



THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND  
AUSTRALIA

**Creating a Scene: The Role of Artists' Groups in the Development of Brisbane's Art World  
1940-1970**

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*A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at*

*The University of Queensland in 2014*

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## **Abstract**

This study offers an analysis of Brisbane's art world through the lens of artists' groups operating in the city between 1940 and 1970. It argues that in the absence of more extensive or well-developed art institutions, artists' groups played a crucial role in the growth of Brisbane's art world. Rather than focusing on an examination of ideas about art or assuming the inherently 'philistine' and 'provincial' nature of Brisbane's art world, the thesis examines the nature of the city's main art institutions, including facilities for art education, the art market, conservation and collection of art, and writing about art. Compared to the larger Australian cities, these dimensions of the art world remained relatively underdeveloped in Brisbane, and it is in this context that groups such as the Royal Queensland Art Society, the Half Dozen Group of Artists, the Younger Artists' Group, Miya Studios, St Mary's Studio, and the Contemporary Art Society Queensland Branch provided critical forms of institutional support for artists.

Brisbane's art world began to take shape in 1887 when the Queensland Art Society was founded, and in 1940, as the Royal Queensland Art Society, it was still providing guidance for a small art world struggling to define itself within the wider network of Australian art. Increasingly, however, new groups began to emerge, dissatisfied with the Society's role in the context of the growing presence of 'modern' or modernist art. The period between 1940 and 1970 was characterised by dynamic growth in Brisbane's art world and artists' groups provided the leadership necessary to bring about lasting change as it progressed toward modernity.

A great deal of art history is written around the creativity and dynamism of avant-garde artists' groups which are seen as harbingers of change and the main drivers of progress in modern art. Much less has been written about the role of non-revolutionary, community artists' groups, especially in underdeveloped art worlds and their progress towards building a mature, institutionally-rich art scene. Using Brisbane as its case study, this thesis argues that such groups have an essential role in sustaining and expanding art practice, art training, art appreciation and an art market.

By examining the infrastructure of Brisbane's art world, and using social network analysis strategies such as "weak ties" and the diffusion of innovations to understand why the Brisbane art world lagged behind more developed art worlds, this thesis provides a more nuanced view of regional art worlds, and a fuller explanation of the role artists' groups have within those art worlds. Non-avant-garde artists' groups "till the soil", cultivating cultural landscapes, and by encouraging many to engage in the practice of art making, they are continuously preparing and repairing the fabric of art worlds.

**Declaration by author**

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my research higher degree candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

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**Publications during candidature**

(Peer reviewed)

Hamilton, Judith. "Influencing the Modern in Brisbane: Gertrude Langer and the role of Newspaper Art Criticism." *Queensland Review* 20, no.2 (2013): 203-214.

Hamilton, Judy. "Dedicated to Art: The Half Dozen Group of Artists." *Fryer Folios* 8, no.1 (2013): 16-18.

Hamilton, Judith. "A Provincial Art World: Brisbane between 1940 and 1970 as a Case Study." *Journal of Language, Literature, and Culture* 61, no.3 (December 2014). Pending.

**Publications included in this thesis**

No publications included.

**Contributions by others to the thesis**

No contributions by others.

**Statement of parts of the thesis submitted to qualify for the award of another degree**

None.

## **Acknowledgements**

Possibly the most enjoyable moment of completing a long and difficult project is thanking the people who have encouraged, stimulated, and guided you along the path. My first thanks must go to three people, long deceased, who encouraged my lifelong interest in learning. My parents, John Colin Watherston and Violet Frances Watson Watherston (née Greer), received only rudimentary primary education but encouraged me to go as far as I could with my education. Mr Robert Arnold Haugh, 'Pop', who was my only primary school teacher, also encouraged my interest in learning and also added the dimension of art to my world. I offer them my grateful thanks.

This project developed as the direct result of my lifelong belief in art as an important part of human expression in everyday life. I would not have been able to bring this work to a solid and coherent conclusion without the work of my advisory team of Dr Melissa Harper and Professor David Carter. I thank them for their support and guidance in this project and for believing that this was a story worth telling. I would also like to thank the staff at the Fryer Library for being so helpful and welcoming as I worked my way through the archives of the many Brisbane artists' groups. I would like to thank the office staff of EMSAH for never being too busy to deliver technical assistance when required.

The members of various artists groups in Brisbane have consistently supported me in my quest to restructure thought concerning the ways in which artists' groups are valued in our society. I would also like to thank artists Alison Coaldrake, Don Ross, Yvonne Mills-Stanley, Rhyl and Rob Hinwood, Beverley Budgen, Joyce Hyam, Wendy Allen, and Warren Palmer for providing personal insights into the period. I am grateful also to Joan Skibby, who was associated with the Johnstone Gallery and facilitated my meeting with Don Ross and Yvonne Mill-Stanley. Finally, I would like to thank Margaret Collerton, who gave me access to her mother's (Muriel Shaw) writings and inspirational studio.

Thanks also to my friend Jane Denison, who has always provided a willing eye to look over my work. Thanks also to Val Bartholomew for her work in proof-reading the thesis, and finally, thanks to my RHD colleagues in the Michie Building and my friends who have supported me on this journey – thanks for picking me up every time I faltered.

**Keywords**

Artists' groups, art worlds, Brisbane art, social networks, weak ties, diffusion of innovations, cultural institutional thickness, critical mass, professionalisation.

**Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classifications (ANZSRC)**

ANZSRC code 190102, Art History, 100%

**Fields of Research (FoR) Classification**

FoR code 1901 Art history 100%

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**List of Abbreviations used in this Thesis**

AAC	Art Advisory Committee
AGNSW	Art Gallery of New South Wales
AGSA	Art Gallery of South Australia
ANZMAG	Australian and New Zealand Museum and Art Galleries Association.
CASQB	Contemporary Art Society Queensland Branch
CAS	Contemporary Art Society (Other Australian Branches)
CTC	Central Technical College Art Branch
HDGA	Half Dozen Group of Artists
JDACC	John Darnell Art Collection Committee
NGV	National Gallery of Victoria
QAAA	Queensland Authors and Artists Association
QAF	Queensland Art Fund
QAS	Queensland Art Society
QAG	Queensland Art Gallery
QNA	Queensland National Agricultural and Industrial Association
QNAG	Queensland National Art Gallery
RA	Royal Academy
RQAS	Royal Queensland Art Society
UAM	University of Queensland Art Museum
YAG	Younger Artists' Group



# Introduction

## Brisbane's Art World in Context 1940-1970

Innovation results not from the contributions of exceptional people, but from numerous and diverse people working together. These people can be unlikely and unexpected.<sup>1</sup>

Art worlds are found in all urban communities. Inevitably, they are founded at different times and at distinct sites, by different people who originate from different places, and yet, in conventional art history, there remains an expectation that art worlds will resemble each other, follow similar historical trajectories, and produce art work similar to that of each other. In 1986, Bernard Smith, writing about art systems, asked why “does one city tend to settle for one constellation of ideas and another, another?”<sup>2</sup> Smith argues that in order to understand why different art worlds develop different constellations of ideas and ideologies, it is more profitable to examine “the enduring institutional supports that a city creates in the course of its historical development” that continuously effect the “production, marketing and preservation of art”, than to concentrate on the ideas and personalities of a few representative artists from that art world.<sup>3</sup> The institutional supports Smith identifies as necessary for the functioning of an interrelated art system include educational, market, conservational, and intellectual facilities, and it is from the character of these support systems that the subtle differences between art worlds arise. This thesis adopts Smith's approach, analysing the development in Brisbane between 1940 and 1970 of educational facilities for artists, opportunities for exhibition and sale, support through conservation, and venues for reviewing or criticism. It focuses on artists' groups as central to the institutional dynamics of Brisbane's art world. While Brisbane developed all of the supports Smith lists, all remained underdeveloped until at the mid-twentieth century, and in this context, artists' groups were a critical and distinctive institutional development that gave Brisbane's art world its idiosyncratic character. The art world these groups created was not a function of a civic polity, but “one which sought to create an

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<sup>1</sup> Robyn Williams, “Bletchley Park,” transcript *Ockham's Razor*, *ABC Radio National* December 8, 2013, unpaginated. <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/ockhamsrazor/bletchley-park/5134192>,

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Smith, “Two Art Systems,” in *The Sydney-Melbourne Book*, ed. Jim Davidson (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986), 168.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, “Two Art Systems,” 169

effective economic apparatus” through the workings of which Brisbane artists could exist and potentially flourish.<sup>4</sup>

I argue that in Brisbane’s art world between 1940 and 1970, in the absence of leadership emanating from any other source, artists’ groups were the drivers of change. As the dominant social form of leadership, artists’ groups brought about changes in Brisbane’s art world that were not merely cosmetic (as would be the case in the adoption of some form of modernism) but deeper and more structural, allowing Brisbane’s art world to flourish in a modern, pluralistic society. My interest in Brisbane’s art world concerns its position within modernity rather than its position on modernism.<sup>5</sup> While modernity is identified as being linked to the contemporary moment of the art world being studied, modernism is an historical phase with distinct stylistic characteristics. Brisbane’s art world has remained an enigma in Australia art history. Cast in the role of artistic backwater by critics such as Robert Hughes and Gertrude Langer for its failure to engage with modernism,<sup>6</sup> it provides a classic example of a young art world struggling to define itself within the wider geography of art.

Bernard Smith’s scholarship on the development of “art systems” in Sydney and Melbourne provides a framework for understanding the development of Brisbane’s art system or art world. Smith’s first work on the subject of art systems, “Art and Industry: A Systematic Approach”, appeared in 1974. He argues for a multi-faceted approach to art history suggesting that by analysing one aspect, such as the works produced by an avant-garde, the historical continuity of the story of art becomes distorted. Smith felt that concentration on the emergence of a style while ignoring its later developments emphasises discontinuity over slow and steady progression. Slow and steady progression in Brisbane’s art world is a substantial theme of this thesis. “Art and Industry” provides a rationale for the examination of Brisbane’s art world, but it is another work by Smith that has provided the model for its structure. The essay, “Two Art Systems”, which examines why the art produced in Sydney is different from that of Melbourne, is essentially an examination of “those specifically urban factors which continuously affect the production, marketing and preservation of works of art”.<sup>7</sup> Smith advocates a study of the set of loosely related institutional components such as fine-art schools, art exhibitions and markets, art museums, and intellectual disciplines (such as art writing) related to art, and further suggests that it is the cultural weighting given to these components that ultimately affects the type of work that is produced in an art system. For example,

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<sup>4</sup> Smith, “Two Art Systems,” 173.

<sup>5</sup> David Carter, *Always Almost Modern: Australian Print Cultures and Modernity* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2013), 46.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Hughes, “Stilted Brisbane” undated clipping from *Nation* (Sydney), in “The Johnstone Gallery Scrapbook 5, 1962-1964,” (Brisbane: State Library of Queensland), 31.; Gertrude Langer, “Brisbane Seems Like an Art Backwater...,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 2, 1958.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, “Two Art Systems,” 169.

Melbourne's system, in Smith's view, was developed around the education and personal development of artists, whereas in Sydney it was the market that was the strongest feature. In Brisbane, none of the institutional components Smith identifies emerged as the core strength of its art world, producing my consideration of artists' groups as the key feature around which Brisbane's art world grew.

### **The Story in Brief**

In 1940, Brisbane, the capital city of the state of Queensland, had a population of 326,000, making it Australia's fourth largest city behind Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide.<sup>8</sup> Government policy focused firmly on regional development because of the economic dependence of both the state and the city on farming and mining activities.<sup>9</sup> In 1963, Australian art critic, Robert Hughes, described Brisbane as having the "atmosphere of a moonshining settlement in the Ozarks," while local art critic Gertrude Langer suggested it was an "art backwater" lagging well behind Sydney, Melbourne, and even Adelaide.<sup>10</sup> Brisbane represented a small provincial art world, whose best and most talented artists, such as J.J. Hilder, Douglas Annand, Lloyd Rees, Margaret Olley, and Margaret Cilento, and entrepreneurs such as Basil Burdett, had left the state to pursue their careers elsewhere because Brisbane did not have the facilities in place to sustain or promote their careers as artists or critics.

The history of Brisbane art is widely taken to begin in 1881 with the drawing classes conducted at the School of Arts by Joseph Clarke.<sup>11</sup> However, Brisbane's art world began to take more definite shape in 1887 when the Queensland Art Society (QAS) was formed to provide Brisbane's artists and those interested in art with an organised system of meetings and exhibitions. Art activity prior to the formation of the QAS was pursued on an individual basis through the drawing and limited painting classes conducted by Clarke, and the exhibition of works at the annual Queensland National Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition (QNAIE) that took place from 1876. The individual nature of these activities contrasted with the ideas of three artists who arrived separately in the colony in 1883: Isaac Walter Jenner, a self-taught professional artist from Brighton in England; Louis Wirth, a professional artist, who had studied in England; and Oscar Friström, a self-taught Swedish artist. Jenner and Wirth, with their backgrounds as professional artists in England, might well have felt keenly the relative lack of cultural pursuits available in Brisbane. The

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<sup>8</sup> *The Queensland Year Book, 1940* (Brisbane: Queensland Government, 1941), 49.

<sup>9</sup> William Hatherell, "A Cultural History of Brisbane 1940-1970," (PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 2003), 44.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Hughes, "Stilted Brisbane"; Langer, "Brisbane Seems Like".

<sup>11</sup> Margaret Maynard, "Aspects of Taste: Exhibitions of Art in Brisbane 1876-1887," *John Oxley Journal* 1, no. 6 (1980): 16.

men soon formed a small social network reflecting their interest in art, and their position in society as outsiders. It was this small social network led directly to the development of the QAS.

The QAS became the lynchpin in the development of Brisbane's art world. Following the death of Clarke in 1890, Godfrey Rivers was appointed as Drawing Master at the School of Arts and introduced a style of art known as bush aestheticism, which would later be derogated as the "gum-tree school". He became Chairman of the QAS in 1892, and under his leadership, the art society provided the stimulus and organisation required for the formation of the Queensland National Art Gallery (QNAG) in 1895. Through the positions of prestige that he occupied in Brisbane's art world, namely Drawing Master, Chairman of the QAS, Curator of QNAG, and Secretary to the Trustees, Rivers exercised great influence in Brisbane's art world. However, in the 1915 restructuring of the Technical College (formerly the School of Arts), Rivers was not offered the position of Supervisor of Art in the newly formed Central Technical College Art Branch (CTC), and he left Brisbane. Rivers provided for Brisbane's art world the sort of leadership that the journalist and patron of the arts, J. F. (Jules Francois) Archibald brought to Sydney's art world in the late nineteenth century.<sup>12</sup> In the void left by Rivers' departure, Brisbane's art world slowly stagnated so that by 1940 little had changed since he left.

The longevity of those appointed as Rivers' replacements at the CTC and QNAG contributed to this stagnation, with F. Martyn Roberts remaining in the position of Supervisor of Art at the CTC until his retirement in 1939, while James Watts continued as Curator of QNAG until 1949. In 1940, the CTC, although its focus was on providing a technical art education for industry, also provided the only public form of art education for aspiring local artists. The art market remained very basic and was centred on the annual exhibition of works by members of the Royal Queensland Art Society (formerly the QAS). One commercial gallery operated intermittently and solo and small group shows were rare. Queensland's National Art Gallery housed the public art collection, and although it presented at least one travelling exhibition organised through the Empire Loans Collection Society of London each year from 1934 to 1952, it was underfunded and located well out of the city. Writing about art was confined to reviews of the very occasional art shows held in the city. In spite of this paucity of art facilities, Brisbane had a number of serious private collectors of art who loaned works for exhibitions, and many artists who supplied primary art works for local and national art markets.

Brisbane's art world awoke from its torpor late in 1940, and its development was given added assistance by the arrival of the first troops from the United States in December 1941. Brisbane became the headquarters of the Allied Forces during the war in the Pacific, with General Douglas Macarthur establishing his headquarters at the AMP Building in Edward Street from July

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<sup>12</sup>Smith, "Two Art Systems," 173.

1942 to November 1944.<sup>13</sup> The arrival of allied troops caused an immediate growth spike in the population, and offered something of an economic boom for the city. Brisbane's population soared from 350,000 in 1940 to nearly 500,000 by 1943 and over two million allied service personnel passed through Brisbane between 1942 and 1944.<sup>14</sup> The troops were integrated into all facets of life in Brisbane, and soldiers joined life drawing classes at the RQAS headquarters at Harris Court in George Street and at Caroline Barker's art studio, also in George Street.<sup>15</sup> Although the population explosion was short lived, Brisbane was drawn into the modern world of dance halls, skating rinks and coffee shops that opened to cater for the entertainment demands of the troops. The end of the war coincided with a period of feverish activity in Brisbane's art world, as new galleries opened, and new artists' groups were formed.

### **Brisbane's Art World in Context**

In a 1963 article for *Nation*, Robert Hughes pondered Brisbane's place in the art world. Declaring that Brisbane, "perched on stilts beside its tepid river, smelling of hot metal and tar, seems almost further from Sydney than Sydney does from Paris", and finding, as mentioned earlier, that its art community reflected the embattled "atmosphere of a moonshining settlement in the Ozarks", Hughes defined Brisbane's art world as provincial and outside the culturally acceptable paradigm for Australian art, because of its almost total rejection of stylistic influences from other art worlds.<sup>16</sup> By way of reply, Brisbane journalist Phyllis Woolcock, writing in the *Bulletin*, argued that Brisbane's ignorance about art was exaggerated by journalists and critics, and that such a view of the city was unfair to "those [in Brisbane] who care – are artistically aware, well informed but not necessarily monied".<sup>17</sup> The central point of Hughes's argument was that some places (Sydney, Melbourne) had more or "better" culture than others (Brisbane), but what he failed to consider, as Woolcock points out, was Brisbane's weaker economic situation. Aidan While reasons that some places have more of the "institutional capacities required to sustain certain kinds of cultural activity" because, historically, major artistic centres (fifteenth century Florence, seventeenth century Holland and Flanders, and twentieth century New York) are inextricably aligned with strong concentrations of disposable wealth.<sup>18</sup> Brisbane, with what Woolcock describes as a collective "branch office" mentality, was by contrast merely an onlooker in the business world, as

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<sup>13</sup> Museum of Brisbane, "MacArthur in Brisbane: Full Biography of Douglas MacArthur," <http://www.mmb.org.au/site-page/macarthur-brisbane>

<sup>14</sup> Hatherell, "A Cultural History of Brisbane," 43.

