, its members will also draw inspiration from what is being said and done elsewhere and will in turn contribute to a wider, international dialogue."<sup>1</sup>*

**THE AIMS OF THE PROJECT**

This quote triggered the development of my PhD research topic, as a direct outcome of my involvement with the South West art scene. Most participants will know me as the former Director of Bunbury Regional Art Galleries and/or lecturer at Edith Cowan University's South West Campus. During this time, I became increasingly aware that very little has been written about contemporary art in the South West, for either the specialist or general reader, and I had many conversations with artists about the lack of critical commentary in the regional media. There is plenty of information about what's happening in the region, but there are no reviews or critique.

I believe this vacuum has led to a perception of South West contemporary art and design practice that underestimates its complex and sophisticated character, and the nature of its contribution to a region experiencing extraordinary growth and prosperity. And so I have devised four main objectives to address my central research question, which is to investigate how South West contemporary visual art and design practice contributes to the intellectual and imaginative life of the region. These objectives are to:

- document and analyse the work of a selected group of living artists to provide insight into their practice as an embodiment of innovation and creative talent;
- identify any distinct regional characteristics of South West contemporary visual art and design practice;
- investigate the role of the media, language and critical dialogue in generating representations and perceptions of South West contemporary visual art and design practice;
- embrace current international debates on creativity, aesthetic value and cultural capital.

**NATURE OF PARTICIPATION**

I have identified around twenty established and emerging artists working in a variety of media, to illustrate my topic. The group includes Noongar and non-Indigenous artists, and selection was based on my evaluation that each artist demonstrates an industrious and recognised commitment to their professional practice, by their:

- critical reputation;
- representation in a significant collection;
- prolific exhibition record at established galleries;
- receipt of a major prize and/or award.

Throughout 2007 and the first part of 2008, I will visit each artist in their studio to view a recent body of work, and discuss their practice, sources of inspiration, intentions, and perceptions of the contemporary art scene in the South West. These interviews will be informal. I will take notes and record each open-ended conversation, for practical purposes, but the transcripts will be used as a means of gathering information only. They will not form the main body of my text. All participants will be permitted to view the transcript of our discussion. However, I will reserve the right to edit transcripts for the purposes of clarity, and use extracts or quotes in the text.

The length of each studio visit will vary. I will make arrangements with each artist individually, but at this stage allow one day for the first visit. Return visits may be required, and I will keep in touch with all artists by telephone and/or email. I will ask for access to artist's records and documents, but granting permission will be optional, and refusal will not prejudice my research. I will also seek permission to reproduce images of artwork. All sources will be acknowledged and copyright will remain with each artist.

<sup>1</sup> Macmillan, D. *Scottish Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Edinburgh, Mainstream, 1994, p.9.

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

I

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
13455318

## INFORMATION SHEET FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

### PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY

Obviously the contemporary and analytical nature of my research requires the participants to be identified, however the risk is minimal, ie. no greater than that experienced in everyday life, as the artists have already voluntarily exposed their work to public exhibition. Information provided will only be used for this research project, which may include publication. Safe storage will be provided for all research documents at my home in Donnybrook, and at Curtin University. Access will be restricted to myself and my supervisor(s).

### VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. Everyone who takes part will be required to sign a *Consent Form* confirming their understanding and acceptance of the research aims, and their agreement to be interviewed. Participants will be at liberty to withdraw at any time, without prejudice.

### BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS

The benefits to artists of taking part in this research include:

- the documentation of new evidence and analysis to show how their work contributes to the intellectual and imaginative life of the region;
- an opportunity to participate in critical dialogue;
- potential exposure.

General benefits for other regional artists and the wider community include:

- challenging current perceptions of South West contemporary visual art and design practice;
- enhancing the image of the South West as an artistic, sophisticated and culturally-rich destination.

### CONTACT DETAILS

For further information, please contact:

Principal Investigator

Mrs Diana Roberts  
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Donnybrook WA 6239

0407310968

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### HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

If you wish to make a complaint on ethical grounds, please contact The Secretary, HREC on 9266 2784 or email [L.Teasdale@curtin.edu.au](mailto:L.Teasdale@curtin.edu.au) or write to:

The Secretary, HREC  
Office of Research and Development  
Curtin University of Technology  
PO Box U1987  
Perth WA 6845

### CONFIRMATION OF ETHICS APPROVAL

This research project has been approved by the Faculty of Built Environment, Art and Design, Curtin University of Technology.

