

# 11

## **BRYAN ROBERTSON, ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM AND LATE MODERNISM<sup>1</sup> IN "RECENT AUSTRALIAN PAINTING" (1961)**

*Simon Pierse*

In June and July of 1961, Bryan Robertson staged an important exhibition of contemporary Australian painting at the Whitechapel Gallery.<sup>2</sup> Under his curatorship, "Recent Australian Painting" projected a particular view of Australia and Australian art to a London audience. Robertson was excited by the exoticism that he perceived in Australian contemporary painting; the result of the country's supposed isolation (both physical and cultural) from Western Europe, and what he claimed was Australia's "lack of any aesthetic tradition with roots."<sup>3</sup> The exhibition was both influential and somewhat controversial, especially for the catalogue introductions written by Robertson and the young Robert Hughes. Whilst Hughes distanced himself from Robertson, writing that "to think of Australia as a *jardin exotique* is a fashionable way of missing the point",<sup>4</sup> he wrote that Australian [artistic] sensibility had been formed by "our complete isolation from the Renaissance tradition, and, parallel with that, a similar isolation from most of what happens now in world art."<sup>5</sup>

Robertson for his part projected a view of Australia as a remote land "in a vast Pacific world, bordered by New Guinea and fringed on one side by the primitive Torres Straits Islands."<sup>6</sup> For the exhibition opening Robertson had the Whitechapel gallery filled with enormous tropical trees and plants, and in a letter to Hal Missingham, director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, he described the gallery as "blazing with light and colour."<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere, Robertson's explanation of the "instinctive exuberance and spontaneity" of Australian painting in terms of "a natural plastic sense fed by the sun and the climate"<sup>8</sup> lent further weight to the idea of an exhibition that had more to do with

geographical climate than the artistic climate of Australia in the early 1960s.

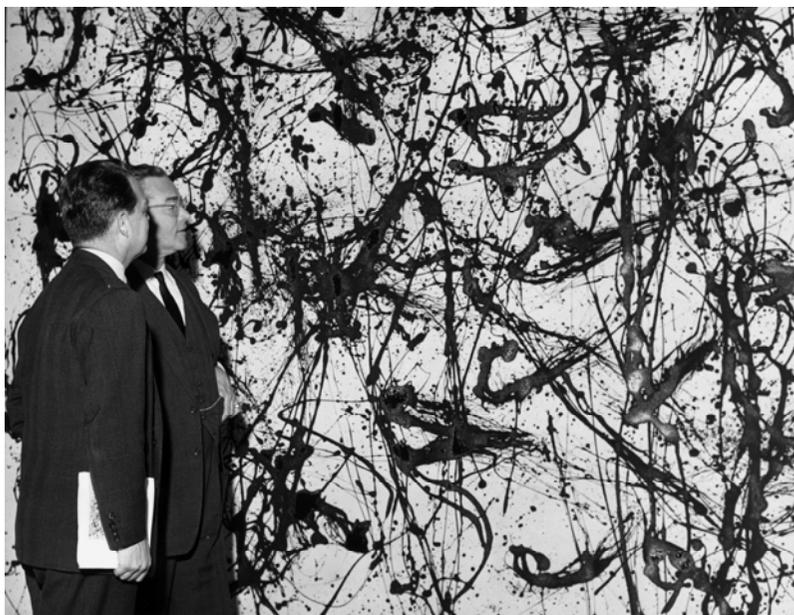
Robertson's curation and projection of Australian painting at the Whitechapel is best understood in the broader context of his exhibition policy there, which he once described as bringing light and colour to London's East End:

What I look for in art of any period is imaginative energy, radiance, equilibrium, composure, colour, vitality, poise, buoyancy, a transcendent ability to soar above life and not be subjugated by it, the avoidance of rhetoric, a resolved formal tension. I have tended to prefer abstract art to figurative art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century because so much modern figurative painting, unsurprisingly, is inherently morbid and this, again, seems self-indulgent to me and redundant.<sup>9</sup>

Bernard Smith's criticisms of Robertson's projection of "Recent Australian Painting" have been widely circulated in a number of lectures and publications. His first critique of the Whitechapel exhibition appeared just a month or so after it closed, in a lecture entitled "The Myth of Isolation", given at the University of Queensland in 1961.<sup>10</sup> The publication of this lecture in 1962 was followed by a further essay: "The Truth about the Antipodeans",<sup>11</sup> in which Smith focussed on the myth of Australian painting as a product of the "exotic and the remote" and drew attention to what he saw as Robertson's bias towards abstract art, in particular American abstract expressionist painting of the late 1940s and 1950s.