<sup>15</sup> Donald Friend, *The Donald Friend Diaries Diaries*, ed. Paul Hetherington (Canberra: National Library Australia, 2003), 111.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Hughes, "Stilted Brisbane".

<sup>17</sup> Phyllis Woolcock, "Brisbane's Boom," *Bulletin* (Sydney), April 4, 1964, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Aidan While, "Locating Art Worlds: London and the Making of Young British Art," *Area* 35, no. 3 (2003): 252

the profits from the Queensland's considerable mineral wealth were directed to "head offices" in Sydney or Melbourne.<sup>19</sup>

Smith suggests that if the only question raised about the work produced in an art system is one concerning individual aesthetic merit, the story of art is reduced merely to the advocacy of the successful.<sup>20</sup> He argues that the subtle differences in the art produced by Melbourne and Sydney artists, comes, not as the result of the successful and "allegedly typical" artists of these cities, but from the art systems that influenced them.<sup>21</sup> I support and aim to substantiate Smith's view in this thesis, by arguing that the milieu in which art is produced is an important influence, and one that ensures that the works from different art worlds will exhibit characteristic differences. An analysis of the artworks produced in Brisbane between 1940 and 1970 is not part of this study, but this thesis, by examining the system in which those works were produced, engages issues vital to understanding aesthetic differences.

Histories documenting and examining Australian art between the wars invariably deal with battles between the forces of conservatism and those seeking the acceptance and adoption of modernism.<sup>22</sup> For the main centres of Australian art, Sydney and Melbourne, this inter-war period was complex and paradoxical as the nation's art forces (conservative or modernist, and ranging from artists and artists' groups to private and public gallery directors and critics) jockeyed for position. While Australian art exhibited a general predominance of conservative taste in painting, modernism slowly began to assert itself, representing a social change in the role of art as well as a change in the nature of the creative experience.<sup>23</sup> Richard Haese contends that the problem besetting Australian art became one of identifying the nature of the values upon which an art purporting to be part of an authentic twentieth century culture might be based.<sup>24</sup> While in other art centres of Australia, these values may have revolved around the issues of modernism, social realism, and abstraction, Brisbane's art dilemma circled around the issues of imitative and non-imitative art.

Brisbane's relationship with modernism was central only to its reputation as a cultural backwater, which was aided by the highly critical writings of critics such as Hughes. When the first wave of modernist ideas in painting arrived in Australia around 1915, Brisbane's art world failed to engage with them and continued to produce competent simulacra of impressionist works until the mid-1940s, when artists from the Miya experimental art studio developed a distinctive local form of expressionism. While the radical style of art proposed by the Miya Studio failed to gain traction in

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<sup>19</sup> Woolcock, "Brisbane's Boom".

<sup>20</sup> Smith, "Two Art Systems," 168; Bernard Smith, "Art and Industry: A Systematic Approach," *Studio International* 187, no. 965 (April 1974): 158.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, "Two Art Systems," 168.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors: the Revolutionary Years in Australian Art* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1988), 39.

<sup>23</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 38.

<sup>24</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 16.

what was essentially a very conservative art market, the threads of expressionism began to redevelop in the mid-1950s in a group working around Jon Molvig at the St Mary's Studio. It will be argued that, as the depth of support for the production of art in Brisbane continued to improve, artists found markets for a wide range of styles. Consequently, by 1970, Brisbane artists had moved well beyond the constraints of easel painting and modernism, and were experimenting freely and enthusiastically with post-object art, among other styles.

### **Thesis Structure**

The thesis is divided into two parts. Part One examines the development of institutional supports such as art education, the art market, the conservation and collection of Brisbane art, and the art criticism and writing that took place in Brisbane's art world between 1940 and 1970. Using the perspective of artists' groups, four chapters explore the development of the infrastructure that created and supported Brisbane's art world. Part Two then analyses the contribution of six artists' groups to the progression of art and posits a frame of reference for the emergence of a modern contemporary form of art in Brisbane.

The education of artists and audiences is the subject of Chapter 1. Taking the view that there can be no art world without artists or an audience, this chapter looks at the consequences for Brisbane's art world of the historical paucity of art education in Queensland. While the education of an art audience was more often a process of acculturation rather than formal education, the teaching of art in Queensland's schools prior to 1960 produced an audience who valued the mimetic in art above all else. For those wishing to make a career in art, the CTC provided sound, if somewhat dated, academic training, which could be supplemented by lessons at various artists' ateliers. In the 1950s, an alternative to the CTC developed at St. Mary's Studio at Kangaroo Point.

In 1940, the RQAS annual ensemble exhibition was the art market in Brisbane. Chapter 2 maps the evolution of local infrastructure for exhibiting art, from the adaptation of large spaces such as the banqueting hall of the Canberra Hotel, through department store galleries, to small, commercial galleries and finally artist hire facilities. Although artists' groups were indispensable in sustaining and maintaining Brisbane's embryonic art market, when the paradigm shifted from capacious annual exhibitions to small continuous exhibitions in private commercial galleries, the dynamics of Brisbane's art world changed and this is reflected in the declining importance of artists' groups' exhibitions from the 1950s.

Chapter 3 examines the role art collection facilities played in the development of Brisbane's art world. Although QNAG had been established through the hard work of the QAS in 1895, and was initially envisaged as providing a major art market for local works (in the manner of the Art Gallery of New South Wales), it was not until the establishment of the John Darnell Fine Art

Collection (Darnell Collection) at the University of Queensland that Queensland art was conserved as the basis of a collection.<sup>25</sup> Although QNAG supported local art where and when it could, it was compelled, through lack of government support, to operate on the periphery of Brisbane's art world in which the RQAS assumed the role of leadership. However, increasing professionalisation in QNAG through the appointment of a director in 1949 further eroded the perceived importance of the RQAS.

Chapter 4 examines the intellectual supports for Brisbane's art world through three of the common forms of art writing present in the city: newspaper art criticism, catalogue essays, and journal writing. Newspaper art criticism in Brisbane grew from the annual exhibitions of artists' groups. Never meant for posterity, newspaper art criticism was the only form of regular art writing available in Brisbane, and it remains virtually the only surviving discourse on art from the period. Art writing never became a major feature of Brisbane's art world, but nevertheless it played an important supporting role to the work of artists' groups as they went about creating a more culturally aware city.

Part Two is a social analysis of selected groups that made a direct contribution to the reshaping and strengthening of Brisbane's art world. As has been suggested, Brisbane's art world was characterised by virtual stagnation between 1915 and 1940, as the institutional facilities established prior to 1915 failed to progress in any significant manner. In Brisbane there were no strong individual professional identities such as Eugene von Guérard or Tom Roberts in Melbourne, or J.F. Archibald and Sydney Ure Smith in Sydney, who might have given direction and shape to Brisbane's emerging art world, and in the absence of strong guidance from any other source, artists' groups such as the Royal Queensland Art Society (RQAS 1887 - present), Half Dozen Group of Artists (HDGA 1941 - present), Younger Artists' Group (YAG 1945 - 1963), Miya Studio (1945 - 1949), St Mary's Studio groups (1951- 1963), and the Contemporary Art Society Queensland Branch (CAS 1961 - 1973), assumed the mantle of leadership. Having identified artists' groups as a critical and distinctive institutional development in Brisbane's art world, this section of the thesis examines the abovementioned artists' groups as a social network, in order to understand why stagnation occurred and how new ideas eventually penetrated the system and propelled Brisbane's art world forward in a meaningful way. Part Two has been divided into three chapters, arranged so that groups with obvious connections are examined in relation to each other. The history, structure, and rationale of each group are considered as ways of understanding how Brisbane's art world transitioned from a cultural backwater into modern and dynamic art world.

Chapter 5 examines the workings of the RQAS and the HDGA. The RQAS is the only group initiated prior to the period under discussion, and it remained the dominant artists' group in

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<sup>25</sup> Heather Johnson, *The Sydney Art Patronage System 1890-1940* (Sydney: Bungoona, 1997), 9.



Brisbane until the 1960s. The HDGA formed as a break-away group from the RQAS and although it offered no new styles or ideas about the production of art to the Brisbane art scene, the formation of the HDGA was important as it represented Brisbane's "professional" artists in an art world dominated by amateurs. The presence of a second artists' group also increased the cultural institutional thickness of Brisbane's art world by providing more exhibiting opportunities for local artists. The HDGA continued to share close social and professional ties with the RQAS throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and this situation made Brisbane's art world a difficult environment for new ideas to gain traction.

Chapter 6 investigates the relationship of two youthful artists' groups of the 1940s – the YAG and the Miya Studio. Both groups formed in 1945 as a result of an experiment by the RQAS to provide young artists with their own exhibition. Miya Studio members split from the YAG to create Brisbane's first oppositional artists' group determined to introduce a modernist/progressive approach to art. Representing an intrusion into Brisbane's hitherto peaceful art milieu, Miya Studio's new ideas about art were at odds with the establishment, but I argue that some of these ideas infiltrated Brisbane's close-knit art world and resurfaced in the 1950s in the studio at St Mary's in Kangaroo Point. In the end, Miya Studio's quest to change Brisbane art was defeated by a lack of artist numbers – the absence of a critical mass. Because institutional support was still not strong in Brisbane, the movement failed, but left as its legacy the idea that Brisbane could support an independent art studio of artists working free of the art establishment.

Chapter 7 examines the unacknowledged legacy of the Miya Studio in the form of the groups that formed at the St. Mary's studio in Kangaroo Point. This chapter follows the exploits of a committed group of art students and a series of mentors who believed in discussing art as a way to understand problems encountered in production, and experimenting to improve their individual products. Importantly, there were enough students to reach a critical mass and the movement became self-perpetuating. My use of social network analysis will explain how weak ties and critical mass finally allowed the diffusion of new ideas to take place in Brisbane. The CAS played a significant role in the diffusion of new ideas, and by the end of the 1960s, the cultural thickness of Brisbane's art world had developed to such a degree that it was able to support many forms of art. Artists' groups had brought Brisbane's art world to the cusp of the international art world. By the 1970s, Brisbane's art world no longer exhibited an inverted hierarchy and had rejected the amateur ethos in favour of the professional.

Finally, in the conclusion, I draw together the key points of this study to highlight the pivotal role played by artists' groups in the development of creative and stimulating environments in which Brisbane artists could thrive, and I identify areas for future research.

## Locating Brisbane's Art History

The definitive text on Brisbane's literary and artistic life during the 1940 to 1970 period is William Hatherell's *The Third Metropolis*, published in 2007. Hatherell suggests that although the time frame chosen for his book may look arbitrary, because there is nothing self-evidently unitary about the period, it coincides generally with the onset of World War II in the Pacific and the publication of the first edition of *Meanjin* in 1940, and continues until 1970, when a "new model of cultural production, characterised by systematic government support for the arts and a network of governmental cultural institutions [such as the Australia Council], had taken hold".<sup>26</sup> In my thesis, the year 1940 represents the end of an earlier period in the evolution of Brisbane's art world in which the production and dissemination of the visual arts in Brisbane was monopolised by the Royal Queensland Art Society (RQAS). In 1941, Brisbane's art world began to grow with the creation of Brisbane's first professional artists' group, the Half Dozen Group of Artists (HDGA), the active encouragement of young artists through the provision of youth memberships of the RQAS, and the introduction of a permanent display of Queensland art at the Queensland National Art Gallery (QNAG). The growth in Brisbane's art world in this period was directed by community artists' groups addressing local needs, and was rounded out by the work of the Contemporary Art Society Queensland Branch (1961-1973). From 1970, as Hatherell suggests, a new era of government support of the arts began.

*The Third Metropolis* focuses on the way the Brisbane of this period nourished the imagination of its inhabitants particularly in the fields of literature and the visual arts. Hatherell concentrates on Brisbane as a point of return for authors such as David Malouf, who anatomised the city in his autobiographical novel *Johnno*. While Hatherell provides a comprehensive picture of the Brisbane of this period, much of the work he cites was composed in a different time and place. My thesis makes wide use of Hatherell's descriptions of Brisbane, but, rather than concentrate on the artists who left the city in order to build their individual practices, I have focused on the visual artists who stayed, and created an art scene by coming together in artists' groups. By remaining in Brisbane, these artists were vitally important in developing the cultural institutional thickness of the city. A secondary consideration in both Hatherell's work and in my own thesis is to appropriately place the achievements of Brisbane artists within wider debates about Australian cultural history.

Three major texts concentrate on aspects of Brisbane artists' groups active during the period from 1940 to 1970. Michele Anderson's (Helmrich) 1987 Honours thesis, "Barjai, Miya Studio and Young Brisbane Artists of the 1940s: Towards a Radical Practice" is a very thorough study of the group that was active in Brisbane between 1945 and 1949, and was ground breaking as it introduced

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<sup>26</sup> William Hatherell, *The Third Metropolis: Imagining Brisbane Through Art and Literature 1940-1970* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2007), 4.

art historians to an alternative history in Brisbane art. While Anderson focuses on the practice of the Miya Studio, the group is contextualised as a radical group working within the constraints of a conservative art world. I have drawn on Anderson's construction of the Miya Studio in my examination of that artists' group in Chapter 6.

Helen Fridemanis's book *Artists and Aspects of the Contemporary Art Society Queensland Branch*, which developed from her Master's thesis "Contemporary Art Society, Queensland Branch 1961-1973: a Study of the Post-War Emergence and Dissemination of Aesthetic Modernism in Brisbane" (1989), has been used extensively to construct my image of the Contemporary Art Society Queensland Branch in Chapter 7. Because her research was conducted relatively soon after the group's period of activity, Fridemanis was able to collect a great deal of information from the artists of the CAS, and she acknowledges the importance of oral history in the construction of her thesis as documents concerned with the management of the CAS were destroyed after the group disbanded in 1973.<sup>27</sup> Other sources available to her were the C.A.S. Broadsheets held at the Queensland Art Gallery Library, catalogues, and newspaper reviews and reports.<sup>28</sup>

*Thorns and Petals: 100 Years of the Royal Queensland Art Society* (1988) by Keith Bradbury and Glenn R. Cooke was written to celebrate the centenary of the society. This text provides an in-depth history of the RQAS and invaluable insights into the many personalities that developed the group. As such it is the authoritative source for information regarding Brisbane's oldest artists' group. Further insights into Queensland art are included in *Art Off Centre*, a collection of essays that were the product of a seminar presented jointly by the Queensland Studies Centre and the Queensland Art Gallery in 1995. Edited by Glenn R. Cooke, *Art Off Centre* represents the first attempt to define the quality and character of the art that has been produced in Queensland. This seminar represents the first attempt to move the focus to Queensland art and away from the Sydney/Melbourne axis.

*Rebels and Precursors: the Revolutionary Years of Australian Art* (1988) by Richard Haese, provided the first extended study of the cultural changes that took place within the Sydney and Melbourne art worlds during the 1930s and 1940s, and the book remains a key text for this period. Haese locates Melbourne as the epicentre for the most volatile and productive variations that emerged as a result of assimilating an Australian idiom with European style modernism as artists were encouraged to "find their moral voice" in the 1930s.<sup>29</sup> Haese brings understanding to the volatile period between the wars as conservatism in Australian art was challenged by the precepts of

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<sup>27</sup> Helen Fridemanis, "Contemporary Art Society, Queensland Branch 1961-1973: a Study of the Post-War Emergence and Dissemination of Aesthetic Modernism in Brisbane", (Masters' thesis, University of Queensland, 1989), iii.

<sup>28</sup> Fridemanis, "Contemporary Art Society," iii.

<sup>29</sup> Barrett Reid and Nancy Underhill, eds., *Letters of John Reid: Defining Australian Cultural Life 1920-1981* (Melbourne: Viking, 2001), 3.

modernism. He also locates artists' groups, such as Sydney's Society of Artists and the Victorian Art Society, as key players in the landscape of Australian art prior to the successful innovation of modernism through the vehicle of the Contemporary Art Society in 1938. However, the highly politicised environment in which artists and art societies worked in Victoria and New South Wales was very different from the placid, inclusive milieu experienced by Brisbane artists.

Heather Johnson's book *The Sydney Art Patronage System 1890-1940* (1995) demonstrates the importance of artists' groups in the development of Sydney's art market in the late nineteenth century, revealing that even as Sydney's art world developed in the early to mid-twentieth century, professional artists remained committed to the annual artists' groups' exhibitions as the most efficient way of disseminating their work to the widest and most influential public. Johnson's work highlights the importance artists' groups assumed in establishing a network of related art activities in Sydney with many members of artists' groups also filling roles as Trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Finally, Hannah Neate's analysis of the Midland Group in her article *Provinciality and the Art World: The Midland Group 1961-1977* (2012) is indicative of the increasing scholarly interest in gaining a fuller understanding of how regional (or as some would perceive or phrase it, provincial) community groups can offer a real alternative to the art worlds that are associated with social art history. Neate promotes "positive provincialism" by framing Nottingham as a provincial city with regional significance, and this is the role I would advocate for further study into regional art worlds, whether in Australia or elsewhere.<sup>30</sup> Non-revolutionary artists' groups have been traditionally assigned a peripheral role in art worlds, but an historically grounded study, such as this thesis, offers a more nuanced reading of the interactions negotiated by artists' groups within an emerging art world.

To complete this analysis of Brisbane's art world, I have utilised a combination of primary sources, including semi-structured interviews with artists who were members of artists' groups during in the period under consideration, newspaper stories from the *Courier-Mail*, and various archives including those of the Johnstone Gallery, the RQAS, the HDGA, Jim Crawford, John Cooper, Irene Amos, Ray Hughes, Gallery One Eleven, and Kennigo Street Gallery. The Queensland National Art Gallery Trustees Reports and Contemporary Art Society Broadsheets were accessed through the Queensland Art Gallery Library.

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<sup>30</sup> Hannah Neate, "Provinciality and the Art World: the Midland Group 1961-1977," *Social and Cultural Geography* 13, no. 3 (2012): 284.