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

2

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
13455318



CONSENT FORM

**SOUTH WEST CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART & DESIGN PRACTICE:  
AN EXPRESSION OF THE INTELLECTUAL & IMAGINATIVE LIFE OF THE REGION**

**CONFIRMATION OF VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

I have read and understood the *Information Sheet* which outlines the aims of this PhD research topic, the nature of participation, potential benefits, and possible publication outcomes.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions.

I agree to participate in the research and accept that my participation is voluntary.

I accept the aims of the research project and nature of participation.

I accept that the contemporary and analytic nature of this research requires participants to be identified.

I accept that the risk of participation is minimal, ie. no greater than that experienced in everyday life.

I accept the statement on privacy and confidentiality.

I agree to be interviewed and to the method of interview as described in the *Information Sheet*.

I agree to the reproduction of images of my artwork, according to copyright procedure and acknowledgement of sources.

I accept the possible publication outcomes of this research project.

I understand I can withdraw from the investigation at any time without prejudice.

Name of participant:

JOHN AUSTIN

Signature:



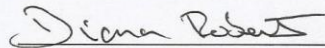
Date:

30 JAN 2007

Name of researcher:

DIANA ROBERTS

Signature:



Date:

24 January 2007

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
13455318

CONSENT FORM

**SOUTH WEST CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART & DESIGN PRACTICE:  
AN EXPRESSION OF THE INTELLECTUAL & IMAGINATIVE LIFE OF THE REGION**

**CONFIRMATION OF VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

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I accept the possible publication outcomes of this research project.

I understand I can withdraw from the investigation at any time without prejudice.

Name of participant: DOUGLAS CHAMBERS

Signature: D. Chambers

Date: 28/2/07

Name of researcher: DIANA ROBERTS

Signature: Diana Roberts

Date: 23/2/07

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
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I understand I can withdraw from the investigation at any time without prejudice.

Name of participant: SENNI DITALEY

Signature: 

Date: 11/2/07

Name of researcher: DIANA ROBERTS

Signature: 

Date: 11/2/07

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
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Name of participant: Ian Dowling  
Signature: Ian Dowling  
Date: 30th January 2007

Name of researcher: DIANA ROBERTS  
Signature: Diana Roberts  
Date: 24 January 2007

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
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I understand I can withdraw from the investigation at any time without prejudice.

Name of participant: SONYA DYE

Signature: 

Date: 16/10/08

Name of researcher: DIANA ROBERTS

Signature: 16/10/08

Date: Diana Roberts

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
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I understand I can withdraw from the investigation at any time without prejudice.

Name of participant: Galliano Fardin

Signature: Galliano Fardin

Date: 19-6-07

Name of researcher: Diana Roberts

Signature: DIANA ROBERTS

Date: 5/5/08

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
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I accept the possible publication outcomes of this research project.

I understand I can withdraw from the investigation at any time without prejudice.

Name of participant: Katherine Hall

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

Date: 1.2.7

Name of researcher: DIANA ROBERTS

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

Date: 24 January 2007

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
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I understand I can withdraw from the investigation at any time without prejudice.

Name of participant: Naomie Hatherley

Signature: Naomie

Date: 18.6.07

Name of researcher: DIANA ROBERTS

Signature: Diana Roberts

Date: 18/6/07

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
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I understand I can withdraw from the investigation at any time without prejudice.

Name of participant: MARY KNOTT

Signature: Mary Knott

Date: 27/02/07

Name of researcher: DIANA ROBERTS

Signature: Diana Roberts

Date: 23/2/07

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
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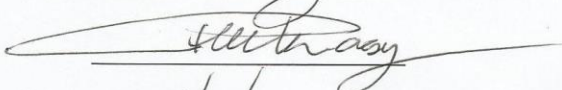
I agree to be interviewed and to the method of interview as described in the *Information Sheet*.

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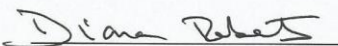
I understand I can withdraw from the investigation at any time without prejudice.