Abstraction versus figuration had, of course, been a hotly contested issue in Australian contemporary painting throughout the 1950s. It was a debate in which Smith had a vested interest since he had helped to form the figurative Antipodean Group in 1959 and was co-author of the group's contentious manifesto attacking tachism and abstract expressionism.<sup>12</sup> Smith wrote to Robertson in 1959,<sup>13</sup> asking him to stage an exhibition of the Antipodeans at the Whitechapel Gallery, having already enlisted the help of Sir Kenneth Clark, from whom he subsequently received some ambiguous support for the Antipodean Manifesto.<sup>14</sup> But Robertson shrewdly circumvented the situation, ignoring Smith's letters, until plans had been set for him to travel to Australia in early 1960, ostensibly on a British Council inter-state lecture

tour, when he was able to visit gallery directors and artists in their studios and curate an exhibition of one hundred and eleven paintings that included a roughly equal number of ‘abs’ and ‘figs’.



**FIGURE 11.1.** John Hay ‘Jock’ Whitney, US ambassador to Great Britain (right), and Porter McCray of the Museum of Modern Art, look at a Jackson Pollock painting at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, November 1958. Photo by Express/Express/Getty Images. Source: Hulton Archive © 2007 Getty Images.

Under Robertson’s directorship, the Whitechapel Gallery gained a reputation for staging innovative and groundbreaking shows of contemporary art. In attracting a Jackson Pollock exhibition to the Whitechapel in 1958 (Fig. 1), Robertson achieved a coup that effectively upstaged the Tate Gallery. His many friendships and contacts amongst artists and gallery directors of the New York art scene subsequently led to exhibitions at the Whitechapel by Mark Rothko (1961), Robert Rauschenberg (1964) and Morris Louis (1965). Robertson did not follow

any Greenburg inspired orthodoxy – he was by nature a maverick – and under his directorship the Whitechapel’s exhibition programme was wide-ranging, eclectic and unorthodox. However, he did feel that the strongest and most lively work being created in the 1950s was abstract, and that “de Staël, Poliakoff, Pollock and Tàpies with a few others were extending visual language” whilst figurative art was mostly weak and retrogressive.<sup>15</sup> Robertson made sure that his curation of “Recent Australian Painting” did not appear to be skewed in favour of abstract artists, but in a letter to Robert Hughes, he confided:

I’ll see to it that the abstract boys get a really hefty participation, in strength, and the Sydney boys needn’t fear that Melbourne painting will get a bigger half of the show, it won’t. ... I’m doing it fairly, and in case anyone (or you) are dubious I didn’t spend two years sweating away on Pollock when I really only like Chagall, as it were. The abstract element will soar across, never fear!<sup>16</sup>

Whilst Robertson was away in Australia, the first group exhibition of Australian abstract art to be seen in Britain was being staged at the New Vision Centre Gallery in London.<sup>17</sup> “15 Contemporary Australian Painters” had been organized by the New South Wales branch of the Contemporary Art Society (CASNSW) and had been shown at the Bissetta Gallery in Sydney in December 1959, before being packed up and shipped off to London. It included the work of CASNSW members Margo Lewers, Carl Plate, Tom Gleghorn and Elwyn Lynn. These artists had previously shown together in an exhibition in Sydney in November 1956 when Paul Haeffiger, in a review for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, commented: “the bandwagon of abstract expressionism is filling nicely.”<sup>18</sup>

It would be a mistake to reduce Smith’s criticisms of Robertson’s exhibition to a personal issue related to his thwarted plans for an Antipodean exhibition. Whilst it is clear that the two men did not see eye to eye, at the heart of Smith’s criticism is what he discerned as Robertson’s strong attraction to American abstract expressionist painting, particularly the paintings of Jackson Pollock (1912–1956). Smith wrote that “Recent Australian Painting” had been curated in terms of Robertson’s own leaning towards primitivism, epitomised in the work of what he described as that “Greenwich village Tarzan”, Jackson Pollock.<sup>19</sup>