## Art Worlds and Art Systems

The terms “art system”, “art world”, and “art environment” can be used interchangeably, and refer to the network of cultural institutions, industry structures, and social practices that determine how pictures are produced and then accessed by patrons and viewers in an urban environment. The term art world is often used in a “loose and metaphoric way” to refer to those involved in art worlds as dilettantes, whose role is to provide patronage.<sup>31</sup> In this thesis, the term is used to refer to those who are concerned with the production, interpretation and distribution of art. The interaction of all interested parties produces a shared sense of worth through an understanding of what they collectively produce.<sup>32</sup>

Howard S. Becker pioneered work in this field when he published *Art Worlds* in 1984. Becker developed an academic model of an art world to examine the networks created by cultural institutions, professional identities, industry structures, and how social practices determine the way pictures are produced and then accessed by patrons at a particular site.<sup>33</sup> The emphasis in Becker’s understanding of art worlds is on the many collaborative activities that emanate from an initial creative impulse when an artist paints a picture: a gallery shows the picture; a critic writes about the picture; a patron buys the picture. But what is important to any art world is the role a sense of shared meaning plays between an artist and the community in which the artist works.<sup>34</sup> Becker argues persuasively that an appreciative audience does not “just happen”, but develops through training, whether formal or informal, in looking at art.<sup>35</sup>

Interpreting the art world as a series of collaborations that take place in order to bring an art work to fruition, Becker’s work is important to the approach taken in this thesis as it establishes a way of looking at art worlds that considers the importance of all art, not just “high art”, in creating a dynamic system of production, dissemination, and collection.<sup>36</sup> Becker stresses the practical importance of encouraging many potential artists in order to find the “extraordinary few”.<sup>37</sup>

No art world could continue to exist without a ready supply of people capable of turning out its characteristic products. The network of distributive organisations art worlds develop – galleries, concert halls, theatres, and publishing companies – requires the continuous creation of a body of work to be distributed.<sup>38</sup>

Such a concept is particularly relevant when considering the attitude of the Royal Queensland Art Society, who accepted anyone interested in art as a member. Becker recognises the importance of

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<sup>31</sup> Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), x.

<sup>32</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 186.

<sup>33</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 178.

<sup>34</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 186.

<sup>35</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 151.

<sup>37</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 231.

<sup>38</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 230.

“competent but uninspired workers”, as the source of a continuous body of work that is essential to sustain and maintain the network of organisations in an art world.<sup>39</sup> Brisbane’s art world, until 1946, was characterised by its sporadic nature and by the often “competent but uninspired” artists who clustered together in artists’ groups in order to produce an impressive annual ensemble exhibition of works. In a small art environment, such as Brisbane’s, the coming together of artists in artists’ groups provided the only means of maintaining a meaningful, continuous supply of artworks that could sustain its art world.

Smith appears unaware of Becker’s work on art worlds. When Smith promulgated the idea of art systems as an important feature in the study of art history, his approach to an art world was through the “professional artist”.<sup>40</sup> Becker, on the other hand, argues that an art world itself defines the boundaries of acceptable art and confers “full membership” as an artist upon those whose work can be assimilated into the art world through the market.<sup>41</sup> Consequently, using Becker’s model, the question of the participation of amateur or professional artists in an art world does not arise. This is an important consideration in any examination of Brisbane’s art world, because between 1940 and 1970 the production of art in Brisbane was dominated by amateur artists organised into artists’ groups.

Arthur Danto, American art critic and philosopher, was arguably the first to present the concept of an art world as a discrete phenomenon, at a symposium on *The Work of Art* at the American Philosophical Association in 1964. In his paper, “The Artworld”, Danto addressed the prevalent negative attitudes of the 1940s to the many new forms of art produced in the twentieth century where distortion of colour and form, such as in expressionism, had meant these works were labelled as merely the work of inept artists. Referring to them as “non-imitations”, Danto challenged audiences and critics to understand and appreciate objects that were not representational works of art.<sup>42</sup> Danto reasoned that if such objects were to be given artistic enfranchisement, their acceptance as such required not so much a revolution in taste as a theoretical revision of their status, and he proposed that non-imitative art objects could be readily accepted as “real” art if they were considered part of an “art world” rather than the natural world. Danto’s concept of an art world is of a privileged place where the “non-imitation” art of the mid-twentieth century is readily accepted as “real” art because it exists as itself, rather than being dismissed as merely “childlike droolings”.<sup>43</sup> Danto’s paper has been particularly useful in developing this thesis, because it highlights the issues

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<sup>39</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 232.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, “Art and Industry,” 159.

<sup>41</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 226.

<sup>42</sup> Arthur Danto, “The Art World,” *Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964), 573.

<sup>43</sup> Danto, “The Art World,” 574.

faced by audiences and untrained art critics in Brisbane's art world as they struggled to evaluate those art works that moved away from the accepted mimetic forms.

Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift in *Globalization, Institutions, and Regional Development in Europe* (1994) propose that it is the institutional thickness of a system that governs how well a localised economy performs.<sup>44</sup> To them, institutional thickness refers to an "environment where a plethora of institutions exhibiting high levels of contact, cooperation, and interaction reveal shared rules, conventions, and knowledge that create mutual awareness that the institutions are involved in a common enterprise".<sup>45</sup> In their view, the performance of any local economy is critically dependent upon its institutional thickness. In this thesis, the term "cultural institutional thickness" is used to refer to the quality and quantity of institutions and activities that support and sustain art production in Brisbane's art world: artists making art, selling art, education, patronage, criticism, and collection. The development of cultural institutional thickness is vital to the development of an art world because, as Adolfo Vazquez suggests:

The artist is subject to the tastes, preferences, ideas, and aesthetic notions of those who influence the market. Inasmuch as he produces works of art destined for the market that absorbs them, the artist cannot fail to heed the exigencies of this market: they often affect the content as well as the form of a work of art, thus placing limitations on the artist, stifling his creative potential, his individuality.<sup>46</sup>

Only when a variety of tastes and styles of art are catered for in the market, through the presence of many avenues of dissemination, education, and patronage, is the artist granted a degree of autonomy in the work they produce.

Amin and Thrift write of "institutionally 'rich' metropolitan" centres while also referring to the "thinness" of underdeveloped economies.<sup>47</sup> The development of cultural institutional thickness is essential to ensuring that art worlds are ready, at any time, to receive and assimilate extraordinary artists into their fabric.<sup>48</sup> New York provides an excellent example of an art world whose exemplary cultural institutional thickness allowed it to develop exponentially in the 1940s. As a centre with a concentration of considerable disposable wealth, it had already acquired cultural institutional thickness in the form of many galleries, museums, artists, and collectors, but, until the 1940s, its art production was dominated by standard impressionistic artworks. The arrival of many influential émigré artists from war-torn Europe into its well prepared and institutionally dense art world

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<sup>44</sup> Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift, eds., *Globalization, Institutions, and Regional Development in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 17.

<sup>45</sup> Amin and Thrift, *Globalization*, 14.

<sup>46</sup> Adolfo Sanchez Vazquez cited in Janet Wolff, *Social Production of Art* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 18.

<sup>47</sup> Amin and Thrift, *Globalization*, 17.

<sup>48</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 231.

stimulated the local growth of new ideas, and, as a result, New York was catapulted to the centre of the contemporary Western art world.<sup>49</sup>

The concept of institutional thickness was developed from an art perspective by Aidan White in “Locating Art Worlds: London and the Making of Young British Art” (2003), in which he proposed the concept of “cultural institutional thickness” as a means of explaining the power of key international art cities such as London and New York. These cities are the “home of the most influential international dealers, auction houses, critics and galleries, and act as magnets for aspiring artists and dealers, who in turn further enrich the creative milieu of art schools, galleries and cultural quarters”.<sup>50</sup> White’s article is also indicative of a renewed interest in the study of art worlds, citing as it does the crucial role the networks, associations, and facilities of the London cultural milieu of the 1990s played in providing “dynamic unity” for the resurgence of British art through the Young British artists.<sup>51</sup>

Brisbane’s art world was so culturally institutionally thin in the 1940s that art students and artists often chose to move to other art worlds more culturally prepared to receive them. The flow of artists away from Brisbane’s art world was only curbed as cultural institution thickness developed in the 1950s with the provision of an alternative form of education and increased opportunities for small exhibitions.

### **Art Societies and Artists’ Groups**

Network theorist, Albert-László Barabási suggests that humans have an inborn desire to form cliques and clusters that offer familiarity, safety, and intimacy for those that belong.<sup>52</sup> Art societies represent a particular form of clustering behaviour that developed in the mid-nineteenth century, especially in Australia where the lack of intellectual stimulation was keenly felt in the many isolated communities as “Via” suggested in the *Brisbane Courier* in 1877:

Understand that Queensland is at present very deficient in many points which constitute, in the fitness of things, civilization [...] Hang up in a public place any wretched daub in colour and crowds will gather to admire.<sup>53</sup>

The formation of art societies in Australia reflected an ideal of the Victorian elite positioning art as the salvation of the morality of the masses.<sup>54</sup> The founders and backers of such institutions clung to

<sup>49</sup> White, “Locating Art Worlds,” 252.

<sup>50</sup> White, “Locating Art Worlds,” 253.

<sup>51</sup> White, “Locating Art Worlds,” 252.

<sup>52</sup> Albert-László Barabási, *Linked: The New Science of Networks* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2002), 49-50.

<sup>53</sup> Via, “Artistic Culture,” *Brisbane Courier*, September 26, 1877.

<sup>54</sup> Charles Mackay, ed. “The Opening of the Royal Academy of Art,” *London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art, and Science* 2, no. 45 (May 11 1861), 553.



the idea that “the study and appreciation of the beautiful exercise an uplifting and purifying power [on the people]”.<sup>55</sup>

Art societies are not a form of art “movement” or “school” as described by Raymond Williams in his seminal work *Culture*.<sup>56</sup> “Movement” denotes the coming together of artists for a specific stylistic aim, while a “school” can be identified by identifiable characteristics of a master artist or location.<sup>57</sup> Art societies were modelled on the intellectual “learned societies” that had flourished in England from the seventeenth century. Learned societies were established as independent, not-for-profit organisations that listed amongst their aims the desire “to encourage and promote” their particular branch of learning, and membership was open to all with an interest in that subject.<sup>58</sup> Members of the Royal Society, for example, were not required to be professional scientists, and enthusiastic amateurs were encouraged to join. However, the possession of wealth was also important within the amateur ranks so that such members could act as patrons for the professionals. In the same way, the RQAS encouraged membership from all who were interested in art, whether as professional artists, amateur painters, or wealthy dilettantes.

Art societies were responsible for the establishment of much of the infrastructure that allowed artists, famous in the Australian art world, to develop. In New South Wales for example, the Academy of Art (1871), later to become the Art Society of New South Wales (1879), established and ran the Art Gallery of New South Wales as the dominant market for the work of Australian artists including Arthur Streeton, John Longstaff, and Margaret Preston.<sup>59</sup> In Brisbane, the focus of the QAS was primarily as an exhibiting venue for the purpose of making sales. Prior to the advent of the QAS, Brisbane artists had sold their works by Art Union or through display in shop windows.<sup>60</sup> Art societies were formed in all Australian capital cities as well as in many smaller cities, and provided the first regulated markets for the works of Australian artists. After holding annual exhibitions from 1888, the QAS turned its attention in 1894-5 to establishing a public art collection, which, it was hoped, would act as a patron for Brisbane artists. In this way, art societies set about creating the first organised art worlds in Australia’s capital cities, as they organised the production of sufficient art works to supply a stable market. The best of those works would then be conserved in the public art collection.

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<sup>55</sup> Via, “Artistic Culture.”

<sup>56</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), 64.

<sup>57</sup> Williams, *Culture*, 62-63.

<sup>58</sup> Royal Society of London, “History,” <http://royalsociety.org/about-us/history/> accessed May 5 2011.

<sup>59</sup> Johnson, *The Sydney Art Patronage System*, 38.

<sup>60</sup> Keith Bradbury, “The Queensland Art Society 1887-1892.” (Unspecified dissertation, University of Queensland, 198?), 4.

Art societies and artists' groups are examples of what Williams refers to as self-instituted independent organisations.<sup>61</sup> It was the heightened importance of the artists' exhibition as a feature of the market conditions that succeeded state, church and private patronage that encouraged the formation. Although they were learned societies, Australian art societies were set up as localised, exhibiting artists' groups in the manner of the British Royal Academy (RA). The RA was a professional body of artists and membership was an honour bestowed by invitation only on artists of distinction. Through their annual ensemble exhibition, the RA established acceptable standards to which British artists should aspire. In a similar way, art societies, by providing a large annual exhibition of local art, established in local communities an acceptable standard of art. Art societies were to be bastions of a civilised society in a colonial world, but, in the twenty-first century, they continue to provide cliques that offer artistic camaraderie for those that belong.

Artists' groups can vary enormously in their structure, from being a very formal organisation with an elected hierarchy to that which resembles nothing more than a group of friends. A methodology for the study of these groups has been constructed using Raymond Williams' study of group formations contained in his seminal 1981 work *Culture*. Williams provides theoretical models for understanding artists groups as independent associations that flourished from the nineteenth century. He considers artists' groups to be a general cultural form, and suggests that all artists' groups exhibit some form of internal organisation, as well as having distinct external relations with other groups.

Williams proposes analysing artists' groups using three models of internal organisation.<sup>62</sup> The first model is based on formal membership, with a legal constitution, an elected internal decision making authority, and the provision for an annual exhibition. Most of the Brisbane artists' groups studied fall into this category including the RQAS, HDGA, YAG, and CAS. The second model is based around a manifesto or a collective manifestation of the group, as in the case of Miya Studio. The third model is very informal and is simply based on a "conscious association" or "group identification" by the participants.<sup>63</sup> Brisbane had many groups of this kind, but it is the groups of St Mary's Studio that are of interest in this thesis.

Groups are further categorised through their external relations into breakaway, specialising, alternative, and oppositional forms.<sup>64</sup> A breakaway group forms when dissatisfaction with the parent body can only be resolved by action, and the HDGA provides a classic example of this in the moment when four members of the RQAS decided to form the HDGA as another exhibiting group in 1941. Specialising groups look to promote a particular form of art that is felt to be neglected by

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<sup>61</sup> Williams, *Culture*, 64.

<sup>62</sup> Williams, *Culture*, 68.

<sup>63</sup> Williams, *Culture*, 68.

<sup>64</sup> Williams, *Culture*, 70.

the existing art world such as contemporary art. The CAS formed to champion the cause of contemporary art in Brisbane. Alternative groups, such as the groups of St Mary's Studio, look to provide facilities that existing institutions tend to exclude. Although not an exhibiting group, St Mary's became an alternative centre for artist training, using modern methods and techniques of teaching. Finally, oppositional groups are characterised by their active opposition to established institutions. Miya Studio was opposed to the virtually "mass-produced" paintings exhibited annually in the RQAS and HDGA exhibitions.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Amateur/Professional Dichotomy**

Terry Smith notes that the dominant view held by general society is that art, in an orthodox art world, is exclusively produced by professional artists for a limited audience.<sup>66</sup> The boundaries of the professional phenomenon remain unclear but in 1940, Brisbane's art world was dominated by amateur artists, organised into artists' groups of which the RQAS was dominant. Becker's view is that an artist is someone whose art works can be assimilated into an art market, while the title of "artist" is denied to those whose works cannot be assimilated.<sup>67</sup> Because Brisbane's art world was dominated by amateur artists, Becker's definition is useful for this thesis because it allows for the consideration of amateur and professional artists whose work was assimilated into Brisbane's art market. The phenomenon of the amateur is often observed in situations where economic constraints make the growth of a professional culture difficult to sustain, and this is true of Brisbane's art world.<sup>68</sup> Artists were derogatorily referred to as "Sunday painters" or "hobby artists" if they pursued a career outside the arts, but these artists dominated Brisbane's art world because the city did not have the cultural infrastructure in place to support more than a few artists until the mid-1950s. As a result, there were always more "Sunday painters" in Brisbane's art world than there were professional artists, and, as a result, Brisbane rested outside the canon of Australian art. It would be 1960 before Brisbane's art world was able to support its artists in full time artistic work, in a combination of production and teaching.

The concept of the amateur fitted the nineteenth century ideals and values of participation and inclusivity, and the RQAS was a product of this period. The HDGA, on the other hand, embraced the twentieth century esoteric values of exclusivity brought about through increasing professionalism. The most basic concept of a professional artist is one where the artist derives the largest portion of income from the production of art works. This income may be supplemented by

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<sup>65</sup> *Younger Artists' Group First Exhibition Catalogue*, 1945.

<sup>66</sup> Terry Smith, "Writing the History of Australian Art: Its Past, Present and Possible Future," *Australian Art Journal* 3 (1983), 10.

<sup>67</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 226.

<sup>68</sup> Clare Cochrane, *Twentieth-Century British Theatre: Industry, Art and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 109.

teaching art or other related art activities without diminishing the primary identification as an artist. The essential difference between an amateur and a professional artist is the power and prestige of a title.<sup>69</sup> Margali Sarfatti Larson, in her book *The Rise of Professionalism* (1977) suggests that although the specific attributes may vary, there is “substantial agreement that professionals have acquired a body of knowledge through education that they apply to their work; they are bound by a distinctive ethics code that relates to the quality of their work; and they are separated from others by having considerable autonomy and prestige”.<sup>70</sup>

The period from 1940 to 1970 saw great changes in the way the artist was received in Brisbane’s art world. Conservative elements in Australian art at this time held fixed ideas of what constituted “good art” and “good artists”.<sup>71</sup> Traditionally, a “good artist” acquired a body of knowledge and skills by serving a “lengthy apprenticeship in the groves of academe” before venturing out on their own.<sup>72</sup> Because of a lack of fine arts education facilities in 1940s Brisbane, the RQAS provided the “groves of academe” where junior artists from the age of fourteen could serve their apprenticeship as artists through the system of the annual exhibition. The exhibition, and the maximising of opportunities provided for the artist to exhibit their work, rather than education, was viewed as the way to improve the quality of art in Brisbane in the 1940s, and all groups active in that period were formed as exhibiting groups. The beginnings of professionalisation in Brisbane’s art world can be attributed to the groups of St Mary’s Studio, who recognised education as more important than participation in exhibitions. Previously, all Brisbane artists’ groups had insisted that the way to improve the standard of art in Brisbane was through increased exhibition opportunities. Reliance on the annual exhibition of works may be said to entrench the amateur ethos.

### **The Diffusion of Knowledge**

Brisbane’s art world of the 1940s resembled nothing so much as a close group of friends who moved in the same social circles: HDGA artists were often members of the RQAS; the art instructors at the CTC were members of the RQAS; RQAS artists advised the Trustees of QNAG. Artists moved in the same circles, met the same people, discussed the same issues, and propounded the same views at different venues.