Name of participant: Peter Kovacsy

Signature: 

Date: 23/2/07

Name of researcher: DIANA ROBERTS

Signature: 

Date: 23/2/07

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

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Name of participant: NICOLE AND ALEX MICKLE

Signature: 

Date: 7/03/07

Name of researcher: DIANA ROBERTS

Signature: 

Date: 23/2/07

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
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Name of participant: STEVE PEASE

Signature: S Pease

Date: 20-3-07

Name of researcher: DIANA ROBERTS

Signature: Diana Roberts

Date: 8/3/07

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
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I understand I can withdraw from the investigation at any time without prejudice.

Name of participant: GERRY REILLY

Signature: Gerry

Date: 27/2/07

Name of researcher: DIANA ROBERTS

Signature: Diana Roberts

Date: 23/2/07

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

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Name of participant: JULIET STONE

Signature: Juliet R Stone

Date: 28.2.07

Name of researcher: DIANA ROBERTS

Signature: Diana Roberts

Date: 23/2/07

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
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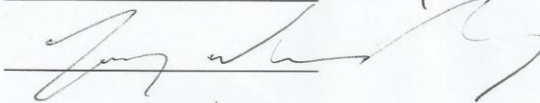
I accept the possible publication outcomes of this research project.

I understand I can withdraw from the investigation at any time without prejudice.

Name of participant:

TONY WINDBERG

Signature:



Date:

28-02-'07

Name of researcher:

DIANA ROBERTS

Signature:



Date:

23/2/07

STUDENT NAME  
DIANA ROBERTS

CURTIN UNIVERSITY STUDENT NUMBER  
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**PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:**

1. *Nel in the canopy* 2006 silver gelatine print 36 x 53cms
2. Installation of *Sundew* by Natalie Williamson silver gelatine print 45 x 31cms
3. Installation of *Whole, you were meant to be here* by Lorena Grant 2006 silver gelatine print 45 x 31cms
4. *Howard Taylor in his Studio* 1988 silver gelatine print 28 x 28cms.

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I confirm that I am the copyright owner of the specified material.

Signed:



Name: John Austin

Position:

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> February 2016

Please return signed form to Diana McGirr

[bigpicturewoman@gmail.com](mailto:bigpicturewoman@gmail.com)

**PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:**

1. *JahRoe Gallery* – exterior view
2. *JahRoe Gallery* – interior view, with furniture made from Western Australian wood designed by Gary Bennett.

I hereby give permission for Diana Rosemary McGirr to include the abovementioned material(s) in her higher degree thesis for Curtin University, and to communicate this material via the [espace@Curtin](mailto:espace@Curtin) institutional repository. This permission is granted on a non-exclusive basis and for an indefinite period.

I confirm that I am the copyright owner of the specified material.

Signed: *Lara Bennett*

Name: Gary Bennett - on behalf - Lara Bennett.

Position: *wife - part owner of Jahroe Gallery*

Date: *12/1/16*

Please return signed form to Diana McGirr

[bigpicturewoman@gmail.com](mailto:bigpicturewoman@gmail.com)

**PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:**

1. Photograph *Bunbury Regional Art Galleries* – exterior view

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I confirm that I am the copyright owner of the specified material.

Signed: 

Name: Julian Bowron

Position: *Manager Community Arts + Culture*

Date: *12/2/16*

Please return signed form to Diana McGirr

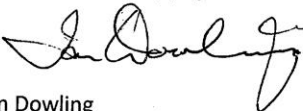
[bigpicturewoman@gmail.com](mailto:bigpicturewoman@gmail.com)

**PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:**

1. *Saddle Grove* installation, City of Bunbury.

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I confirm that I am the copyright owner of the specified material.

Signed: 

Name: Ian Dowling

Position: *artist*

Date: *13/2/2016*

Please return signed form to Diana McGirr

[bigpicturewoman@gmail.com](mailto:bigpicturewoman@gmail.com)



**PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:**

1. Photograph of *Lyndendale Gallery* – exterior view

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I confirm that I am the copyright owner of the specified material.

Signed: *DV Gillies*

Name: Denise Gillies

Position: *Artist / Owner Lyndendale Gallery.*

Date: *12/02/2016.*

Please return signed form to Diana McGirr  
[bigpicturewoman@gmail.com](mailto:bigpicturewoman@gmail.com)

**PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:**

1. Christine Gregory's work at Gunyulgup Galleries

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I confirm that I am the copyright owner of the specified material.