Two years after the Whitechapel Pollock exhibition, and with the help of Lee Krasner, the artist's widow, Robertson published a book on the art of Jackson Pollock. He was in the final stages of writing the book when Bernard Smith, through the auspices of Ursula Hoff, tried without success to make contact to pursue the request for an Antipodean exhibition. Subsequently, in "The Truth about the Antipodeans", Smith critiqued the book as "a most extraordinary publication" in which Pollock is:

... depicted doing violent balletic tricks with a can of paint... Then a couple of pages of biography are devoted almost exclusively to Jackson's violence, alcoholism and interest in the archetypal. This is followed by seven pages of ecstatic praise for just one painting, our own beloved *Blue Poles*. It is all presented in the high purple prose of Robertson's primitivism. Pollock, he concludes with triumph, has proven to us all that painting is a 'primitive activity'<sup>20</sup>

Convenient though this is to Smith's argument, since it seems to confirm Robertson's view of modern Australian painting as another manifestation of primitivism, it neither does full justice to Robertson's curation of the exhibition, nor does it sufficiently explain Smith's own stance towards abstract expressionist painting. In 1983, Smith published "Notes on Abstract Art" in which he related: "for me, neither painting nor sculpture are at their best when they are wholly abstract. ... To separate painting from meaning is to weaken it, because the two, in this art, adhere so closely together. When I compare Pollock's *Blue Poles* with Tiepolo's *The Banquet of Cleopatra* I just seem to know, instinctively almost, which is the better painting."<sup>21</sup>

However, it was not simply instinct that drew Smith towards figuration. Politics also played their part. Smith reacted strongly towards what he described as the "new American dogma" of Abstract Expressionism and the pervasive worldwide influence of Federal government sponsored American culture. In July 1950 at the Venice Biennale, Smith had first come across the work of Gorky, Pollock and de Kooning. He wrote: "it was however, Pollock's work to which I reacted most strongly, and with an intense dislike. It seemed to me that he was forcing painting to a pitch of abstraction beyond which it could only destroy its own traditions."<sup>22</sup> Smith noted the similarity between one of Pollock's

canvases at the Venice Biennale and the work of British artist Alan Davie (b.1920) who he knew at the Abbey art centre in New Barnet in north London.<sup>23</sup> Davie had a studio upstairs in the Abbey on the same floor as Smith's study. Smith recalls:

It was there that I first saw Pollock-type painting and spent many nights arguing with him during the winter of 1949, though we remained good friends, about his new-found manner of painting and about art in general. 'It destroys too much', I would argue. 'You can't go on from there, you can only go back.' It seemed to me then, and it still seems to me, that abstract expressionism (though they hadn't agreed on any name at that time) was a *pisaller* ... that what it promised it could not deliver, that is, was wholly destructive of the painterly tradition. A point of no return.<sup>24</sup>

Robertson, who gave Davie an exhibition at the Whitechapel in 1958, the same year as the Jackson Pollock exhibition, was not simply a standard-bearer for American and British abstract expressionism, nor was the Whitechapel Gallery exclusively devoted to exhibitions of abstract expressionist art. Nevertheless, it does appear that, in his writing on American artists such as Pollock, Robertson had formulated certain notions about the relationships between landscape and national character, which were subsequently developed or redeployed to present Australian contemporary painting in a similar light. Robertson observed that "the space of America frightens its inhabitants" and described the search for an American identity as "made against the space, antagonistically." He described how Americans from the East did not look out of the windows of the long-distance railway trains taking them across the continent, which existed only "in terms of scattered relatives, or business appointments, or friends serving as refuge points."<sup>25</sup> "In the great landscapes of Wyoming, Arizona, and California", Robertson went on, "a man or a sudden outcrop of rock stands out with the same massive isolation as Chartres Cathedral from the rolling plains of Normandy."<sup>26</sup> In similar vein, Robertson wrote of the vast spaces and immense distances of the Australian continent and "the very real isolation of many Australians [that] give a special edge to whatever is created, as well as to behaviour."<sup>27</sup> In terms of character, Robertson found in Pollock "a Celtic and Northern sensibility"<sup>28</sup> and, amongst