Mark Granovetter, in his 1973 essay “The Importance of Weak Ties”, suggests that within a social group of friends there always exists a strong probability that all the friends will share congruent ideas, prejudices and values.<sup>73</sup> Granovetter refers to such connections as strong ties.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Margali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), x.

<sup>70</sup> Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism*, x.

<sup>71</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 10.

<sup>72</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 10.

<sup>73</sup> Mark Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 78 no. 6 (May 1973): 1374.

Granovetter views society as being structured into clusters or close-knit circles of friends who exhibit strong ties to each other. Strong ties reflect the time and effort put into maintaining such a tie. Weak ties, on the other hand, connect acquaintances belonging to a completely different circle of friends, and it is through our weak ties that we are exposed to new ideas. Weak ties are understood, in this thesis, as being cultural outsiders who brought new ideas into Brisbane's art world and effected change in the production, distribution, and consumption of art in the city. By applying the concept of strong and weak ties to Brisbane's art world, viewing the artists' groups, and the institutions that supported them, as clusters of like-minded "friends", it is reasonable to suggest that new ideas found it difficult to gain a foothold because of the strength of the ties that existed there.

Brisbane's art world began as the result of the actions of three important weak ties to art worlds in Europe. Walter Jenner, Isaac Friström, and Lewis Wirth settled in Brisbane in 1883, and established a friendship as newcomers with mutual interests in art. Together they established the QAS as Brisbane's first artists' group in 1887. The strength of the ties within this group then held Brisbane's embryonic art world together. However, the incidence of change connected with the appearance of weak ties is reiterated throughout the history of art in Brisbane, and in this thesis, "the outsider" is a recurrent theme in the development of the city's art world.

Godfrey Rivers, who arrived in Brisbane in 1890, was another outsider with links to the art worlds of Sydney and Europe. While initially acting as a weak tie and a harbinger of change, the strong ties that Rivers developed in Brisbane were ultimately responsible for establishing Brisbane's reputation as a parochial art backwater. By 1895, Rivers was in control of art education in Brisbane at the Brisbane School of Arts, was the chairman of the QAS, and was the founder/secretary/curator of the Queensland National Art Gallery (QNAG). With so much time and effort invested in maintaining connections, Rivers' control over Brisbane's art world was such, that when he left Brisbane in 1915, the bush romanticism style he had implanted remained completely unchallenged and by 1940, Brisbane's art world was in a time warp, continuing to operate in much the same way that it had when Rivers left.

Outsiders continued to influence the development of Brisbane's art world. E. Lilian Pedersen, who arrived in Brisbane in 1937, may also be regarded as an influential weak tie in Brisbane's art world. While her decision to found the HDGA in 1941, in an effort to improve the standards of Brisbane art through greater exhibition opportunities, challenged the dominance of the RQAS, it was the much younger outsider Laurence Collinson who provided the catalyst for a challenge to the "gum tree school" style in 1945 by propounding modernist ideas through the establishment of the Miya Studio.

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<sup>74</sup> Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," 1375.

As part of the HDGA exhibition program, well-credentialed guest artists, such as William Dobell, were invited to exhibit alongside local artists in an effort to improve the standard of local works.<sup>75</sup> However, the cultural transmission of new concepts and ideas is not simply a process of imitation.<sup>76</sup> If this had been the case, the work of Brisbane artists should have shown the influence of the regular exhibitions of contemporary art sponsored by the Empire Loan Society of London that came to QNAG throughout the 1930s.<sup>77</sup> Gabriel Tarde, a nineteenth century French sociologist, realised that individuals have a tendency to imitate those they respect and suggests that the spread of innovations, such as those revealed in the exhibitions, relies on the presence of opinion leaders for those innovations to take hold.<sup>78</sup> This process is well illustrated by the fact that RQAS artists William Bustard, Frank Sherrin, and Vida Lahey can be regarded as opinion leaders in the 1940s Brisbane art world, but they were no longer innovators. The artists that formed the Miya Studio were innovators, but they were not opinion leaders. It was not until the era of St Mary's Studio at Kangaroo Point in the 1950s that innovators and opinion leaders coalesced in the advent of a series of artist/mentors who provided an alternative form of artist education, and in doing so, finally created a critical mass of exponents that allowed Brisbane artists to develop a culturally satisfying form of contemporary art for its art world.

The transmission of new ideas and the diffusion of innovations is another concept that must be considered in this analysis of Brisbane's art world through the lens of artists' groups. Studies in the sociology of innovation carried out by Everett Rogers from 1962 indicate that simply having knowledge of new ideas is not enough for them to be accepted by a social group. Rogers suggested that individuals must not only become aware of an innovation, but must also develop an attitude toward it, before deciding whether or not to adopt it.<sup>79</sup> He suggests that when individuals are aware that others in their group are considering ideas favourably, they are more likely to form a positive attitude and adopt those ideas accordingly.<sup>80</sup> It is for this reason that the six artist mentors who operated out of St Mary's Studio between 1951 and 1963 were able to succeed in bringing a sustained style of contemporary art to Brisbane where previous artist's ateliers, and even the Miya Studio, had failed. One key reason was that the mentors of St Mary's encouraged their students to discuss their ideas about art.<sup>81</sup> Although Miya Studio encouraged its members to discuss ideas and to examine "the great traditions of the past [so as to] investigate contemporary ideas and

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<sup>75</sup> HDGA Minute Book.

<sup>76</sup> John Scott, *What is Social network Analysis?* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 58.

<sup>77</sup> 'Empire Loan Pictures,' *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 30, 1939.

<sup>78</sup> Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 4th ed. (New York: Free, 1995), 40.

<sup>79</sup> Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 322.

<sup>80</sup> Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 324.

<sup>81</sup> Muriel Shaw, "Kangaroo Point Mentors and the Paint Tree: a Short History of a Brisbane Studio at Kangaroo Point in the '50s and '60s as Remembered by Some of the Students", (Unpublished manuscript, Brisbane: Fryer Library).

techniques” in order to “to make this arid soil fertile”, because the group failed to reach critical mass, their ideas were not adopted elsewhere in Brisbane.<sup>82</sup>

The development of critical mass must be considered in the progression of art in Brisbane. In *The Diffusion of Innovations* (1995), Everett Rogers describes critical mass as occurring at the point at which enough individuals have adopted an innovation so that the innovation’s further rate of adoption becomes self-sustaining.<sup>83</sup> Modernist ideas promulgated by artists’ of the Miya Studio were variously dismissed by Brisbane art critics as grotesque, surrealistic, and untalented scribbling. As part of a small art world, their ideas failed to reach critical mass and the group disbanded after five years, leaving few traces of their existence. Critical mass was finally achieved when twenty students formed themselves into loose-knit group at the basement studio of St Mary’s Anglican Church at Kangaroo Point. Through the efforts of these students and their mentors, this group became self-sustaining and introduced a contemporary style of art of figurative art to Brisbane that finally consigned the bush aestheticism of Godfrey Rivers to art history.

Discussion, an integral part of the art making process at St Mary’s Studio, allowed the students to develop attitudes toward ideas that were being presented by the opinion leaders in the form of the mentors, and marked a significant change in behaviour for Brisbane artists. This heuristic process can be contrasted with the prescriptive art education programme that continued to be offered at the CTC, as it continued to stress the importance of mimesis in rendering copies from objects and nature. This complex set of concepts are used to understand why Brisbane’s art world failed to match the developments in art set in the dominant larger Australian art centres such as Sydney and Melbourne.

This study addresses a gap in our understanding of how art worlds develop and why some ideas may be adopted and others may not. It seeks to analyse Brisbane’s art scene between 1940 and 1970 on its own terms rather than to judge it by what it lacked in the eyes of other art worlds. By undertaking an analysis of Brisbane’s art world as a whole, I wish to provide a more nuanced understanding of the individual characteristics of Brisbane’s art world. The artist is the building block of an art world, whether working as an individual or as part of a group, and in an era when government support for the visual arts was minimal, the artist had little choice but to operate in a symbiotic relationship with the general public who formed an audience as well as a reservoir of prospective patrons. An art system needs both artists and an audience to function effectively, and as Bernard Smith suggests:

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<sup>82</sup> *Miya Studio Second Exhibition Catalogue*, 1946.

<sup>83</sup> Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 313.

In the early life of any fine-arts system it is necessary first to produce the artists and create a taste for art before the art goods begin to flow in any great quantity into the marketing components of the system.<sup>84</sup>

And so it is with consideration of the education of artists and developing an appreciative audience that this thesis begins.

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<sup>84</sup> Smith, "Two Art Systems," 171.



## Part One

### Chapter 1

#### Art Education: A Bridge to the Modern

Excellent tuition was found for me, and I was well taught to draw the outward show of dancing fauns, Donatello heads, etc. I was well surrounded with tradition, and taught only through tradition [...] I must have learnt to draw, for I won so many prizes. After some years of this excellent training I was allowed to start on colour.<sup>1</sup>

These words, written by Margaret Preston in 1923, describing her art education in Melbourne in 1896,<sup>2</sup> could just as easily describe the situation facing progressive art students in Brisbane in the 1940s. The Brisbane Central Technical College Art Branch (CTC) was Queensland's only public art school, and it surrounded its students "with tradition, and taught only through tradition". The limited training facilities for fine arts education in Brisbane were indicative of the "cultural institutional thinness" of Brisbane's art world in the 1940s, and meant that many art students felt that they were "denied the opportunity in their home State to achieve their ambitions in the Arts".<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, many aspiring local artists, including Lloyd Rees, Margaret Olley, Margaret Cilento, Betty Quelhurst, and Betty Cameron, left Brisbane to study or work in art worlds where there was more "encouragement to express themselves".<sup>4</sup> For those unable to study interstate or overseas, the CTC or a local artist's atelier provided the only access to art education in Brisbane's art world. Brisbane artist Wendy Allen, who completed a Certificate of Applied Art at the CTC in 1958, recalls that her assessment for perspective drawing consisted of a folio of drawings of an overhead railway pass that needed to combine "reflection plus shadow, and not a single solitary line could be wrong".<sup>5</sup> This example of "imitativeness" required by the CTC indicates that technical skill was valued over personal expression in local art education.

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Preston, "Why I Became a Convert to Modern Art," in *Modernism in Australia: Documents on Art, Design and Architecture 1917-1967* eds. Ann Stephen, Andrew McNamara, and Philip Goad, (Melbourne: Miegunyah, 2006), 66.

<sup>2</sup> Isobel Seivl, "Preston, Margaret Rose (1875–1963)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed September 2, 2014, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/preston-margaret-rose-8106/text14151>.

<sup>3</sup> Cecil Wallace, "Frustrated Youth Goes South," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), June 14, 1948.

<sup>4</sup> Wallace, "Frustrated Youth".

<sup>5</sup> Wendy Allen, taped conversation with author January 12, 2013.

This chapter argues that the development of education and training facilities available for artists and audiences in Brisbane between 1940 and 1970 was critical to the progress of Brisbane's art world towards modernity. In *Art Worlds*, Howard S. Becker develops the concept of art as a collective activity, which requires, not only artists educated in the principles and techniques involved in the production of art, but also an audience that can appreciate those works.<sup>6</sup> Empathetic and skilled teachers at quality art schools are important to develop the skills of an artist, but equally, the "support activities" of "appreciation, response, and criticism" do not "just happen", but require some type of formal or informal art education to develop the skills of art appreciation.<sup>7</sup> Janet Wolff argues that the "tastes, preferences, ideas and aesthetic notions" of the audience can dictate form and even the content of the art produced in an art world and can, in turn, limit or stifle the creativity of artists in that environment.<sup>8</sup> In complex and culturally thick art worlds, this is not a problem for artists or for audiences, as the facilities exist to cater for diverse aesthetic notions regarding what might constitute art. However, in underdeveloped art worlds such as that of Brisbane in the 1940s, where education of artists was tailored towards producing the traditional impressionistic style of paintings that were valued by Brisbane audiences, the impact is much greater and artists who chose to work in Brisbane had little choice but to eschew creativity and follow the constraints of traditionalism as imposed by their audience if they wished to sell their work. For Brisbane's art world to develop the multiplicity of practice and styles that characterised the more mature art worlds of, for example, Sydney and Melbourne, the art educational facilities available for both artists and audiences had to be increased to encourage greater diversity.

This examination of Brisbane's art education facilities begins with a brief overview of impact of the general art education available through the public school system. For most people, the art taught in their primary school years represented the only art experiences they would ever have. This limited understanding, did not provide the grounding needed to develop visual literacy and fulfil the role of an "appreciative audience" in Brisbane's art world. For those who wished to develop their artistic talents further, Brisbane had limited facilities and, prior to the mid-1950s, its art world shared the fate of all small cities on the periphery of culture as student artists left to study elsewhere. The chapter then examines the facilities available in Brisbane for artist training, which included the atelier style of artists' studios, and the Central Technical College Art Branch (CTC) that delivered a broad based course designed to offer some self expression while carrying out the real task of training commercial artists for the burgeoning world of advertising.<sup>9</sup> However, when English artist Richard Rodier-Rivron arrived from Sydney in 1950, Brisbane's art world changed

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<sup>6</sup> Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 18.

<sup>9</sup> "Change in Art if Worth It," *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), November 23, 1941.

irrevocably. When Rodier-Rivron's private class was relocated to St Mary's Studio in Kangaroo Point, it grew to become an alternative centre for artists' education in Brisbane. The modern methods taught at St Mary's Studio curbed the inevitable "artist drift" away from Brisbane for training, and added to the developing cultural thickness of Brisbane's art world.

### **An Appreciative Audience**

In 1940, the RQAS attracted a record number of artist exhibitors for its fifty-third annual exhibition, indicating the importance that art and these art exhibitions held for local artists. On the other hand, newspaper reports, in lieu of attendance figures that are not available, suggest that attendance by the general public at that same show was poor. Public apathy remained a continued source of frustration for the organisers of the exhibitions. Cecel Knopke, a young art student of the period, reviewing the 1943 RQAS exhibition in Brisbane's youthful *Barjai* magazine, noted that it was a "great pity" that such exhibitions were not "more publicly attended". Knopke pointed to the lack of education about art in Queensland schools as the root of the problem:

It is no wonder that these exhibitions of art are not visited by the general public, for the study and appreciation of art is so thoroughly neglected in the curriculum of every school.<sup>10</sup>

Without the support of the education system, the general population of Brisbane remained largely uninterested in art exhibitions, in Brisbane or elsewhere.

From 1890, Queensland primary schools, through the school syllabus, provided an elementary art education based only on mimetic drawing.<sup>11</sup> This basic art education informed art audiences when they encountered art at the Queensland National Art Gallery (QNAG), or in the rare exhibitions of original art, which included the annual exhibitions of the RQAS. The concept of art as an essential part of everyday life and culture was not one that was embraced by the majority of people in Queensland in the 1940s. If art was thought about at all, it was in terms of making a rare pilgrimage to the Art Gallery to see "art" *in situ*, or else in the realistic easel-paintings that formed the annual exhibitions by artists' groups. In 1959, Vida Lahey, in her book, *Art in Queensland*, which was produced for Queensland's centenary, pointed to the "vicious circle" consisting of "an apathetic public and a moribund Art Gallery" as detrimental for any future development of Brisbane's art environment.<sup>12</sup> Lahey was a long-time member of the RQAS, and her words echoed the sentiments expressed nearly twenty years earlier when the *Courier-Mail* declared that "there are many people in this city who, while professing an interest in art, never visit any of our exhibitions

<sup>10</sup> Cecel Knopke, "The Royal Art Society's Exhibition," *Barjai* (1943): 10.

<sup>11</sup> Donald Braben, "A Survey of Art Teacher Education in Queensland 1860-1976" (Masters' thesis, City of Birmingham Polytechnic, 1981), 29.

<sup>12</sup> Vida Lahey, *Art in Queensland 1859-1959* (Brisbane: Jacaranda, 1959), 14.

and, therefore, cannot possibly have a fair idea of what is being done by local artists".<sup>13</sup> There was no dearth of Brisbane art collectors even in the early 1940s as is illustrated by the fact that 20 local collectors were able to lend 300 pictures representing the works of 70 quality Australian artists for an art exhibition in aid of the Red Cross in 1941.<sup>14</sup>

Every art world has its own geographic, economic, and cultural peculiarities, and Brisbane, like other art worlds, found it satisfying to hold certain attitudes, ideas, and behaviours. Brisbane's engagement with modernist ideas in art increased slowly throughout the 1940s, and the post-war years were a time of artistic and cultural ferment as the city sought to find a balance between a conservative/traditionalist past and a contemporary/modern present. However, both artists and their audiences found themselves without the cultural competence to decode the new lexicon of symbols employed to create modernist art. As art styles began to move away from the purely mimetic and into the realms of abstraction and individual expression, the art-lover's experience of the work was either enhanced or diminished depending on whether they had, or had not, acquired the appropriate cultural code that permitted understanding of the work. When viewing the new art, audiences without knowledge of the appropriate cultural code were both baffled and frustrated by their inability to interpret what they saw, and dismissed modern art as a decline in artistic standards introduced by "diseased minds" from twentieth century Europe.<sup>15</sup>

### **Developing Visual Literacy for the Modern in Art**

The lexicon for deciphering modernist art was very different from that of the traditionalist school, and for a small community, such as Brisbane, the acquisition of the prerequisite skills for decoding and therefore enjoying and producing modernist art was not as straightforward as simply viewing examples of modernist works in exhibitions. Everett Rogers suggests that simply having knowledge of new ideas, such as those acquired through exposure to work in an exhibition, is not sufficient for those ideas to be accepted by a social group.<sup>16</sup> Rogers argues that individuals must not only become aware of an innovation, but then must develop an attitude toward it, before deciding whether or not to adopt it.<sup>17</sup> Rogers further suggests that when individuals are aware that others in their group are considering ideas favourably, they are more likely to form a positive attitude and adopt those ideas accordingly.<sup>18</sup>

The problems encountered when dealing with the unfamiliar in art were expressed by the Governor of Queensland, Sir Leslie Wilson, in his opening address at the fifty-fourth annual

<sup>13</sup> "Brisbane People Show Indifference to Art," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), March 8, 1941.

<sup>14</sup> "Concerts at Art Exhibition for Red Cross," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), June 20, 1941.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors: the Revolutionary Years in Australian Art* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1988), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations* 4th ed. (New York: Free, 1995), 11.

<sup>17</sup> Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 21.