Signed: *Gregory*

Name: Christine Gregory

Position: *Artist / Photographer*

Date: *17/2/16*

Please return signed form to Diana McGirr

HYPERLINK "mailto:bigpicturewoman@gmail.com"

[bigpicturewoman@gmail.com](mailto:bigpicturewoman@gmail.com)



PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:

1. Guy Grey-Smith *Windy Harbour, South West WA, 1975* – Janet Holmes à Court collection
2. Guy Grey-Smith *Karri Trees, 1979* – Janet Holmes à Court collection
3. Guy Grey-Smith *Landscape 1969* – City of Bunbury collection
4. Guy Grey-Smith *Murchison River 1957* – City of Busselton collection.

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I confirm that I am the copyright owner of the specified material.

Signed: *Susanna Grey-Smith*

Name: Susanna Grey-Smith

Position: *Artist's daughter*

Date: *19 February 2016*

Please return signed form to Diana McGirr

[bigpicturewoman@gmail.com](mailto:bigpicturewoman@gmail.com)

*Diana R McGirr*

Diana Rosemary McGirr

**PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:**

- DM* 1. Untitled 2004 charcoal on paper (dimensions unavailable)  
2. ~~6~~ Untitled 2005 (5 panels) charcoal and ochre on board (dimensions unavailable)  
3. ~~7~~ Mine exhibition at Mossenson Galleries, Melbourne 2009  
4. ~~8~~ Two Ways 2009 mixed media on board 15 x 15 x 4.5 (3 components).

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I confirm that I am the copyright owner of the specified material.

Signed: *Katherine Hall*

Name: Katherine Hall

Position:

Date: 18.2.16

Please return signed form to Diana McGirr  
[bigpicturewoman@gmail.com](mailto:bigpicturewoman@gmail.com)

**PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:**

1. Gunyulgup Galleries, Yallingup – exterior view across lake
- ~~2. Christine Gregory's work at Gunyulgup Galleries~~

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I confirm that I am the copyright owner of the specified material.

Signed: 

Name: Ashley Jones

Position: DIRECTOR OF GUNYULGUP GALLERIES

Date: 13/02/2016

Please return signed form to Diana McGirr

[bigpicturewoman@gmail.com](mailto:bigpicturewoman@gmail.com)

**PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:**

1. Photograph of *Peter Kovacsy A Studio Practice* book cover
2. Photograph of Peter Kovacsy's studio gallery in Pemberton

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I confirm that I am the copyright owner of the specified material.

Signed: 

Name: Peter Kovacsy

Position: *Artist*

Date: *8/2/2016*

Please return signed form to Diana McGirr  
[bigpicturewoman@gmail.com](mailto:bigpicturewoman@gmail.com)

**PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:**

1. *The Navigators* by John Tarry

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I confirm that I am the copyright owner of the specified material.

Signed:



Name: Dave Roberts

Position: PHOTOGRAPHER

Date: 03/03/2016.

Please return signed form to Diana McGirr

[bigpicturewoman@gmail.com](mailto:bigpicturewoman@gmail.com)



**PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:**

1. *Dying to be with you* 2013 installation, Cowaramup
2. *Dying to be with you*, with Peter Spence and Katherine Hall.

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Signed:

H Seiver

Name: Helen Seiver

Position:

copyright owner.

Date:

12.2.16

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1. Howard Taylor *Forest Trees* 1979, re-installed 2009 outside City of Bunbury administration building
2. Howard Taylor *Forest Trees* 1979, re-installed 2009 – looking skywards
3. Howard Taylor *Foliage Light* 1986 – City of Bunbury collection.

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Signed:



Name: Douglas Sheerer

Position: Director Galerie Düsseldorf (Representing the Howard H Taylor Estate)

Date: 18 February 2016

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1. Photograph by Wendy Slee of *ArtGeo Gallery* – exterior view

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Signed: *Wendy Slee*

Name: Wendy Slee

Position:

Date: 12 February 2016

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**PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:**

1. *A Feeling of Touch on the Horizon* oil and beeswax on canvas 114 x 140cms.