Australians, “a strong Celtic strain ... notably Irish, which has its own waywardness.”<sup>29</sup> But as Robertson himself allowed, all artists are different, and the image of Pollock as a hard living, hard drinking man – in part an exercise in self-promotion, reinforced by the famous Hans Narmuth film footage – was counter-balanced by the example of Russian born Mark Rothko (1903–1970). To accompany the Rothko exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1961, Robertson contributed a catalogue preface in which he wrote of the work as “a statement of extreme refinement, formed and articulated with absolute certainty and control” in which “there is no sign of the artist searching or himself in the execution, no evidence of strain or struggle.”<sup>30</sup>

The fashion for Australian contemporary painting that had been growing in London since the early 1950s had, to large extent, been initiated by Sir Kenneth Clark, who saw in the work of Nolan, Drysdale and others, new hope for figurative contemporary painting. This climate also nurtured what has been dubbed “a London school of Australian art criticism” led by John Douglas Pringle, Colin McInnes and other expatriate Australians living there. Robertson, who was friendly with Clark, whilst sharing his enthusiasm for Australian art, particularly the work of Nolan, was keen to demonstrate that abstraction was an equally important part of Australian contemporary painting. Whereas Clark was depressed by the spread of international abstraction, something he saw as manifesting “the iron grip of historical determinism”,<sup>31</sup> Robertson had a strong and sanguine belief in what he perceived as a general movement towards metaphysical abstraction in Australian and American art.<sup>32</sup>

Although American influenced abstract expressionism had gained ground in Australia during the mid to late 1950s, there was also an established tradition of Australian abstraction dating back to the 1930s. Robertson was well aware of this through his friendship with Roy de Maistre, a long-term resident of London. In his catalogue introduction to the Whitechapel show, Robertson wrote of “A handful of artists in late middle age [who] have been painting abstract pictures in Australia for several decades, notably [Godfrey] Miller (1893–1964), [Ralph] Balson (1890–1964) and [Ian] Fairweather (1891–1974).” Indeed, Robertson went to some lengths to include a work by Fairweather in the Whitechapel show, eventually borrowing “Pool” (1960) from the collection of Kym Bonython in Adelaide.<sup>33</sup> Paintings by Balson and

Miller were also included. Although the poured paint of Balson's early 1960s 'matter paintings' bears a superficial resemblance to Pollock's work, such work represented the culmination of many decades of art practice that had its roots, not in American abstract expressionism of the 1950s, but in Australian 'non-objective' art of the late 1930s.<sup>34</sup> For "Recent Australian Painting" Robertson borrowed one of Balson's late 'non-objective' paintings ("Painting No. 9", 1959) and Miller's "Nude and the moon" (1957-9) from the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Miller's "Summer" (1957-60) and "Triptych" (1957-60) were also shown at the Whitechapel, and "Triptych" was subsequently bought for the Tate Gallery's permanent collection.

Because Robertson's selection of Australian painting was made independently of the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board, he was able to make an eclectic and largely personal choice. This choice included not only work by a wide range of abstract painters, both young and old, but also paintings by every artist of the Antipodean Group, as well as surrealist canvases by James Gleeson, theatrical gouache and watercolour sketches by London based set-designer Loudon Sainthill, and ink drawings by Donald Friend (1915-1989), who Robertson made a special visit to see in Sri Lanka on his way home from Australia. Friend was rather equivocal about his place within an exhibition that aimed to show "the most recent trends in contemporary Australian painting", informing Robertson that he had no wish to become "a Zen-Buddhist abstract-expressionist television pin-up."<sup>35</sup> On receiving a copy of the catalogue, sent from London, he wrote in his diary:

I regret now having sent anything at all to the damned show which is very evidently preponderantly Abstract Expressionist – splurged anonymous-looking canvases. I can well imagine my work in such company would look anaemic and foolishly refined. Although it is hard to judge from photographs, especially of pictures that seem to rely not at all on drawing, composition and design or tonality for their interest, but on painting surface (and perhaps colour) alone.<sup>36</sup>

Friend thought that the work selected by Robertson constituted "a loss of identity" for Australian painting. The pervasive American influence that Smith and others had reacted against and had sought to counter

with the 1959 Antipodean exhibition now seemed poised to swamp national identity in a homogenising modernism.