<sup>18</sup> Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 14.

exhibition of the RQAS in 1942. Wilson said that he liked to “look at pictures which show clearly what they represent; and portraits from whom one can recognise the individual”.<sup>19</sup> Although he had been educated in England in the late nineteenth century, Sir Leslie’s remarks express his appreciation of art using “the period eye”, a concept introduced by the art historian, Michael Baxendall in 1988.<sup>20</sup> The period eye supposes that audiences, in order to discover meaning in a work of art, refer to a lexicon of representational conventions that have been formed from the attitudes, ideas, and behaviours that are commonly held in their culture. In Paris during the 1940s, the period eye was attuned to the “non-imitations” encountered in the work of Picasso or Chagall, whereas in Brisbane at that time, the period eye convention was for the purely mimetic representations of the natural world. Artworks that did not conform to that convention were viewed as “merely distortions” or the works of inept artists.<sup>21</sup> Given the lack of art education in Queensland schools, it is not to be wondered at that audiences, from the Governor down, frequently lacked the skills to interpret the unfamiliar conventions that confronted them when viewing modernist work. The Governor’s words accentuate the fact that the issue of educating an audience was defined neither by class nor position.

Developing visual literacy or competency was not easy in Brisbane in the 1940s, but lunch hour lectures at the Art Reference Library on Fridays provided one avenue. The Art Reference Library was the education arm of a larger organisation, the Queensland Art Fund (QAF) that was formed by RQAS artists, Daphne Mayo and Vida Lahey in 1927 to raise funds for the purchase of pictures for the Queensland National Art Gallery (QNAG). In 1933, the QAF approached the philanthropic Carnegie Corporation of New York about improving conditions for art and artists in Brisbane by endowing a travelling art scholarship scheme.<sup>22</sup> The Carnegie Corporation operated a special fund for the advancement of education in countries outside the United States, and had been funding adult education projects in Australia since 1930.<sup>23</sup> The QAF’s request was rejected as being outside the Carnegie Corporation’s philanthropic guidelines. However, in 1936, Dr. Keppel, the President of the Corporation visited Australia at the invitation of Professor Henry Caselli Richards of the University of Queensland, to see firsthand the conditions that persisted in Australia in many public facilities such as libraries, schools, and art galleries.<sup>24</sup> Professor Richards was a trustee of the Queensland National Art Gallery and the inaugural President of the Australian and New Zealand Museum and Art Gallery Association. As a result of Dr. Keppel’s visit, the QAF was offered a set

<sup>19</sup> “Art Encouragement,” *Telegraph* (Brisbane), October 9, 1942.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Baxendall, “The Period Eye” in *Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 143-164.

<sup>21</sup> “Promising Youth,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 17, 1946.

<sup>22</sup> Dominie, “Schools and Colleges,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 9, 1933.

<sup>23</sup> Dominie, “Schools and Colleges.”

<sup>24</sup> Dominie, “Schools and Colleges.”

of “art teaching equipment” comprising 1900 photographs of art works; 200 books on painting, sculpture, woodwork, and other crafts; 20 original mounted prints, etchings and engravings; and 100 reproductions of famous pictures that were suitable for framing.<sup>25</sup> This treasure trove became the Art Reference Library that was housed in three rooms beside the Supreme Court in George Street, and provided an important cultural resource for artists and students in Brisbane.

The public lectures presented at the Art Reference Library covered a wide range of topics and included “Sculpture of the Renaissance” delivered by Daphne Mayo, “Art in Education” by primary school headmaster, Claire Mowbray Butler Van Homrigh, “Some Aspects of German Art” by Mr H. Von Ploennies, and a series on “Aspects of Modern Art” by RQAS member and artist Roy Dalgarno. These lectures were popular, with a regular attendance of between 50 and 80 but Winifred Moore, a feature writer with the *Courier-Mail*, noted an attendance of nearly 200 people at one lecture given in April 1940. Although the lecturer and topic are unnamed in Moore’s article, it is probable that the presenter was Gertrude Langer, a recent arrival in Brisbane.<sup>26</sup> The audience at that lecture included a “university lecturer, society women and welfare workers, a State school headmaster, artists, writers and at least one head of a big business firm”.<sup>27</sup> Moore suggested:

These people had come, as I had, because they wanted to find out the secret that others had discovered, the message that painting, sculpture, and architecture hold for those who set themselves to understand it. [...] Among her listeners were many who had a fine taste in literature. They had been brought up to appreciate the rhythmical and majestic arrangements of words which awaken in the receptive mind emotions that are more profound than the meaning of the words themselves [...] But they had not had access to the world’s great works of art and realising what they had missed, they had come to the Art Reference Library in the attitude of students to one who could help them read and understand the message of the artist for themselves.<sup>28</sup>

Moore raises the critical issue of the importance education plays in the understanding and appreciation of both literature and the visual arts. Not all lectures were so popular, but the fact that so many people would avail themselves of these lectures in their lunch hour indicates that there was considerable interest in finding out about art in the community. Because of a lack of funds, the Art Reference Library was forced to close in 1949 but, in its time, the Library made a valuable contribution to art education in Brisbane by providing, at second hand, pictorial examples of some of the world’s great art.<sup>29</sup> The most significant development in improving visual literacy in Brisbane came, however, not through the Art Library, but around the dining table of Dr Gertrude Langer in suburban Toowong.

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<sup>25</sup> Dr Keppel, letter to Daphne Mayo dated January 13, 1936.

<sup>26</sup> Winifred Moore, “Art Reference Library is Aid to Entrance to Walled Garden,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), April 18, 1940.

<sup>27</sup> Moore, “Art Reference Library”.

<sup>28</sup> Moore, “Art Reference Library”.

<sup>29</sup> “No Cash: Art Library Shut,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), July 22, 1949.

Gertrude Langer was a young, elegant Austrian refugee from war torn Europe who arrived in Brisbane in 1939, with a Ph.D. in Art History from the University of Vienna. Langer became an important figure in the evolution of Brisbane's art world through her salon style lectures, and later, through her art criticism column for the *Courier-Mail*. Born into a wealthy Viennese family, Langer enjoyed a privileged upbringing, frequently travelling to art centres throughout Europe with her family. Her early studies were in Art History with Josef Strzygowski at the University of Vienna and later with Henri Fosseon at the Sorbonne in Paris.<sup>30</sup> Langer followed Strzygowski's method of teaching the history of art, where the student was expected to acquire an overall knowledge of the world of art from prehistoric art and Asian art to the moderns before choosing to specialise in any particular area.<sup>31</sup> Brisbane artist, Muriel Foote (Shaw) remembered that Langer's lectures always began with the history and social conditions of a country before the paintings, sculpture, architecture, and the "minor arts" were introduced.<sup>32</sup> In 1941, the first group of students at Langer's lectures consisted of Mrs Mavis Cummings, Mrs Nita Lucas, Mrs Eva Lancock, Winifred Moore (journalist), and Muriel Foote (artist and art teacher).<sup>33</sup> Nothing much is known of these women apart from Moore and Foote, but extrapolating from the fact that Mavis Cummings was the wife of the well-known Brisbane architect, Robert Percy Cummings, the others women would appear likely to also be society matrons. Langer's students also included young artists, such as Pamela Seeman, Joy Roggenkamp, Laurence Collinson, and Laurence Hope, all of whom went on to play important roles in the development of Brisbane's art world.

At these lectures, books from Langer's extensive library smuggled out of Europe were passed around the group, and, after initial discussions about a work, Langer would introduce the group to the formal principles of painting such as shapes, spaces, lines and rhythms.<sup>34</sup> Langer delivered lectures developed around a theme over a period of ten weeks. It was her extensive knowledge of all forms of art, and a strong commitment to contemporary forms of art, which characterised Langer's engagement with Brisbane's art world. Believing that the arts were an important part of any community, Langer became a champion for the cause of contemporary forms of art in Brisbane, and, when she became art reviewer for the *Courier-Mail* in 1953, she used her column to educate her readers in "looking at art".<sup>35</sup> Langer became Brisbane's most important art critic, and while her reviews were not always appreciated by local artists, they were written with a view to educating people about what artists were trying to achieve in modern art forms, where

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<sup>30</sup> Gertrude Langer and Barbara Blackman, *Gertrude Langer interviewed by Barbara Blackman*. [Sound recording], January 1, 1982, accessed September 5, 2012, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.oh-vn584284>.

<sup>31</sup> Langer, interview.

<sup>32</sup> Muriel Shaw Papers, private collection.

<sup>33</sup> Shaw Papers.

<sup>34</sup> Shaw Papers.

<sup>35</sup> Shaw Papers.

mimesis was replaced as the sole purpose of an art-work by the expression of individual ideas.<sup>36</sup> By 1970, through her column, and in conjunction with the development of greater cultural thickness in Brisbane's art world, Langer's reviews were no longer written for an enthusiastic amateur audience, but for sophisticated art cognoscenti. An examination of Langer's work as an art critic is further developed in Chapter 4, but her development of the art review as an educational strategy, and provision of private art appreciation classes in Brisbane represented more incremental steps taken in the development of Brisbane's art world.

### **Atelier Style Education in Brisbane**

Until 1951, the only alternative to the formalised academic training provided by the CTC was an atelier system of artist education. The atelier method is an individualised form of art education, conducted in the studio of a master artist and based on the transfer of art skills from the master to a student. There was no formalised syllabus, and lessons were tailored to the needs of the student. The time spent with the teacher was open-ended, with the student moving on when they felt they had achieved their goals. Caroline Barker, who was active as an artist and teacher in Brisbane in the early 1940s, offered atelier type art education at her George Street studio, as well as being the art teacher at Somerville House, a prestigious Brisbane secondary school for girls.<sup>37</sup> Barker was born in Melbourne in 1894 and studied at the National Gallery Art School before moving to Brisbane in 1920. She later travelled to England for further study. On her return to Brisbane in 1935, Barker established a studio in George Street that became a meeting place for local and interstate artists, including Donald Friend in 1943.<sup>38</sup> Barker was an empathetic and skilled teacher according to Margaret Olley, one of her students at Somerville House, who described her as a "free spirit who, without being a great artist herself was able to inspire others".<sup>39</sup>

While Barker had extensive experience of the art world outside Brisbane, another Brisbane artist offering atelier style education, Percy Stanhope Hobday, was locally trained: first in the studio of his artist father, James Mayall Hobday, and then at the Art Branch of the CTC where his teacher was Godfrey Rivers.<sup>40</sup> As a Brisbane artist who travelled little, Stanhope Hobday is interesting in that, against Brisbane's prevailing stylistic climate of bush romanticism, he developed an individualistic modern style of colourful, simplified, patterned compositions that embraced the

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<sup>36</sup> Langer, interview.

<sup>37</sup> Meg Stewart, *Margaret Olley: Far from a Still Life* (North Sydney: Random House 2012), 64.

<sup>38</sup> Donald Friend, *Diaries of Donald Friend 2* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2002), 111-112.

<sup>39</sup> Stewart, *Margaret Olley*, 60.

<sup>40</sup> Glenn R. Cooke, "Percy Stanhope Hobday," *Design and Art Australia Online*, accessed May 16, 2014, <http://www.daao.org.au/bio/stanhope-hobday/biography/>



modernist notion of taking inspiration from the “changed social environment” in which he lived.<sup>41</sup> Hobday was a progressive thinker, and more significantly, he recognised that the future of Brisbane’s art lay with young students such as those who attended classes at his studio at the Reserve Bank Chambers 115 Queen Street, in the early 1940s.<sup>42</sup> His students, Joy Roggenkamp, Peter Abrahams, and Laurence Collinson, were part of a number of talented young artists including Margaret Olley, Margaret Cilento, and John Rigby that emerged in Brisbane’s art world in the early 1940s.

Brisbane’s culturally thin art world did not have the facilities in place to train these young artists and to sustain their professional careers. The absence of adequate facilities for their education meant that much of the talent of young artists was traditionally lost to Brisbane and used to develop the cultural environments of other art worlds.

### **Academic Art Education at the CTC**

If Brisbane’s art world wanted to retain the services of its artists, it had to meet the needs of those artists. The atelier system was successful as far as it went, but could work only with individual students because of the small size of the artists’ studios. Change on a large scale was the only option to secure the future needs of artists in Brisbane’s art world. The opportunity to create change rested with institutions that could influence many students at a time, and in Brisbane, the only such institution available was the CTC, and it was not interested in making changes. In 1941, some students at the CTC expressed their dissatisfaction with courses that had not been “amended for more than 30 years” and demanded action.<sup>43</sup> Nothing came of their demands and courses were not upgraded until 1963.

For those Brisbane art students unable to afford travel abroad for study or interstate art training, the CTC provided art instruction using the highly prescriptive South Kensington System of art education, developed in London from 1857 and based almost entirely on drawing using plaster casts of classical sculpture as models.<sup>44</sup> The South Kensington System was designed to reduce the study of art to a systematised body of knowledge governed by strict rules.<sup>45</sup> For example, studies of the figure for painting or sculpture were taught using plaster casts of heroic classical statuary such

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<sup>41</sup> Keith Bradbury and Glenn R. Cooke, *Thorns and Petals 100 Years of the Royal Queensland Art Society* (Brisbane: Royal Queensland Art Society, 1988), 46.

<sup>42</sup> Cooke, “Percy Stanhope Hobday”.

<sup>43</sup> “Art Society Chief’s Support for Students,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), November 17, 1941. Although unnamed, it is thought that the chief agitators were Margaret Olley and Margaret Cilento.

<sup>44</sup> Braben, “Survey of Art Teacher Education,” 15.

<sup>45</sup> Braben, “Survey of Art Teacher Education,” 16.

as the Greek *Discobolus* and *Heracles* as the models.<sup>46</sup> Donald Braben provides the following course outline of subjects offered at the Art Branch of the CTC in 1941:

First Year Full Day Course: History of Art, Colour study, Light and Shade, Lettering, Modelling, Painting, Design, Freehand Drawing, Geometrical Drawing and Perspective, Outdoor Sketching, History of Ornament, Plant Study.

Second Year Full Day Course: History of Art, Light and Shade, Lettering, Modelling, Painting, Design, Commercial Design, Freehand Drawing, Geometrical Drawing and Perspective, Antique [undefined], Anatomy, Head Drawing, Outdoor Sketching, History of Ornament.

Third Year Full Day Course: History of Art, History of Ornament, Drawing the figure from Life, Design, Painting, Design, Perspective Drawing, Antique [undefined], Drawing the Head from Life, Outdoor Sketching, Art Metalwork, Mural Design.<sup>47</sup>

At first glance, this curriculum appears to provide a comprehensive choice of subjects but it is the manner in which the material was taught that was contentious. Progression through the course was heavily reliant on developing the skills of mimetic draughtsmanship, and there was little room in the curriculum for the development of skills of self-expression. Discussion about art was not encouraged at the CTC, and former student Wendy Allen recalls that, even in 1958, the art library as a reference source for ideas at the CTC was available only for the use of staff.<sup>48</sup> As has been seen earlier, Everett Rogers has suggested that discussion was important in becoming aware of innovations and developing attitudes toward new ideas. With the discussion of ideas not encouraged at the CTC, in addition to the limitations of its library's accessibility, the institution myopically failed the needs of the progressive element that was developing in Brisbane art.

Historically, the Queensland Department of Public Instruction preferred their art instructors to be experienced teachers who were content to remain teachers first and artists second.<sup>49</sup> Cyril G. Gibbs, appointed in 1939 to replace F. Martyn Roberts as the Supervisor of Art at the CTC, was well-qualified for the position, having graduated from the Ballarat Art School in 1929, he then lectured at Swinburne Technical College in Melbourne before moving to Brisbane in 1934, where in 1936 he established the Gibbs-Smith Studio of commercial art.<sup>50</sup> Gibbs was happy to relinquish the world of commercial art in order to return to teaching, and remained at the head of the Art Branch until 1971.<sup>51</sup> While artist Roy Churcher was highly critical of Gibbs's teaching style,

<sup>46</sup> Braben, "Survey of Art Teacher Education," 28.

<sup>47</sup> Braben, "Survey of Art Teacher Education," 46.

<sup>48</sup> Allen conversation.

<sup>49</sup> Braben, "Survey of Art Teacher Education," 28.

<sup>50</sup> *Colonial to Contemporary: Queensland Art College 125 Years* (Brisbane: Griffith Artworks, 2006), 116.

<sup>51</sup> *Colonial to Contemporary*, 116.

regarding his adherence to the South Kensington System as reinforcing “the defunct craft tradition of learning skills” rather than encouraging the student’s artistic and intellectual creativity,<sup>52</sup> Irene Amos valued her academic art education received at the CTC but eventually went on to become a totally abstract artist in Brisbane’s expanded art scene.<sup>53</sup> In 1963, the CTC finally began to broaden its curriculum and employed artists such as Roy Churcher, William Robinson, and Mervyn Moriarty to teach what Gibbs disparagingly referred to as “hobby classes” in art.<sup>54</sup> The hobby classes were uncredited classes outside the Diploma of Applied Art. Churcher and Robinson taught contemporary figurative art, while Moriarty taught abstraction. It wasn’t until 1970 that real change was implemented at the CTC when the two strands of art education were separated to provide a Diploma of Fine Arts as distinct from the technical education of the Diploma of Graphic Design.<sup>55</sup>

### **Genesis of the Modern**

In October 1945, in a controversial “Foreword” to the catalogue of the first YAG exhibition, Laurence Collinson criticised a number of aspects of Brisbane’s art system, including the “harmful influence of local training institutions”. According to Collinson, “the use of the word ‘art-school’ is unjustifiable”.<sup>56</sup> As a result of the criticism, he, along with fellow art students Pamela Seeman and Laurence Hope, broke from both the CTC and the YAG in November 1945, and established a cooperative, contemporary art studio, the Miya Studio, as a base for research into art through the free and open discussion of new ideas and experimentation in accordance with the modernist principles of individual expression.<sup>57</sup> The young artists of the studio believed that discussion was at least as important in the development of an art practice as the more considered influence of technique that was taught at the CTC. By instituting this practice of learning through discussion, Miya Studio immediately repositioned the academic teaching of the CTC as no longer the only way the practices of art could be learned in Brisbane. While not a teaching studio, by working together in close proximity, Miya Studio engendered a spirit of camaraderie amongst the artists, and encouraged a social role for art akin to that of other artists’ enclaves such as Montmartre, Camden Town, or even Box Hill. However, Miya Studio’s freedom from the oppressive teaching style of the CTC came at a cost.

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<sup>52</sup> Roy Churcher, CAS Broadsheet, August 1962.