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Signed: *Juliet R Stone*

Name: Juliet Stone

Position: *Artist*

Date: *11/2/2016*

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**PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:**

1. Photograph of Monique Tippett's Forest Stand, Margaret River
2. Photograph of Monique Tippett's Forest Stand, Margaret River

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Signed: *ETippett*

Name: Ebony Tippett

Position: *Photographer.*

Date: *21/02/16*

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**City of Bunbury Collection**

1. Tony Jones *Echo* 1996 painted steel and wood 120 x 170 x 137 (excluding frame)
2. Guy Grey-Smith *Landscape* 1969 oil on canvas 61 x 90cms
3. Howard Taylor *Foliage Light* 1986 oil on hardboard 75 x 106cms
4. Douglas Chambers *The Wicketkeeper* 1989 oil on canvas 151 x 148cms
5. Mary Knott *Traversing* 1992 pastel, gesso and bitumen on paper 76 x 74cms
6. Mary Knott *Deluge* 1992 plaster, cane and paper 42 x 34cms
7. Kent Le Grand *Wave Form I* 1988 blown glass 13.5 x 14cms
8. Gerry Reilly *Monoclines* 2003 blown glass 30 x 24cms, 28 x 20cms, 41 x 15cms
9. Mary Knott *Cornucopian* 1995 paper and cane 50 x 400cms (multiple pieces)
10. Galliano Fardin *Directions and Choices 3 (Boundary Lake)* 1996 oil on canvas 175 x 129cms
11. Sandra Hill *Going Back Home* 1997 transfer print and watercolour 120 x 100cms
12. Shaun Atkinson *Infinite/Finite* 1999 oil on board 46.5 x 49.5cms (detail)
13. Paul Uhlmann *Untitled Studies in Light (Night/Sea)* 1999 oil on board 121.5 x 152cms
14. Katherine Hall *Burial Ground* 2001 charcoal on paper 150.5 x 250cms
15. Steve Pease *Landline Series Sandrift 4* 2003 (top view) chemically-coloured brass 6.8 x 20cms
16. Rick Martin *Opening to an unquiet day* 2005 acrylic and oil on canvas 170 x 100cms
17. Helen Foster *Drought* 2007 Stoneware 8 x 45cms
18. Thomas Heidt *Strange Seed 1* 2007 wood and copper 40 x 200cms
19. Tony Windberg *Ascension* 2007 oil on canvas 61 x 66cms
20. Kent Le Grand *Wave Form II* 1988 blown glass 11.7 x 10cms
21. Chris Williamson *Silo Sketchbook* watercolour, gouache, collage on paper 77 x 102cms
22. Rita Winkler *Breaking Out* sterling silver, stainless steel, gold and cubic zircon stones  
ring: 1.4 x 0.8cms, brooch: 6 x 5.5cms, earrings: 3 x 2.7cmseach
23. Olga Cironis *Mylaup Beach* steel and found objects 43.5 x 51cms
24. Alex Mickle *Hand to Mouth* cold cast bronze, wood, brick and steel  
85 x 11x21.5cms, 132 x 28 x28cms, 90 x 18 x 31cms
25. Simon James *Embers* wood and woodstain 18 x 26cms, 24 x 27cms
26. Michael Wise *Black Night* automotive enamel, acrylic on aluminium 54 x 54cms
27. Kay Gibson *Occupied Territory II* acrylic on canvas 125 x 101cms, 125 x 35.5cms
28. Charles Riley *Djuidin's Dreaming* enamel and acrylic painted refrigerator  
141 x 72.5 x 53cms
29. Troy Bennell *Fire on Pingelly Reserve* acrylic on canvas
30. Tjyllyungoo Lance Chadd *Nyoongarah Wirdanginy* 2010 acrylic on canvas 70 x 70cms
31. Graham 'Swag' Taylor *Peaceful Place* 2011 acrylic on canvas 120 x 180cms
32. Philip Hansen *Bushboy Hill - Kangaroo Dip at Dawn* 2012 acrylic on canvas 76 x 50.5cms
33. Sam Harris *Untitled* 2013 digital archival print 71 x 93.5cms (each print including frame)