In point of fact there were relatively few works in “Recent Australian Painting” that could be genuinely described as tachist or abstract expressionist. The exhibition might have looked very different had Robertson included the tachist paintings of Peter Upward, as at one point he had intended to do, or if he had been successful in persuading Tony Tuckson, deputy director of AGNSW, who was coordinating the collection and shipping of paintings to England, to contribute some of his own abstract expressionist influenced paintings to the exhibition. Both names appeared on the provisional list of exhibitors at various stages in the planning of the show, but were eventually dropped.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, Robertson used “Recent Australian Painting” as an opportunity to construct his own utopian vision of the future of Australian painting. He shaped the exhibition in such a way that its climax would be three paintings by Brett Whiteley (1939–1992), then just twenty-two years old and living in London. Robertson had chosen two of these paintings from Whiteley’s Ladbroke Grove studio, paintings which he described as “of startling maturity, richness and spiritual and imaginative poise, perfectly at ease in their medium and wholly original.”<sup>38</sup> Whiteley was already evolving an abstract style, partly inspired by the sienna red walls and early Renaissance paintings that he had seen whilst on a recent scholarship in Italy, and partly derived from erotically charged images of the figure. Robertson was convinced that these paintings would form the climax and culmination to the whole exhibition and he contrived to hang Whiteley’s work so that it would dominate the end wall of the Whitechapel gallery, where it would serve as the backdrop for speeches made at the exhibition opening. “Recent Australian Painting” suggested a direction for Australian contemporary painting through abstraction and demonstrated that potential through the paintings of its youngest exhibitor. But the style of Whiteley’s work, however “wholly original” Robertson claimed it to be, was strongly influenced at the time by the paintings of American artist Richard Diebenkorn (1922–1993), an artist whose work Whiteley had, up to then, only seen in reproduction.<sup>39</sup> Through Robertson’s influence, Whiteley’s “Untitled red painting” was acquired for the Tate Gallery, and the same year this work appeared in an American publication, *Abstract*

*Painting: Fifty Years of Accomplishment from Kandinsky to the Present*, alongside reproductions by Motherwell, Pollock and Rothko.<sup>40</sup>

Through Robertson, Whiteley met a number of American artists on visits to London in the early 1960s. They included Robert Motherwell, Helen Frankenthaler, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman. But with the exception of Robert Rauschenberg (b.1925), who Whiteley met at a gathering at Robertson's flat, he was never particularly influenced by their work.<sup>41</sup> The example of American painting was not of much use to him, Robertson was later to write, "except in terms of increased scale common to all painters at the time and, marginally, the influence of Rauschenberg's 'combine' paintings, in separated canvases deployed like diptychs or triptychs on to which photos or texts or objects were occasionally collaged."<sup>42</sup>

The Rauschenberg exhibition staged by Robertson at the Whitechapel in 1964 influenced the Australian artists living in London much more than the Pollock and Rothko shows had done. W.R. Bill Cumming, Secretary to Australia House in London, whilst describing the exhibition at the time as "shocking" ... "extremely avantgarde" [and] ... "a series of gimmicks", admitted that "Rauschenberg has, in the last ten years or so, considerably influenced quite a number of the younger [Australian] artists."<sup>43</sup> Louis James (1920–1996) was one of those Australians impressed by the Whitechapel Rauschenberg exhibition, work that he summed up as "somewhere between abstract expressionism and pop",<sup>44</sup> whilst Lawrence Daws (b.1927) was for a time very interested in Rauschenberg's 'combine drawing' technique, which involved the lifting off of images with a tetrachloride solution.<sup>45</sup>

In 1962, when Robertson received a Ford Foundation Grant to visit New York and write about the most recent trends in American painting, he invited Lawrence Daws to accompany him on a two-month visit to the United States. Daws took up residence with Robertson in an apartment he was renting in New York where he was introduced to some of Robertson's personal friends such as the author Dawn Powell. Robertson seemed to be continually on the phone, Daws remembers, "opening up conduits and networks all over the place" and "being wooed by Leo Castelli and various other people" for future exhibitions at the Whitechapel. It was an exciting time to be in New York: Henry Geldzahler had been sent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art to the west coast of the United States to investigate the latest trends in