<sup>53</sup> Helen Fridemanis *Artists and Aspects of the Contemporary Art Society: Queensland Branch* (Brisbane: Boolarong, 1991), 73.

<sup>54</sup> Alison Coaldrake, taped conversation with the author January 21, 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Fridemanis *Artists and Aspects*, 20.

<sup>56</sup> Laurence Collinson, foreword to *Younger Artists’ Group Exhibition Catalogue 1945*.

<sup>57</sup> *Miya Studio Second Exhibition Catalogue*, 16.

Geoffrey Dutton notes that art teachers are important in enabling their students to respond with knowledge as well as enthusiasm to social mores.<sup>58</sup> Without the discipline imposed by a teacher at an art school or a master artist in an atelier, progression of the Miya artists' work was limited and characterised by "change rather than improvement in technique [that] led to some unhappy results".<sup>59</sup> By 1950, Collinson's work had not progressed to an identifiable style as would be expected over a period of five years, but was described the *Guardian*, as "like that of a syndicate [...] with no definitive style".<sup>60</sup> Pamela Seeman's early promise as a strong portrait artist, developed through her conventional studies at the CTC, dissipated as her later work lapsed into caricature seen in *The Metal Polisher*, shown in the New Theatre Art Club show of 1950.<sup>61</sup> The most successful of the three was Laurence Hope, who aligned himself with Sidney Nolan (during Nolan's Brisbane sojourn in 1947) and later with Charles Blackman during his Brisbane years. Hope held a solo show at the Art Reference Library in 1949, and his work was in the modernist manner. Warwick Lawrence, art critic with the *Courier-Mail* wrote that Hope "painted life as he feels and see it with an imagination that is both strong and candid. The result is a series of haunting and highly sensitive commentaries on present-day social conditions".<sup>62</sup> The studio disbanded in 1949, but left an important legacy in the idea that a new type of artist education was possible in Brisbane: education through experiment and discussion that did not require the formality of an institutionalised art school curriculum or drawing from plaster casts.

The closure of Miya Studio in 1949 meant that forward thinking Brisbane art students no longer had any practical alternative to the academic tradition of the CTC. However, at an exhibition of his work at Moreton Galleries in 1950, visiting artist Richard Rodier-Rivron expressed an interest in forming a private art class in Brisbane.<sup>63</sup> Shortly afterward, he advertised an art class for beginners and advanced students using "modern methods and techniques".<sup>64</sup> Students such as Bronwyn Yeates, Judy Cuppaidge, Elaine Perret, Shirley Miller, Pam McFarlane, Ginty Ferrier, and Alan Stevenson, the rector of St Mary's Anglican Church in Kangaroo Point, welcomed the class and formed the initial core group of students.<sup>65</sup> Rodier-Rivron's intention to teach using modern methods and techniques provided a continuation of the Miya Studio's challenge to the academic system of artist training.

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<sup>58</sup> Geoffrey Dutton, *The Innovators: The Sydney Alternatives in the Rise of Modern Art, Literature, and Ideals* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1986), 61.

<sup>59</sup> Unidentified newspaper clipping, hand-dated September 24, 1947, HDGA Archive.

<sup>60</sup> T O'C., "Varied Work at N. T. Art Show," *Guardian* (Brisbane), September 28, 1950.

<sup>61</sup> *The Metal Polisher*, photograph, Jim Crawford Papers.

<sup>62</sup> Warwick Lawrence, "Sensitive Commentary by Painter," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), March 14, 1949.

<sup>63</sup> Paul Grano, "Versatile Art Show," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), June 20, 1959.

<sup>64</sup> "Classes and Tuition," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 5, 1950.

<sup>65</sup> "Classes and Tuition."

For Brisbane's small art cognoscenti, Rodier-Rivron was seen as a credible artist in that he had trained in London and had in 1947 and 1949 had work accepted for the national Wynne Art Prize for Australian landscape conducted by the Art Gallery of New South Wales.<sup>66</sup> Combined with his promise of an alternative teaching method to that of the CTC, and as a result of publicity garnered from his show, Rodier-Rivron's class grew quickly and he was soon offered the use of the studio space underneath the church hall of St Mary's by his student, the Reverend Alan Stevenson.<sup>67</sup> For the next decade, St Mary's Studio was associated with Brisbane's first truly alternative form of art education.

### **St Mary's Studio: An Alternative to Tradition**

In contrast to the ateliers, where individual tuition prevailed, and unlike the Miya Studio with its small numbers, St Mary's Studio, which began in 1951 with a strong core of around twenty students, was able to develop a critical mass of artists early in its existence. Everett Rogers defines critical mass as being achieved at a point where enough individuals have developed a positive attitude toward an innovation, and have decided to adopt the idea so that the innovation's further rate of adoption becomes self-sustaining.<sup>68</sup> The development at St Mary's Studio of a critical mass of artists who were committed to developing a more contemporary style of art in Brisbane meant that Brisbane's art world now had two viable and competing art styles.<sup>69</sup> Richard Rodier-Rivron became the first of a series of talented artist/mentors who taught at St Mary's and fostered the growth of contemporary art in Brisbane. Rodier-Rivron was followed by Margaret Cilento (1953), John Rigby (1954-1955), Jon Molvig (1956-1957), and Roy Churcher (1958-1962). Mervyn Moriarty took some classes at St Mary's between 1962 and 1966, when he left the Studio to open his own art school known as Eastaus.

From the beginning of the studio tradition at St Mary's in 1951, tuition for the students was very different from that encountered at the academic CTC. Teaching styles at St Mary's encouraged the modern European style of art education which supported independent student experimentation with minimal teacher intervention. Teaching was delivered by artist/mentors who provided a model of professional artistic practice that allowed their students to develop specific art skills and knowledge that would enhance the student's professional and personal growth as an artist. The artist/mentors did not impose their personal style on the work of the students. The usual teaching practice was for the mentor to set up a model from which the students would make unsupervised

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<sup>66</sup> Glenn R. Cooke, "Richard Rivron," *Design and Art Australia Online*, last updated 2011, <http://www.daaao.org.au/bio/richard-rivron/biography/>

<sup>67</sup> Muriel Shaw, "Kangaroo Point Mentors and the Paint Tree: a Short History of a Brisbane Studio at Kangaroo Point in the '50s and '60s as Remembered by Some of the Students," (Unpublished Manuscript, Brisbane: Fryer Library), 4.

<sup>68</sup> Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 313.

<sup>69</sup> Shaw, "Kangaroo Point Mentors," 4.

studies before the mentor would step in to offer criticism.<sup>70</sup> Apart from practical applications to the practice of art, Rodier-Rivron created a stimulating, convivial atmosphere where students were encouraged to discuss the works of some of his favourite English artists such as William Sickert, Victor Pasmore, John Piper, and Matthew Smith. No longer was it sufficient for a student to know how an effect was created; Rodier-Rivron was encouraging them to understand why an effect was used. It was the development of this discussion technique of teaching and learning that was to embed the changes that were taking place in the art produced by the students at St Mary's.

Alison Coaldrake, a student at both the CTC and St Mary's in the 1950s, offered insights into the difference in teaching styles at the two institutions, with a comparison between Melville Haysom at the CTC in 1953 and Roy Churcher at St Mary's in 1959. Haysom taught in the mimetic tradition of the CTC, and would demonstrate painting technique from a position in front of the class using the traditional "saucepans and spinach" technique of contrasting textures.<sup>71</sup> The method demonstrated was then duplicated to the best of the student's ability and graded accordingly. Wendy Allen, a later student of the CTC, confirms that the practice of demonstration as a "how to do it" style of teaching still persisted at the CTC in 1958.<sup>72</sup> Churcher, on the other hand, would require the student to experiment with the subject first, thinking the process through for themselves before he offered any comment. Coaldrake suggests that the problem was then turned back to the student to come up with a solution. This creative commitment to solving the problems that constantly arise as part of the creative process was one of the features of tuition at St Mary's and provided a major difference to the teaching at the CTC. Rather than assuming the didactic role of an instructor, the mentors provided a model of creative enquiry for their students, and the solution to problems encountered remained the responsibility of the student. Although there was no formal syllabus, St Mary's Studio was recognised by the students as providing an excellent contemporary art education.<sup>73</sup>

Each artist/mentor added something to the story of St Mary's Studio. Rodier-Rivron was a wholly representational English artist, but through his cachet as a successful overseas artist and his commitment to modern teaching methods, his class flourished. Gertrude Langer described Rodier-Rivron's paintings as having a refined surface treatment within a general style of "romantic realism" that was "agreeable" rather than "daring".<sup>74</sup> However, artist Don Ross believes that it was Rodier-Rivron's introduction of the innovative technique of "free drawing" described in Kimon Nicolaïdes's 1941 book *The Natural Way to Draw* that made such a difference to Brisbane art

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<sup>70</sup> Coaldrake conversation.

<sup>71</sup> Coaldrake conversation. The "saucepans and spinach" technique refers to the practice of setting up a model for a painting exercise using objects with strongly contrasting textures.

<sup>72</sup> Allen conversation.

<sup>73</sup> Shaw, "Kangaroo Point Mentors," 9.

<sup>74</sup> Gertrude Langer, "A Teacher's Art Show," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), April 13, 1954.

students.<sup>75</sup> Nicolaïdes’s drawing method challenged art students to be confident with their drawing and suggested that the use of an eraser was not permitted before Exercise 28 on page 112 was attempted.<sup>76</sup> A total of 64 exercises in drawing were provided, but the book was not a “how to” manual of drawing techniques. Once an exercise was completed, it became part of a longer pattern of drawing: part of what Nicolaïdes referred to as “Schedules”. For example, Schedule 9D on page 97 was planned as a three hour drawing session working with a life model:

Skill	Task	Exercise	Time Allocated
Gesture Drawing	25 Drawings	Exercise 2	30 minutes
Form Studies in Ink	3 Drawings	Exercise 23	30 minutes
Descriptive Poses	6 Drawings	Exercise 10	15 minutes
Rest			15 minutes
Gesture Drawings	25 Drawings	Exercise 2	30 minutes
Modelled Drawing in Ink	1 to 4 Drawings	Exercises 13 and 24	60 minutes

Gesture drawing required the student to “feel the movement of the whole” pose rather than obsessing over insignificant details. From the period in which Joseph Clarke became drawing master at the Brisbane School of Arts in 1880, fine mimetic drawing had formed the basis of Queensland’s art education. Liberating artists from this restrictive quality proved to be revolutionary for St Mary’s students and allowed them far greater scope to infuse their paintings with the gestural freedom offered by the drawing technique.

Students who attended classes at St Mary’s Studio identified with a new “modern” art presence in Brisbane. Muriel Shaw suggests that because the students identified as the “group from St Mary’s” and were no longer constrained by the conservative, academic image of the CTC, they felt “modern”.<sup>77</sup> Anne-Marie Willis, in her book *Illusions of Identity* (1993), sums up the feeling of modernity in Australia as “an expectation, an imminence”,<sup>78</sup> and it is this feeling of expectation that best describes the attitude of the students at St Mary’s. They were no longer looking to the past for an evaluation of their efforts but to the future to see what could be achieved. The students at St Mary’s formed a loose-knit group that worked to encourage each other, and it was their identification as a group that produced the phenomenon of critical mass. Rather than remaining as isolated hobbyists or individual students learning their craft at the ateliers or the CTC, the students

<sup>75</sup> Don Ross, taped conversation with the author, April 3, 2012.

<sup>76</sup> Kimon Nicolaïdes, *The Natural Way to Draw* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1941) 9.

<sup>77</sup> Shaw Papers.

<sup>78</sup> Anne-Marie Willis, *Illusions of Identity: The Art of Nation* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1993), 133.

at St Mary's worked together on modernising the practice of art in Brisbane. The students are recognised as a group because of their "conscious association" with each other, illustrated by their decision to remain at St Mary's when Rodier-Rivron moved on in 1952. Such studio loyalty was of major importance to the success of St Mary's as the continuity of classes established a stable economic base for the artist/mentors, allowing each new mentor to seamlessly assume control of existing classes without risking income, while waiting for sufficient students to enrol to make the class viable.

After the departure of Rodier-Rivron, Margaret Cilento was invited, fresh from her studies in New York and Europe, to take over the ready-made class in 1953. Cilento, the winner of the Half Dozen Group's 1946 travelling scholarship, had studied in New York, at both the Studio of the Artists School and Atelier 17, where art was also taught through experimentation followed by discussion of the results. Cilento returned to Brisbane to develop her art practice but taught art to make a living. Cilento's first-hand connection with the New York Abstract Expressionist School represented the closest tie Brisbane had with the network of artists in the international art scene, but she left the studio in 1954 to pursue further study in London. She asked her friend John Rigby to take over the classes at St Mary's.

When John Rigby took over the studio, he was married and had a young family to support. He had full-time employment as a commercial artist and had no financial reason to commit to the student group. He took over the role because he believed that it was important to maintain an alternative to the CTC in Brisbane.<sup>79</sup> Because of his many commitments, Rigby conducted only one evening drawing class each week and a Saturday afternoon painting class, but it was enough to allow the alternative education facility to survive. After winning the national Flotta Lauro Art Prize in 1955, Rigby offered the studio and the classes to Jon Molvig, who had also made the move to Brisbane. In 1956, Molvig took over the classes at St Mary's and continued the tradition of mentors.

Molvig encouraged a convivial environment in the Studio, similar to that cultivated by Rodier-Rivron. However, a new group of artist/students, attracted by Molvig's presence as an artist, gathered around him: these included artists Andrew Sibley, Gordon Shepherdson, Margaret Olley, and Joy Roggenkamp, while students Irene Amos, John Aland, Wendy Allen, Warren Palmer, and Mervyn Moriarty also joined the group. The students confessed to feeling "nervousness and awe" working in close proximity to so many luminaries of the local art world.<sup>80</sup> John Aland felt that "artists and students alike had a great respect for Molvig: he triggered off the students, bringing out their individuality, and was able to instil in them that art is communication".<sup>81</sup> Molvig's style of

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<sup>79</sup> John Rigby interviewed by Barbara Blackman, [sound recording] 1985, accessed May 30, 2012. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.oh-vn2089791>.

<sup>80</sup> Irene Amos, cited in Shaw, "Kangaroo Point Mentors," 2.

<sup>81</sup> John Aland's response to a questionnaire from Muriel Shaw, 1984.



teaching was nothing out of the ordinary, with the students being largely left alone to experiment before Molvig offered constructive criticism.<sup>82</sup> Mervyn Moriarty remembers the numerous discussions on art did much to broaden his knowledge of creative art.<sup>83</sup> When Molvig moved on from the studio in 1957, the core group of artists that had begun with Rodier-Rivron also moved on, establishing teaching studios of their own. Inner city suburbs such as Spring Hill and nearby Petrie Terrace, with their cheap rents and dilapidated houses, became another centre of artistic activity in Brisbane, further enhancing the cultural thickness of Brisbane's art world.

By the time Roy and Betty Churcher arrived at the studio in 1958, St Mary's was the hub of a burgeoning contemporary art scene in Brisbane. While Molvig had cultivated a bohemian atmosphere at the Studio, the Churcher style was more studious. Betty Churcher had left Brisbane in 1952 as Betty Cameron, the winner of the inaugural YAG travelling art scholarship valued at £300 and jointly funded by the YAG and RQAS. Cameron was representative of those students who could not afford to leave Brisbane to undertake further study, but the scholarship that she helped devise, allowed her to study in England and she graduated from the prestigious Royal College of Art in London in 1955.<sup>84</sup> Returning to Brisbane in 1957 with her English born and Slade-trained husband Roy, the Churchers first set up classes at the attic studio at the School of Arts before taking over the lease of St. Mary's Studio from Molvig.<sup>85</sup>

Unlike the artists that gathered around Molvig, the students that formed Roy Churcher's classes mainly included young, intellectual, married women, such as Alison Coaldrake who was married to a scientist working for the CSIRO. These women had time on their hands because social convention decreed that they should not work.<sup>86</sup> Churcher continued the traditions of teaching self-expression and interpretation by evaluating the success of the student with "balanced and constructive criticism", but he also introduced innovations designed to reduce the student's idea of "preciousness" about art produced on canvas by introducing the practice of painting in oils on prepared paper.<sup>87</sup> While not being successful in an archival sense, Churcher's approach to the experience of painting was grounded in a sound economic context. Painting on paper reduced costs for the students and encouraged experimentation, but oil paint was also expensive when bought in small tubes from artists' supply shops and students used the precious commodity sparingly. Encouraging his students to develop a more painterly and expressive style, Churcher bought paint in

<sup>82</sup> Shaw, "Kangaroo Point Mentors," 1.

<sup>83</sup> Marilyn England, *From River Banks to Shearing Sheds: 30 Years with Flying Arts* (Brisbane: Suzanne Wickenden, 2009), 7.

<sup>84</sup> Betty Churcher interviewed by Robin Hughes, *Australian Biography Project*, 2002. [Transcript of sound recording]. <http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/churcher/intertext4.html> ; Details of the YAG scholarship are discussed in Chapter 6.

<sup>85</sup> Betty Churcher interview.

<sup>86</sup> Coaldrake conversation; Val Waring, taped conversation with author February 4, 2011; Rhyl Hinwood, taped conversation with author June 30, 2011.

<sup>87</sup> Coaldrake conversation.

bulk and sold it on to his students. In this way, he encouraged his students to apply paint thickly so they could fully enjoy the full experience of painting, rather than simply filling in spaces with a thin film of colour. For Churcher, painting was “an experience one goes through in the process of making something” and encouraged his students to “get on with it” when making art.<sup>88</sup>

Churcher continued classes at St Mary’s until the end of 1962, after which he was employed by the CTC to teach the aforementioned “hobby” art classes to women with time to spare during the day. These were in effect, the same women who came to his classes at St Mary’s and they represent on the part of the CTC, an inclination to change from the strict academic format of previous years. At the CTC, Churcher taught in the same way as he had at St Mary’s, and many of his students, including Irene Amos, Beverley Budgen, and Alison Coaldrake, enrolled in the new course. Joyce Hyam also enrolled in his class at the CTC and discovered the group at St Mary’s for the first time.<sup>89</sup> The women continued to use St Mary’s Studio for other experimental work, and Hyam joined them. The group became known as the Wednesday Group, and Churcher often joined their painting sessions as he missed the camaraderie and atmosphere of the Studio.