**City of Busselton Collection**

1. Guy Grey-Smith *Murchison River* 1957 watercolour and ink on paper 29.2 x 39.3cms
2. Marina Troitsky *Displacement No. IV* 2009 found cabinet and kangaroo bones 121.8 x 73.3 x 57.5cms (doors ajar)
3. Laurie Posa *Red Tail Cockatoo* 2009 oil on canvas 121.9 x 76.2cms

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Signed:

Name: Paul Webster

Position: Photographer

Date: 23-02-2016

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[bigpicturewoman@gmail.com](mailto:bigpicturewoman@gmail.com)

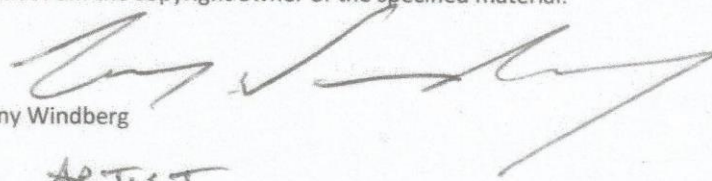
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1. Tony Windberg outside his studio, black and white photograph
2. *Karri* 1987 oil on canvas 122 x 122cms
3. *Red Tingle* 1998 charcoal on paper 56 x 74cms
4. *Visitors* 2001 oil on canvas 75 x 152cms (3 panels)
5. *Out Back - Karratha Self-Portrait* 2003 conte crayon, iron oxides on paper 77 x 57cms
6. *Convergence - Karratha* 2003 acrylic and oil on linen and canvas panels 56 x 244cms
7. *Genesis* 2005 oil and oxides on canvas and linen panels 84 x 51 cm (2 panels)
8. *Frontier* 2002 oil on canvas 76 x 76cms
9. *From the Edge - Meekathara* 2002 conte crayon on paper 56 x 153cm (2 panels)
10. *Day Vision* 2003 engraved vinyl, oil on canvas 52 x 100cms
11. *The Cutter* 2009 oil on canvas 66 x 61cms
12. *Containment I, II and III* 2010 oil on marine ply panel 29 x 19cms
13. *Redemption* 2008 oil on linen 102 x 138cms
14. *Decomposition 1* 2009 oil on canvas 92 x 92cms
15. Tony Windberg *Light Shift - Tuart* 2009 ash, charcoal, oil and wax on canvas/linen panel 106 x 51cms (each panel)
16. Tony Windberg *Vanishing Point - Middleton Road A and B* 2010 engraved vinyl and mdf 1780 x 1526 x 430 (both sections wall mounted)
17. *Vanishing Point - South West Highway* 2010 engraved vinyl on mdf 45.9 x 144.4 x 29.6cms
18. *Glade* 2010 engraved vinyl, painted mdf 460 x 2520 x 52cms (combined dimensions).

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Signed:



Name: Tony Windberg

Position: ARTIST

Date: 12 FEB 2016

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[bigpicturewoman@gmail.com](mailto:bigpicturewoman@gmail.com)



# Janet Holmes à Court Collection Image Loan Agreement

Loan ID No.: 1211

As agreed between the borrower and the lender and governed by the *Reproduction Request and Terms and Conditions for reproduction of works of art from the Janet Holmes à Court Collection.*

Name of borrower: Diana McGirr  
Contact name: Diana McGirr  
Borrower address: Donnybrook WA 6239

Phone: 0407 310 968

Fax:

Exhibition /purpose : for use in Diana's PhD thesis about the South West art world

Locations and dates: November 2014

Period of loan: From: Fri, 21 Nov 2014 To: Wed, 21 Jan 2015

Total Images: 2

Accn. #	Title	Artist name	Medium	H x W x D (cm)	Date
2193	Windy Harbour, South West, W.a	GREY-SMITH, Guy	oil on hardboard	125.5 186.5	1975
48	Karri Trees	GREY-SMITH, Guy	oil on canvas on board	122.3 111.5	1979

Total Images: 2

I have read and agree to the conditions of this Photographic Hire Agreement as stated in the Terms and Conditions on the reverse of this document.