American contemporary art, only to find “that it was all happening back in New York.”<sup>46</sup> One of the centres of this new art scene was Andy Warhol’s studio. Daws accompanied Robertson there on a visit:

It was on the first floor and quite small ... inside the studio Warhol was doing his ‘quick-quick-slow paintings’ on the floor. He had a dress on and a Marilyn Munroe look – the wig thing. He gave us tumblers of neat scotch, no question of water. ... There was a bit of a noise and it turned out that his mother lived upstairs. Warhol used to bang on the ceiling and say: “keep the noise down!”<sup>47</sup>

Afterwards, Daws, Robertson and Warhol went out to eat with Geldzahler at the Four Seasons restaurant in the Seagram Building on Park Avenue. Still wearing the blonde wig and beauty spot, Warhol positioned himself at the table where he could see everyone who was coming into the restaurant.

Leaving New York, Robertson and Daws travelled to Boston, and then by ferry to Provincetown, a popular summer retreat for the New York art set. There they spent a good deal of time with Mark and Mel Rothko, Helen Frankenthaler and Robert Motherwell, who took Daws to meet and pay homage to the aged Hans Hoffman. Returning to New York, Daws and Robertson stayed with Lee Krasner for a week of dinner parties around a big expanding, eight-foot round table.<sup>48</sup>

For Daws, the experience of meeting his “heroes from art school” was like a dream, but, with the exception of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, he was not particularly influenced by the work he saw in America.<sup>49</sup> Clearly, though, Robertson’s connections with American modernism were well developed in the early sixties and many of the artists that he met or visited in 1962 would go on to have one-man shows at the Whitechapel Gallery in the following years: Robert Rauschenberg (1964), Lee Krasner (1965) and Robert Motherwell (1966).

But evidence that Bryan Robertson’s interests in American modernism may directly have influenced Australian artists in London in the early 1960s appears very slight. Despite the opportunities he gave Australian artists to see recent American painting and to meet American artists in London or the United States, they remained on the whole remote from any direct influence. With the exception of the Rauschenberg exhibition

that evidently impressed a number of the younger Australian painters in Robertson's circle, and which exerted an influence on Daws, James and Whiteley, Australian expatriate artists living in London proved to be far more resilient to the international spread of American modernism than many had predicted. Robertson's interest in American abstract expressionist painters like Pollock was certainly part of an exhibition strategy, played out at the Whitechapel during the mid-period of his directorship, but this hardly constitutes a curatorial leaning towards 'primitivism' as Smith has claimed.

---

<sup>1</sup> Late modernism is defined here as the post Second World War period in American painting (c1945–1964), a period that is characterised by abstract expressionism or 'painterly abstraction', and which ended with the post-painterly abstraction exhibition curated by Clement Greenberg for Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Bryan Robertson (1925–2002) was director of the Whitechapel Gallery in London's East End between 1952 and 1968.

<sup>3</sup> Bryan Robertson, "Notes on Australian Painting," *London Magazine* 1.3 (1961): pp. 59–66.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Clark, Robert Hughes and Bryan Robertson, *Recent Australian Painting* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1961), p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Robertson, "Notes on Australian Painting," pp. 59–66.

<sup>7</sup> Robertson to Missingham, 22 June 1961, Whitechapel Gallery Archives, WAG/EXH/78/1.

<sup>8</sup> *Recent Australian Painting*, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Bryan Robertson, *'45–'99: A Personal View of British Painting and Sculpture* (Cambridge: Kettle's Yard, 1999), p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard Smith, "The Myth of Isolation," first published in: *Australian Painting Today, The John Murtagh Macrossan Lectures* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1962); republished in: *The Antipodean Manifesto: Essays in Art and History* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1975), pp. 57–69.

<sup>11</sup> Smith, "The Truth about the Antipodeans," in *The Death of the Artist as Hero. Essays in History and Culture* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988), pp. 198–213.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, "The Antipodean Manifesto," in *The Death of the Artist as Hero*, pp. 194–97.