In 1962, Mervyn Moriarty became the last of the mentors of St Mary’s. Moriarty was a young student when he first appeared at the studio in the time of Molvig, but he carried on the teaching tradition of stressing the importance of self-expression and interpretation of a subject. Moriarty’s lasting impression on art in Brisbane was made through education, as he later developed another alternative to state-controlled education through the establishment of the Eastaus (for eastern Australia) Art School in 1971, and later the Flying Art School in 1973.<sup>90</sup> When Moriarty left the Studio, classes continued to be held there by a series of competent painters, but its importance as the alternative centre of artist education in Brisbane was over. The development of post-1970 art education in Brisbane owes much to the work done at St Mary’s Studio, throughout the 1950s in particular.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined art education in Brisbane between 1940 and 1970. In 1940, the establishment educational facility, the CTC, showed little interest in breaking the cycle of conservatism in Brisbane because there were no challengers to the system it supported. Miya Studio repositioned the art education practices of the CTC by making them “no longer the only way” that artists could be trained, and although Miya Studio was not a teaching studio, its use of experimentation and discussion to further artistic work provided an alternative for artists who wanted to be progressive and modern. Miya Studio’s legacy of finding another way to obtain an art

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<sup>88</sup> Coaldrake conversation.

<sup>89</sup> Joyce Hyam, taped conversation with the author, April 12, 2012.

<sup>90</sup> England, *From River Banks to Shearing Sheds*, 9.

education in Brisbane was fully realised in the 1950s in the groups that formed at St. Mary's Studio in Kangaroo Point. St Mary's became known as the centre for creative art in Brisbane, while the CTC continued to provide an art education grounded in tradition. The teaching at St Mary's greatly increased the number of artists in Brisbane working in a contemporary style, but more importantly for the development of cultural institutional thickness in Brisbane's art world, many of those artists set up their own teaching studios, with each studio adding to the cultural depth of Brisbane's art world.

While the CTC remained the premier artist training facility in the state, it lost cultural prestige to St Mary's Studio. As a result of competition, the CTC was forced to rethink its strategy in the expanded field of artist education in Brisbane. In 1963, the CTC updated its courses to allow fine art instruction as a "hobby" course with Roy Churcher, William Robinson, and Mervyn Moriarty as the tutors and the establishment and the alternative in education began to converge. The introduction of these courses was a token gesture toward modernisation on the part of the CTC, but one result was that the absolute necessity for the alternative artist training facility that was St Mary's was lessened. As the students who had studied at St. Mary's moved on and established teaching studios of their own in Brisbane's inner city suburbs, such as Spring Hill and nearby Petrie Terrace, they continued to increase the density of cultural practices in Brisbane. In 1970, the CTC's new courses for a Diploma of Fine Arts as distinct from the technical education traditionally provided in the Diploma of Graphic Design provided yet more depth to Brisbane's cultural landscape.<sup>91</sup> In 1972, the CTC Art Branch became the College of Art and was moved from George Street to a modern, purpose-built environment for teaching the arts at suburban Seven Hills.<sup>92</sup>

By 1970, there were also many more ways of educating an art audience. From 1963, art had been a subject in the state secondary school curriculum for the Senior (Year 12) Certificate. Although the number studying art in secondary schools was still very small, it was a step toward creating greater cultural awareness in the general population. Gertrude Langer remained as the art critic of the *Courier-Mail* and continued to educate the newspaper's public about art using her "Art Review" column, but the most significant change in educating Brisbane's art audience came from art being much more readily available to view because of significant developments in the Brisbane art market. From the RQAS annual exhibition of local art and an occasional solo show in 1940, Brisbane's art market, as will be documented in the next chapter, had increased exponentially over the three decades and revolutionised the ways Brisbane audiences related to art. Where once Brisbane artists may have felt their creativity was stifled by the tastes, preferences, ideas and

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<sup>91</sup> Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 20.

<sup>92</sup> *Colonial to Contemporary*, 18.

aesthetic notions of a largely conservative audience, by 1970, Brisbane art audiences appreciated a wide variety of styles, which were continuously on show in the city.

With the development of St Mary's Studio, the cultural institutional thickness of Brisbane's educational art world had increased to the extent that the trend for aspiring art students to leave Brisbane to pursue further study in art in Sydney, Melbourne, or overseas had been curbed by the mid-1950s. Although St Mary's ceased to be a teaching studio in the early 1960s, it later became, as will be shown in Chapter 7, a hotbed of new ideas through an informal education process conducted under the auspices of the Contemporary Art Society Queensland Branch. Cecel Knopke would have been pleased.

## Chapter 2

### Brisbane's Art Market: "Modest Work for Modest Means."<sup>1</sup>

Selling your work is an amazing feeling. You can't quite believe it.<sup>2</sup>

Brisbane's art market was fragmentary at best in 1940, with two large annual exhibitions and three small exhibitions. Many artists were able to exhibit and sell their works at the ephemeral Fine Arts gallery at the Queensland National Agriculture and Industrial Association's (QNA) annual exhibition in Bowen Hills in August, as well as at the Royal Queensland Art Society's (RQAS) annual ensemble exhibition of members' works at the City Hall Gallery in October.<sup>3</sup> The three small exhibitions were privately organised, and it must be noted that none took place in a designated gallery. These exhibitions included Leonard Shillam's solo exhibition of modernist sculptures at the Art Reference Library in April, while Muriel Foote (Shaw), Vera Cottew, and Ella Robinson held a joint exhibition in the Old Courier Building in May. Finally, in December, Noel Wood and Roy Delgarno exhibited works painted on Bedarra Island in North Queensland, also in the Old Courier Building.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter examines the changes wrought in Brisbane's art market between 1940 and 1970 as it gradually developed the structures and mechanisms that have come to characterise the commercial gallery system that disseminates art products in a primary art market. A primary art market is one in which art works are first offered for sale in the public domain as objects worthy of acquisition and preservation by individual or institutional patrons. During the period under discussion, the paradigm for the exhibition and sale of original art in Brisbane shifted from large annual exhibitions conducted by artists' groups in makeshift venues, to that of individual or small group shows that utilised professional art dealers and a continuous exhibition cycle at commercial art galleries. This investigation will map the development of facilities for the exhibition of art including the use of commercial spaces such as the Canberra Temperance Hotel and department

<sup>1</sup> Frank Rutter, "Modest Work for Modest Means," cited in Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich, eds., *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850-1939* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2011), 98.

<sup>2</sup> Alison Coaldrake, conversation with the author, January 21, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> The QAS was granted a Royal Charter in 1927 to become the Royal Queensland Art Society (RQAS). The QNA's annual exhibition is known as the "Ekka". The City Hall Gallery was a purpose built gallery, housed on the fifth floor of the "new" City Hall building, and intended for use by community groups.

<sup>4</sup> "Queensland Artist's Show," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), March 29, 1940; "Art of Tropics New Tradition," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), December 6, 1940; "Three Girls to Give Art Show," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), May 4, 1940.

store galleries, before examining the development and role of professionally-run art galleries in Brisbane's modern, commercial art market. While concentrating on the Moreton Galleries and the Johnstone Gallery, it is worth noting here that the Johnstone Gallery became the largest commercial gallery in Australia in the 1960s, and although local artists were little represented there, the artistic ambience that it created as an institution in Brisbane added considerably to the development of cultural institutional thickness in the city.<sup>5</sup> In the changed scene of the late 1960s, small specialist galleries such as Gallery One Eleven and the Design Art Centre emerged to cater for what had become a pluralist art world.

I aim to show that the new commercial system of exhibiting art was important in changing attitudes to art in Brisbane as it involved a transformation in habits of viewing of art, as new relationships were forged between artists' groups, artists, dealers, art objects, and audiences.<sup>6</sup> In an undeveloped and undefined art market, artists find it difficult to secure the notice of patrons. This was the situation that faced Brisbane artists in 1940.

A major challenge in the study of the Brisbane art market during this period is the paucity of data available. I have drawn on historical evidence provided by newspaper stories, magazine articles, exhibition ephemera, Post Office Directories, archives of artists' groups' records, and commercial gallery archives. Incomplete sales records are available for RQAS and the Half Dozen Group of Artists (HDGA) exhibitions through their respective archives. There is a lack of information about the department stores themselves in Brisbane, and I have pieced together the story of Finney's Art Gallery from newspapers. While this gallery played an important part in the development of Brisbane's cultural facilities, the fact that Leslie Slaughter's short history of Finney Isles, *Finney's 90 Years Progress 1864-1954*, makes no mention of the gallery is indicative of the small part such galleries played in the economic fortunes of the department stores.<sup>7</sup>

## **A Professional Art Market**

Within an art system, a professional art market represents the activities of commercial art galleries and dealers, where works of art are made public, value is conferred, and ownership is transferred

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<sup>5</sup> The Johnstone Gallery has been widely written about by a number of authors, most notably as the topic of Louise Martin-Chew's 2002 Masters' thesis, "Like Topsy: The Johnstone Gallery, 1950-1972". Recent scholarship has shown a resurgence of interest in the Johnstone Gallery as a Brisbane icon of the 1950s and 1960s: the exhibition *Remembering Brian and Marjorie Johnstone's Galleries*, was curated by Nancy Underhill at the University of Queensland Art Museum (UAM) in 2014. In association with this exhibition, the John Oxley Library in the State Library of Queensland presented *A Night in the JOL: The Johnstone Gallery*, with Victor Mace, the former assistant director of the Johnstone Gallery, in conversation with Ian Townsend from the Australian Broadcasting Commission, and Simon Elliott, Assistant Director Curatorial and Educational Services at the National Gallery of Australia, who has a long personal association with the Johnstone Gallery. Strong attendance at both events is indicative of the interest engendered by this icon of Brisbane's engagement with the modern art world.

<sup>6</sup> Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich, eds., *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Leslie Slaughter, *Finney's 90 Years Progress 1864-1954* (Brisbane: Finney Isles, 1954).

from the artist. With its infrastructure of dealers, galleries, and exhibitions, the art market represents the most efficient way of introducing the work of artists to the art-buying public. Howard S. Becker suggests that a healthy art market impacts favourably on the quality of work produced because it “defines the boundaries of acceptable art” by giving recognition as artists to those whose works it can assimilate, and rejecting those it cannot.<sup>8</sup> In art worlds where the art market is not well developed and there are few marketing opportunities, artists strategically adopt a more conservative approach to their work as they seek to maximise sales in the available conditions.<sup>9</sup> This was the situation in Brisbane in the 1940s. Although United States servicemen were enthusiastic about the freshness and vigour of Brisbane art, Dr James Vincent (J.V.) Duhig,<sup>10</sup> Chairman of the RQAS, felt the work showed a monotony of style and content.<sup>11</sup>

The modern commercial art market, as it is understood today with its art dealers, agents, and small commercial galleries, is a relatively recent phenomenon that grew up around the Barbizon (1830-1870), Impressionist, and Post-Impressionist schools of painting in France.<sup>12</sup> Only when these schools established their own networks of marketing, dealerships, and distribution did they begin to flourish.<sup>13</sup> Similarities exist within Brisbane’s art world. It was not until a network of art marketing opportunities developed in Brisbane that local artists were freed from the need to exhibit with artists’ groups, and individuality in style and expression was able to be developed. As Tyler Cowen argues, the art market is an economic rather than an aesthetic reality that in turn affects the form art takes.<sup>14</sup> Cowen suggests that just as state-sponsored art or art sponsored by religion has, throughout history, had identifiable characteristics, so the commercial art market also produces art with recognisable characteristics. By analysing the facilities that were available for Brisbane artists to market their work, it is possible to trace the development of Brisbane art from small paintings suitable for small suburban homes, to statement pieces that complemented the sleek interiors of modern 1960s homes and corporate offices.

Changes in the patronage of art also affected the art world. Over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century, the middle classes increasingly became important as patrons of art.<sup>15</sup> With the rise of the middle class in nineteenth century England and a commensurate increase in their wealth as a result of increased professionalism in the workplace, aristocrats and plutocrats were

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<sup>8</sup> Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 226.

<sup>9</sup> Janet Wolff, *Social Production of Art* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 18.

<sup>10</sup> Dr or Professor James Vincent Duhig was better known as J.V. Duhig to differentiate him from his uncle, Dr James Duhig, the Catholic Archbishop of Brisbane who was also an art patron.

<sup>11</sup> J.V. Duhig, foreword to *Royal Queensland Art Society Exhibition Catalogue*, 1943.

<sup>12</sup> Tyler Cowen, *In Praise of Commercial Culture* (Cambridge MA.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 112-113.

<sup>13</sup> Cowen, *Commercial Culture*, 113.

<sup>14</sup> Cowen, *Commercial Culture*, 113.

<sup>15</sup> Fletcher and Helmreich, *Modern Art Market in London*, 2.

deposed as the arbiters of taste influencing London's art market.<sup>16</sup> As a consequence, subject matter and the scale of paintings changed to become acceptable to a domestic market, rather than a civic one. Large historical works made way for subjects with wider appeal to Victorian audiences such as poignant narratives, landscapes, portraits, and still-life works, and the scale of the works decreased so that they might hang more easily over the mantelpiece in a middle class home. At their annual exhibitions, Brisbane artists provided the sort of work that sold well to their middle class public as evidenced by the sale in 1940 of works such as *Jacaranda* by Charles Lancaster, *Farmyard Fowls* by Frankie Payne, and *Mt Warning from Razorback* by Frank Sherrin.

Marketing strategies in a professional art market centre around retailing practices first developed in modern department stores.<sup>17</sup> In modern department store culture, shop assistants, through speaking knowledgably about the products on offer, were able to increase sales figures for their employers through personal engagement with potential customers.<sup>18</sup> To establish a rapport between the patron and the work on view, professional sales staff in commercial galleries became adept at building an artist's reputation by sharing details of the artist's life and personality with the customer.<sup>19</sup> Also, because the galleries were commercial enterprises, the assistants maximised sales opportunities in not only selling from the floor, but also allowing patrons access to the gallery stockroom.<sup>20</sup> In this way, an artist's work was continuously available to a buying art public. Around the same time that Finney Isles and Company remodelled the top floor auditorium of their Queen Street department store to provide a dedicated exhibition and art gallery space in 1946, the city experienced unprecedented growth in the number of professional commercial art galleries becoming available, with four galleries, the most important of which was the Moreton Galleries, opening in Brisbane. Dealing with prospective art buyers became the speciality of art dealers in the independent commercial gallery system,<sup>21</sup> allowing the commercial galleries to eventually gain ascendancy over department store galleries and the annual artists' group exhibitions as promoters and disseminators of art.

### **Exhibition Venues**

Since 1888, when the first QAS exhibition was held, the annual exhibition of the art society had remained the one constant feature of Brisbane's art market. The RQAS assumed a cultural role, not dissimilar to that adopted by the Royal Academy of Arts (RA) in London, of representing and fostering an acceptable form of art for Brisbane art audiences. Art was disseminated through large

<sup>16</sup> Fletcher and Helmreich, *Modern Art Market in London*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Anne-Marie Willis, *Illusions of Identity: The Art of Nation* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1993), 143.

<sup>18</sup> Willis, *Illusions of Identity*, 143.

<sup>19</sup> Sheila Patrick, "Buying a Painting?" *The Bulletin* (Sydney), December 15, 1962: 18.

<sup>20</sup> Patrick, "Buying a Painting?," 18.

<sup>21</sup> Heather Johnson, *Sydney Art Patronage System 1890-1940* (Sydney: Bungoona, 1997), 79.



ensemble exhibitions organised by artists' groups and societies to show the latest works produced by artists, and they remained a popular way of bringing together artists and patrons for the purpose of making art sales. Heather Johnson suggests that in the Sydney art world even well-known artists, such as Margaret Preston, held over their best work for the annual exhibitions of the Society of Artists (Sydney), where they were more likely to be viewed by the Art Gallery of New South Wales Trustees, in preference to consigning them to a show in a commercial gallery.<sup>22</sup>, and throughout the 1940s, marketing activity in Brisbane's art world remained firmly centred on the large annual exhibitions of artists' groups. Solo art shows by local individual artists remained a rarity, and a viable alternative network of artists, dealers, and patrons capable of sustaining an independent art market was still to be established.

Each year, the RQAS struggled to find a venue large enough to house its capacious annual exhibitions. With as many as 240 works on show, the society required a setting where many works and patrons could be gathered together. Official recognition of the importance of the RQAS exhibition to Brisbane's cultural scene was given when plans for Brisbane's "new" City Hall were drawn up in the 1920s. When the City Hall opened in 1930, it included a large (4060square feet), well-lit, purpose-built gallery on the top floor for large scale community events, such as the society's large ensemble exhibitions.<sup>23</sup> A bureaucratic bungle saw the City Hall gallery designated as a permanent home for the city's large, but unmediated, collection of paintings (over 400) by local artist Richard Randall and a complex situation developed whereby the Randall family estate virtually controlled the use of what was a public facility.<sup>24</sup>

Prior to 1938, venues for the RQAS exhibitions were of a makeshift kind, as illustrated by the utilisation of large spaces including the Public Library in William Street in 1930 and 1931; the old Christian Science Church Hall at North Quay in 1933 and 1934; the Commercial Travellers Association Building in Elizabeth Street in 1935; and the fourth floor of the AMP Building in Edward Street in 1936 and 1937. The RQAS, supported by the *Courier-Mail*, successfully lobbied the Brisbane City Council for the use of the gallery from 1938, until the gallery space was closed for security purposes in 1942 as a result of World War Two. It never reopened for community use, and the artists' groups had no option but to find an alternative venue for their exhibitions.

After the closure of the City Hall gallery, exhibitions were held at the Canberra Temperance Hotel (colloquially referred to as the Canberra) on the corner of Edward and Ann Streets in the city.<sup>25</sup> The Canberra was part of a non-profit organisation of Australian hotels linked to the

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<sup>22</sup> Johnson, *Sydney Art Patronage*, 40.

<sup>23</sup> "Randall Art Collection," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), February 12, 1933; "No Hall for Art Exhibition," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 3, 1940.

<sup>24</sup> The Randall Gallery is discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

<sup>25</sup> The building today houses the Rendezvous Hotel at 255 Ann Street.

Temperance movement, and when it was renovated in 1935 it became the largest hotel, licensed or unlicensed, in Australia.<sup>26</sup> In 1942, the Canberra's Brisbane management generously offered the use of their banqueting hall "free of charge" for the 1942 HDGA exhibition.<sup>27</sup> This exhibition, which opened on September 4, 1942, was the first to be held at the Canberra and it was followed in October 1942 by the RQAS exhibition. Securing a stable, reputable and, above all, a well appointed venue of commercial significance provided the groups with greater validation for the worth of their exhibitions in the community.