Lender: Janet Lee Holmes à Court trading as Janet Holmes à Court Collection ABN 20 256 856 040

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name: Sharon Tassicker, Manager, Janet Holmes à Court Collection

Borrower:

Signature: Diana R McGirr Date 20/11/14

Name: DIANA ROSEMARY MCGIRR

Please sign both copies of this form, retain the white copy for your records and return the pink copy to:  
The Manager, Janet Holmes à Court Collection  
PO Box 7255, Cloisters Square, WA 6850

Registered Office: Suite 1 /464 Murray Street Perth WA 6000  
Telephone: (08) 6217 2640 Facsimile: (08) 6217 2645 Mobile: 0439 392 635



**From:** hacgallery@heytesbury.com.au [mailto:hacgallery@heytesbury.com.au]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 8 October 2013 4:10 PM  
**To:** bigpicturewoman@southwestlife.com.au  
**Subject:** Images of Holmes à Court Gallery

Hi Diana

We have attached some images of the gallery that you can use for your PhD on South West Galleries.

The credits are:

Figure 1 'Black, White & Bronze,' Holmes à Court Gallery at Vasse Felix, photography courtesy of Sharon Tassicker

Figure 2 'The Art of Sound', Holmes à Court Gallery at Vasse Felix, photography courtesy of Megan Schlipalius

Figure 3 'Fire: some kind of energy', Holmes à Court Gallery at Vasse Felix, photography courtesy of Sharon Tassicker

All of the images feature the Janet Holmes à Court Collection.

The exhibition Black White & Bronze (exhibited 2012) featured the Janet Holmes à Court Collection works plus sculpture by Bodo Muche and Simon Holmes à Court.

<http://www.holmesacourtgallery.com.au/article/black-white-bronze>

Fire - some kind of energy (exhibited in 2013) featured the Janet Holmes à Court Collection plus installations by local artists affected by the Margaret River Fires.

All the works in the exhibition The Art of Sound (exhibited in 2013) are from the Janet Holmes à Court Collection. The Sound was supplied in domes seen in the image.

See the National Film and Archive website or the Holmes à Court Gallery website for further information about this project.

<http://www.holmesacourtgallery.com.au/articles/past-exhibitions-2013>

Good luck with your research,  
Megan

Megan Schlipalius

**Janet Holmes à Court Collection**

PO Box 7255, Cloisters Square WA 6850  
Phone 08 6217 2640 | Fax: 08 6217 2645  
<http://www.holmesacourtgallery.com.au>

**From:** Julie Martin [mailto:julie@leeuwinestate.com.au]  
**Sent:** Sunday, 29 September 2013 9:55 AM  
**To:** Diana Roberts  
**Subject:** Re: Request to use pics in my PhD thesis

Hi Diana.

Thanks for your email.

There are high res images for download on our website - under images gallery click on media images & follow the prompts. [www.leeuwinestate.com.au](http://www.leeuwinestate.com.au)

With best wishes & good luck with your thesis.

Julie

Sent from my iPad

On 28/09/2013, at 2:05 PM, "Diana Roberts" <[bigpicturewoman@southwestlife.com.au](mailto:bigpicturewoman@southwestlife.com.au)> wrote:

Hello

I'm writing a PhD thesis about the South West art world, and I wish to reproduce some images in a background chapter where I describe and illustrate some of the galleries and collections in the South West.

Do you have any photographs of the Leeuwin Estate Art Gallery I could use? I'd like to include one or two in my thesis to give a sense of the gallery and collection. For example, there is quite a good one on your website.

Please note, all images will be captioned and referenced with the source, eg:

Figure 8: Leeuwin Estate Art Gallery

Photo: name of photographer/copyright holder

If you do have any suitable images and you are willing to let me reproduce them, could you please forward them in jpg format via email.

Kind regards  
Diana Roberts MA  
PhD Candidate, Department of Art  
School of Design & Art, Faculty of Humanities  
Curtin University, Western Australia

**From:** Colette Fitzgerald [mailto:[colette.fitzgerald@swdc.wa.gov.au](mailto:colette.fitzgerald@swdc.wa.gov.au)]  
**Sent:** Thursday, 7 November 2013 4:42 PM  
**To:** [bigpicturewoman@southwestlife.com.au](mailto:bigpicturewoman@southwestlife.com.au)  
**Subject:** FW: Permission to use maps in my PhD thesis

Dear Diana

Don Punch, CEO, South West Development Commission has approved the use of the maps indicated for your PhD thesis.