- 
- <sup>13</sup> Smith to Robertson, 4 April 1959, Smith Papers: Antipodean Correspondence, 1959, Mitchell Library, MSS 5202 4 (6). See also Smith, "The Truth about the Antipodeans," p. 209.
- <sup>14</sup> Smith wrote to Clark on 28 February 1959, Smith Papers, Mitchell Library, MSS 5202 4 (6). See also Smith, "The Truth about the Antipodeans," p. 202.
- <sup>15</sup> Robertson, *Recalling the Fifties*. (London: Serpentine Gallery, 1985), p. 3.
- <sup>16</sup> Robertson to Hughes, London, 2 January 1961, Whitechapel Gallery archives: WAG/EXH/2/78/4.
- <sup>17</sup> "15 Contemporary Australian Artists", New Vision Centre Gallery, London, 1960.
- <sup>18</sup> Peter Pinson, *Ehlyn Lynn, Metaphor & Texture* (St. Leonards: Craftsman House, 2002), p. 19.
- <sup>19</sup> Smith, "The Truth about the Antipodeans," p. 212.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Smith, "Notes on Abstract Art," in *The Death of the Artist as Hero*, p. 182.
- <sup>22</sup> Smith, "Notes on Abstract Art," p. 186.
- <sup>23</sup> A number of Australian artists had stayed at the Abbey during the late forties and early fifties, including James Gleeson, Robert Klippel, Grahame and Inge King, Len French and Noel Counihan. Smith, "Notes on Abstract Art," p. 187.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Bryan Robertson, *Jackson Pollock* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1960), p. 160.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 24.
- <sup>27</sup> Clark, Hughes and Robertson, *Recent Australian Painting*, pp. 9–10.
- <sup>28</sup> Robertson, *Jackson Pollock*, p. 24.
- <sup>29</sup> Clark, Hughes and Robertson, *Recent Australian Painting*, p. 9.
- <sup>30</sup> Mark Rothko: A Retrospective Exhibition, Paintings 1945–1960 (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1961).
- <sup>31</sup> Clark, Hughes and Robertson, *Recent Australian Painting*, p. 4.
- <sup>32</sup> Clark, Hughes and Robertson, *Recent Australian Painting*, p. 11.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid. Although Fairweather exhibited regularly at the Macquarie Galleries in Sydney, since 1953 he had been living as a recluse on Bribie Island, Queensland. The old photograph of Fairweather, dressed in

---

military uniform, in the *Recent Australian Painting* catalogue was the only one that could be found by Tony Tuckson, deputy director at AGNSW.

<sup>34</sup> Such as the group show “Exhibition I”, held at the David Jones Galleries, Sydney, in August 1939.

<sup>35</sup> Donald Friend, Notes for biographical entry, 1961, Whitechapel Gallery Archives: WAG/EXH/2/78/4.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Hetherington, ed., *The Diaries of Donald Friend*, vol. 3 (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2005), pp. 514–15.

<sup>37</sup> See Whitechapel exhibition file (uncatalogued), AGNSW. Tuckson wrote: “It was very kind of you to include me in your list of artists, but I am practically a non-exhibiting person these days and feel that I should not be included” (Tuckson to Robertson, 6 March 1961).

<sup>38</sup> Barry Pearce, with Bryan Robertson and Wendy Whiteley, *Brett Whiteley: Art & Life* (London: Thames and Hudson in association with the Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1995), pp. 9–10.

<sup>39</sup> I am grateful to Lawrence Daws for this insight into the influence of Diebenkorn on Whiteley’s early work.

<sup>40</sup> Published by Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1961. See Frannie Hopkirk, *Brett: A Portrait of Brett Whiteley by his Sister* (Sydney: Alfred Knopf, 1996), p. 151.

<sup>41</sup> Pearce, *Brett Whiteley: Art & Life*, p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Cumming to Dargie, London, 13 March 1964. Dargie Papers, National Library of Australia, MS7752/1–2.

<sup>44</sup> J. Lane, “Portrait of the Artist: Louis James – Our Greatest Lyricist,” *Antiques and Art Australasia* (1972): p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> Lawrence Daws in conversation with the author, Beerwah, Queensland, December 2005.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*