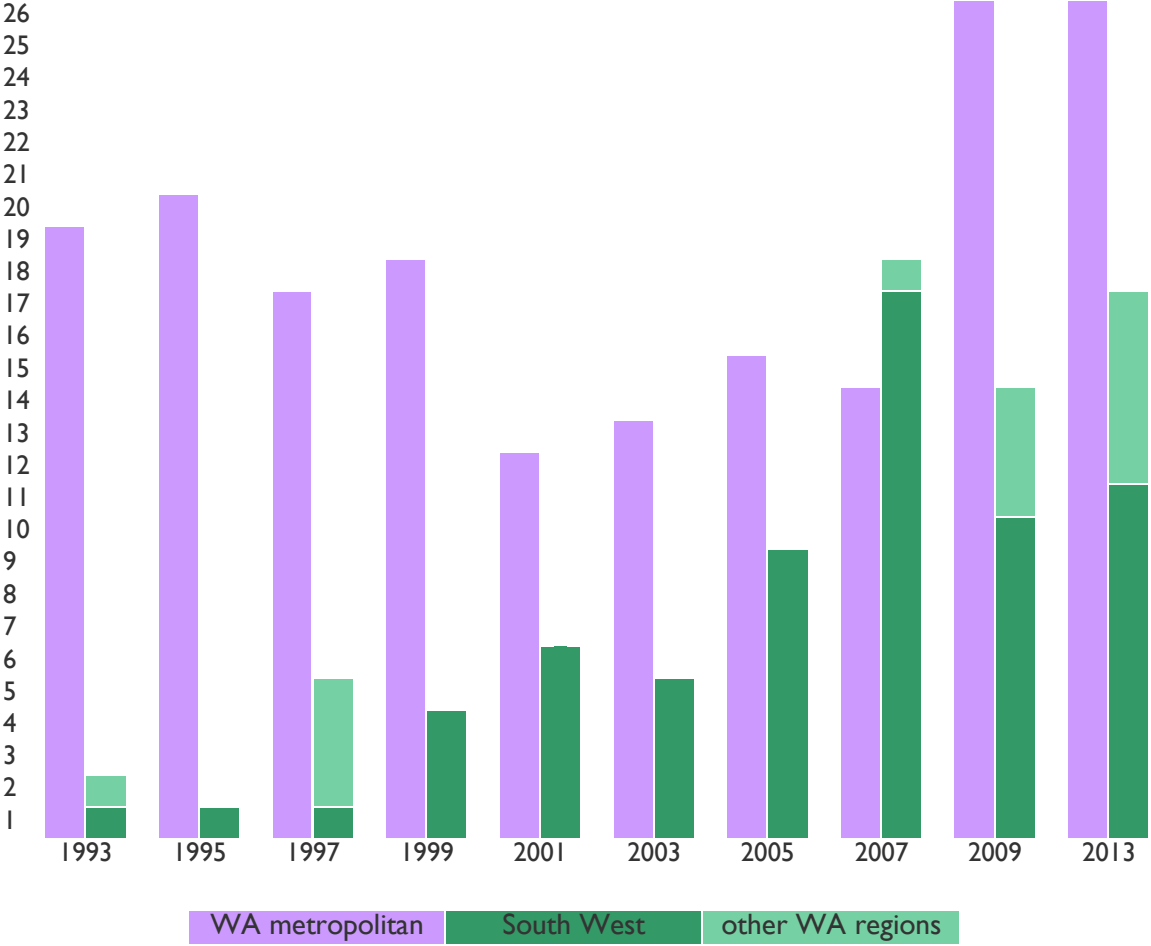
Regards Colette

Colette Fitzgerald | Executive Officer  
South West Development Commission  
9th Floor, Bunbury Tower, 61 Victoria Street | PO Box 2000 | BUNBURY WA 6230  
Phone: 08 9792 2006 | Mobile: 042 985 1593 | Fax: 08 9791 2130  
Email: [colette.fitzgerald@swdc.wa.gov.au](mailto:colette.fitzgerald@swdc.wa.gov.au)  
[www.swdc.wa.gov.au](http://www.swdc.wa.gov.au)

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **TABLE I**

**Table I. Number of artists selected for the *Bunbury Biennale* 1993 to 2013**



## **APPENDIX 3**

### **TABLE 2**

**Table 2. Tony Windberg's participation in exhibitions involving selection and judging for an art award.**