Facilities for displaying art at the Canberra were excellent. The banqueting halls of the hotel were planned so that they could be used as one large space with a floor area of 4512 square feet, or by partitioning, as three smaller spaces for more intimate shows.<sup>28</sup> The rooms had good natural light from windows on all sides, with the added attraction of a roof garden that provided visitors with unparalleled scenic views of Brisbane.<sup>29</sup> Although the banqueting halls were on the ninth floor of the hotel, they were served by a "large goods lift and a service lift" as well as by "two fast passenger lifts", which allowed ease of access for mounting and demounting the show, and the ingress of patrons.<sup>30</sup> Use of the Canberra gave the groups an outstanding, central venue for their exhibitions, with sales of over £400 being recorded at the RQAS exhibition in 1944.<sup>31</sup> In 1946, the RQAS, the HDGA, Younger Artists' Group (YAG), and Miya Studio all held their annual exhibitions at the Canberra, but were subsequently advised by the hotel management that the banqueting halls were no longer available for the group shows because of increased commercial activity as a functions venue.<sup>32</sup> Once again, the artists' groups needed to find a suitable venue for their annual exhibitions, but this time, their attention was drawn to the recently opened art gallery in Finney's department store.

### **Department Store Galleries**

When Brisbane's first department store art gallery opened on 27 June 1946 at Finney Isles (known as Finney's) in Queen Street, it provided the most visible evidence that a full-time, professional art market was developing in Brisbane.<sup>33</sup> While it remains unclear what prompted the development of the department store gallery, Anne-Marie Willis believes these "palaces of consumption" strove to become the centres of social and leisure life for their customers, who were predominantly middle

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<sup>26</sup> "The New Canberra," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 17, 1935.

<sup>27</sup> HDGA Minute Book.

<sup>28</sup> "The New Canberra."

<sup>29</sup> "The New Canberra."

<sup>30</sup> "The New Canberra."

<sup>31</sup> "Art Society Sales," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 17, 1945.

<sup>32</sup> HDGA Minute Book.

<sup>33</sup> "No Dim-Out for Art," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), June 28, 1946.

class women.<sup>34</sup> As part of the shopping experience, the department store gallery provided a large professionally appointed space where art works could be shown, and viewed, to advantage, and they allowed artists to reach a much wider audience than had previously been possible. The large-scale format of Finney's Art Gallery, with its professional inclusions of good lighting and hanging conditions, was welcomed by the artists' groups as constituting the perfect venue for their exhibitions.

The department store, an icon of modernity, became an important feature of the Brisbane art system when Finney's developed the large auditorium space of its Queen Street store into an art gallery venue in 1946. David Jones had pioneered this aspect of commercial life in Australia when, in 1944 it added the David Jones Art Gallery to its Elizabeth Street store in Sydney, in order to reinforce the firm's aura of quality and exclusivity as a shopping destination.<sup>35</sup> Centrally located on Queen Street, Finney's Café and Auditorium had been popular social venues for lunches and celebrations since 1933, but modern department stores sought to encourage their visitors to maximise and enjoy their in-store time by providing some additional amenities of pleasurable living such as beauty salons, restaurants, and art galleries. These facilities took on added significance because of their absence elsewhere in the city.<sup>36</sup> Shopping, or "going to town", was generally approached in the 1940s and 1950s as a well-planned, all-day event rather than as a quick dash from the country or suburbs, and the modern department store transformed the act of shopping from a necessary chore to a pleasurable occasion.<sup>37</sup>

Finney's became the first department store in Brisbane to offer a commercial art gallery as part of this extended shopping experience, and it gave the recently modernised store cultural resonance in the community. Situated on the fifth floor of Finney's city premises and next to the busy café, the gallery seemingly occupied an inconvenient position, but, as with the Canberra Hotel, modern lifts transported visitors quickly and easily from the ground floor to the venue. The presence of the café also encouraged an in-store passing trade. The auditorium was refurbished as an art gallery included specially-constructed hessian walls on three sides to provide a neutral, textured background that would show the works to advantage. Good natural light was admitted from above through high windows constructed into the square dome occupying a central position in the gallery roof.<sup>38</sup> The gallery opened with a solo exhibition of watercolours and oils by RQAS member Vida Lahey, and became established as a popular venue, not only for the artists' groups' exhibitions, but also for large public exhibitions such as the *Art for All* exhibition of recent

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<sup>34</sup> Willis, *Illusions of Identity*, 142; Gail Reekie, *Temptations; Sex, Selling and the Department Store* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1993), 2.

<sup>35</sup> Willis, *Illusions of Identity*, 142.

<sup>36</sup> Willis, *Illusions of Identity*, 142.

<sup>37</sup> Willis, *Illusions of Identity*, 139.

<sup>38</sup> "No Dim-Out for Art".

acquisitions by the Queensland National Art Gallery held there in 1947.<sup>39</sup> From 1947 to 1949, four artists' groups, RQAS, HDGA, Younger Artists' Group (YAG), and Miya Studio, exhibited at Finney's.

Artists' groups were required to pay the commercial rental rate for the gallery of £31/10/- for the two weeks of an exhibition.<sup>40</sup> Because the Canberra had donated the use of their exhibition space, this was an additional expense that had to be factored into the planning of the exhibitions. However, Finney's excellent facilities and its ideal central location for the showing of art initially boosted sales figures at the exhibitions, and at the 1947 HDGA exhibition, excellent sales figures of £316/19/2 were recorded.<sup>41</sup> This figure compares well with the £352 quoted by Heather Johnson as an average at the Sydney art societies shows.<sup>42</sup> While the median price of paintings in the Brisbane exhibitions ranged from 6 to 15 guineas, prices at a Society of Artists Exhibition (Sydney) that came to Brisbane in 1946 were set at between 20 and 80 guineas.<sup>43</sup>

Sales totals began to decline from 1950 as more commercial galleries opened in the city. The 1951 RQAS annual exhibition, for example, where a showing of 119 paintings netted only 11 sales for a total of £129/3/-.<sup>44</sup> Attendance at the show was quite good, with a total of 662 people signing the visitor's book, but the effects of an expanded art market in Brisbane were being felt by the large exhibitions. With their sales figures in decline, the artists' groups tried offering smaller autumn or spring shows in addition to their annual exhibitions in order to boost sales with only limited success.<sup>45</sup> While the artists' groups were searching for answers to their dwindling sales figures, the future of the city department store art gallery was also being reconsidered by store owners. Whereas in 1946 it was possible to assess the inclusion of an art gallery in a department store as broadening the cultural experience of its customers, by the mid-1950s the more pragmatic argument of value-adding in monetary terms was foremost in importance. The valuable floor space occupied by Finney's art gallery in the Queen Street store was one of the first casualties of the 1955 take-over of Finney's by David Jones.

With Finney's taken over by David Jones, the Queen Street art gallery was relocated to T.C. Beirne's, the Fortitude Valley store previously owned by the Finney family.<sup>46</sup> Although Fortitude Valley, with its two large department stores, T.C. Beirne's and McWhirters, had been an important shopping precinct in Brisbane from the late nineteenth century, from 1951, "the Valley" was being

<sup>39</sup> "Hanlon Promises New Art Gallery," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), May 10, 1947.

<sup>40</sup> HDGA Minute book.

<sup>41</sup> HDGA Minute book.

<sup>42</sup> Johnson, *Sydney Art Patronage*, 39.

<sup>43</sup> "Society of Artists 1946 Brisbane Exhibition Catalogue".

<sup>44</sup> RQAS Minute Book.

<sup>45</sup> HDGA Minute book.

<sup>46</sup> "Myer Take-over: Take-over Boom Still Smoulders," *Sydney Morning Herald*, Finance Supplement, October 18, 1955.

touted as a modern shopper's paradise through a concerted advertising campaign designed to lure shoppers away from the city department stores of Finney's, Allan and Stark, and McDonnell and East.<sup>47</sup> The change of location of the art gallery did not serve the artists' groups well as their exhibitions in the Valley stores were poorly patronised and in 1955, the HDGA recorded sales of only £60 at their exhibition held at the T.C. Beirne store.<sup>48</sup>

David Jones attempted to resurrect the art gallery in Finney's Queen Street store in 1962, but it was closed permanently in 1966, while the gallery at the Valley store of T.C. Beirne operated until the end of 1969 before it also closed. The shopping emporiums had been able to promote art to a general shopping public as another of the many desirable commodities needed for a sophisticated modern lifestyle, in a way that the makeshift venues utilised by the groups never could.

From 1953, the RQAS moved their exhibition from Finney's to the rival Allan and Stark gallery, also in Queen Street. No reason has been found to account for this move, but from 1954 they eschewed the department store galleries, and reverted to the use of makeshift venues. The roof of the foyer of the School of Arts building in Ann Street was the setting for their continentally-inspired exhibition in 1954. The exhibition size was by now considerably reduced, with approximately 125 works being hung. In 1955, when the RQAS secured "The Pink Room" at the Bellevue Hotel on the corner of George and Alice Streets for their exhibition, members could enter four works but, at most, only three would be selected.<sup>49</sup> While the venue may have been makeshift, the approach by the RQAS was not, as their Council took a professional approach by appointing selected members as dedicated sales staff for the duration of the exhibition in July.<sup>50</sup> Adding to the professionalism was an opening sherry party, and members of the RQAS Council wore identifying name-tags to better assist visitors to the show. Mrs. Adams, the proprietor of the hotel, offered the use of the room free of charge, and purchased two paintings for a total of 55 guineas. A total of 19 paintings were sold for £216. The following year, the modern glass and chrome of Eagers' Car Sales Showroom in the City Building in Edward Street became the venue.<sup>51</sup>

By 1958, the Y.M.C.A. Building in Edward Street was a popular site for art exhibitions, with the HDGA presenting its annual exhibition there in that year, while the "Queensland Artists of Fame and Promise" exhibition organised by the Arts Council of Australia (Queensland Division) was also held there. The RQAS solved the problem of annually locating a suitable venue for their exhibition, by purchasing a property in Upper Edward Street, in 1966, with a view to establishing their own exhibition space. In 1969, the building was ready for occupation, and the RQAS was able

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<sup>47</sup> "Valley Advertisement," *Courier-Mail*, (Brisbane), September 14, 1951.

<sup>48</sup> HDGA Annual Report, 1956.

<sup>49</sup> RQAS Minute Book, June 7, 1955.

<sup>50</sup> RQAS Minute Book, June 7, 1955.

<sup>51</sup> RQAS Minute Book, April 3, 1956.

to hold in-house exhibitions. From this point, Bradbury and Cooke suggest that the group became increasingly inward looking and less in touch with movements in Brisbane's art world.<sup>52</sup>

In the 1960s, the Contemporary Art Society Queensland Branch (CAS) exhibited biannually at Finney's Art Gallery from 1962 until 1966 when the gallery closed permanently, and then at T. C. Bierne's in The Valley until that gallery also closed in 1969. For their 1969 Warana Festival exhibition, the CAS was forced to find a new venue for their exhibition. The site chosen was the foyers of the newly opened S.G.I.O. Theatre and, for the first time, Gertrude Langer was moved to describe the setting for the exhibition:

The S.G.I.O. Theatre foyers provide an opportunity of displaying the paintings in the Contemporary Art Society's Interstate Warana Competition in a way that does the individual work more justice than when jostling others on crowded walls. Incidentally, what the right painting in the right place can do in a public space is shown by John White's dynamic and accomplished hardedge abstract "Metropolis" which looks superb against the staircase.<sup>53</sup>

The artists' groups showed remarkable adaptability to the various sites used for their exhibitions over the years. In the 1940s, their concerns were to house large exhibitions, while keeping the achievements of local artists in the public eye. By the 1960s, the exhibitions were smaller but new logistical problems entailed in showing larger works had been created. For artists' groups, the department store gallery had provided the support the exhibitions needed in the form of professionally appointed venues, ideas about modern sales techniques, but most of all stability.

### **Commercial Galleries: The Moreton Galleries**

Small commercial galleries had operated in Brisbane long before the opening of the Moreton Galleries by John Cooper in August 1946. For example, from 1928 to 1942, Eliza Jeanette Sheldon's Gainsborough Gallery, which was housed in the Bank of New South Wales Chambers in Adelaide Street, opened intermittently to show good quality art by mostly southern artists. Cooper had also operated the Cellar Gallery at 97 Wickham Terrace from 1936 to 1939.<sup>54</sup> However, in 1946, a spate of new galleries opened in the city including the Albert Art Gallery run by father and son Arthur and Howard Tilse at 137 Ann Street, where "art displays [were] arranged" as a sideline to their picture framing business between January 1946 and December 1950.<sup>55</sup> William Hickson-Adams, one of Brisbane's serious art collectors, opened the Centennial Galleries in the old Coconut Grove Dance Hall in Adelaide Street in February 1946.<sup>56</sup> Centennial Galleries operated until May

<sup>52</sup> Bradbury and Cooke, *Thorns and Petals*, 154.

<sup>53</sup> Gertrude Langer, "Right Paintings in the Right Place," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 2, 1969.

<sup>54</sup> Fedora G. Fisher, "John Cooper Biography," (Unpublished essay 1976, John Cooper Archive), unpaginated.

<sup>55</sup> Howard Tilse, letter to RQAS dated October 1, 1945 advertising the Albert Art Gallery. The last recorded mention of the gallery was in the *Courier-Mail*, December 1, 1950.

<sup>56</sup> "Dance Hall will be Art Gallery," *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), January 20, 1946.

1947. The Curzon Gallery in Queen Street, with director Helen Franklin, operated within Curzon's dress shop from October 1946 to April 1947.<sup>57</sup> The increased interest in art in Brisbane at this time is made evident by the sale of over half the works, for prices between 15 and 100 guineas, at the exhibition of works by Max Ragless that opened the Centennial Galleries.<sup>58</sup>

Cooper named his new gallery the Moreton Galleries after the district in which Brisbane is located, and it became the first professionally run private commercial gallery in Brisbane, providing a continuous programme of exhibitions throughout the year as a primary point of sale for original works of art. Although it was too small to be of direct benefit to artists' groups as an exhibition venue, the central location of Moreton Galleries in the prestigious AMP Building in Queen Street,<sup>59</sup> along with the recently opened art gallery in Finney's and the plethora of other small art galleries that had opened in the vicinity, greatly increased the general public's awareness of art as a part of everyday life in Brisbane, adding to the growing cultural depth of the city.

Cooper already had a long association with Brisbane's art world. In 1934, soon after leaving secondary school in Sydney, John Cooper arrived in Brisbane with £10 in support from his father, and sold etchings by the Sydney artist, George Ansdell, on commission, door to door, for prices between 5/- and 17/6.<sup>60</sup> In those days of economic depression, Cooper, although he had no training in art or business, astutely based himself in what was known as the doctors' precinct of Wickham Terrace in the city; he had correctly adjudged that even in the tough times of a depression, doctors still made money. Christopher Heathcote notes that an art gallery or dealer must make a connection with those members of a society that have either money or social dominance if they are to succeed, and this is what Cooper did.<sup>61</sup> After selling out his first consignment of etchings, Cooper returned to Sydney to replenish his stock rather than acquiring new works locally.

On his return to Brisbane in 1935 with his new stock, Cooper established a permanent, but makeshift, gallery in a disused storeroom at his base at 97 Wickham Terrace. The name, Cellar Gallery, gave it a cachet among the fashionable Brisbane "bohemian set" and its location in the heart of the doctors' precinct made excellent business sense.<sup>62</sup> Dr. J.V. Duhig, a medical practitioner with rooms in the building who would, in 1937, become chairman of the RQAS, more than adequately filled Heathcote's criteria for an art patron to support the gallery. He was wealthy and well connected through his social position as a member of the professional middle class, being both a doctor and a Professor at the University of Queensland. Duhig recommended the young entrepreneur to his professional colleagues, and in doing so laying the foundations of Cooper's long

<sup>57</sup> Firmin McKinnon, "Black and White in Art," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), February 11, 1947.

<sup>58</sup> "Brisbane Art Level Higher," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), February 7, 1946.

<sup>59</sup> General Macarthur had set up his headquarters in the AMP Building during World War II.

<sup>60</sup> Fisher, "John Cooper Biography".

<sup>61</sup> Christopher Heathcote, *A Quiet Revolution: The Rise of Australian Art 1946-1968* (Melbourne: Text, 1995), 168.

<sup>62</sup> Fisher, "John Cooper Biography".

and successful career as a gallery owner in Queensland.<sup>63</sup> The Cellar Gallery provided Brisbane art lovers with quality works of established Australian artists, such as the Lindsays (Norman, Percy, Daryl, and Raymond), Max Meldrum, Sydney Long, and Will Ashton.<sup>64</sup> In 1939, Cooper joined the RAAF and the Cellar Gallery closed.<sup>65</sup>

Cooper remained with the RAAF until he was invalided out in early 1945 with tuberculosis, contracted while serving in Bougainville.<sup>66</sup> He returned to Brisbane and developed the idea of the Moreton Galleries. The Moreton Galleries prospered from the beginning: the first exhibition, featuring thirty-one landscape paintings by Tasmanian artist John Eldershaw, was a sell-out.<sup>67</sup> Eldershaw, who had first exhibited in Brisbane in 1935 at the Gainsborough Gallery, had never before experienced a sell-out in Brisbane, and the sale of paintings, priced between 15 and 60 guineas, realised more than £900.<sup>68</sup> In an interview with the *Courier-Mail* in February 1946, Cooper suggested that Brisbane had recently become more “culture-conscious”, with local art buyers now prepared to pay between “40 to 60 guineas for works that before the war they would not purchase for 15 guineas”.<sup>69</sup> More than 150 people attended the opening event for the Moreton Galleries, and, in what must have been a first for an art exhibition in Brisbane, the doors had to be closed.<sup>70</sup> Cooper had once again read his market well and the result highlights the growing interest in art in Brisbane, more than justifying Cooper’s concept of a professional art gallery in the city.

Moreton Galleries was particularly suited to the solo artist or small group exhibitions, and it established a reputation for supplying good art, mainly in a figurative and more conventional style. A schedule of exhibitions lasting between one and three weeks was drawn up and shows were held continuously throughout the year. Cooper cultivated his clientele from among the professional men of Brisbane and encouraged a sophisticated and celebratory atmosphere, notably through the introduction of the evening sherry party opening event.<sup>71</sup> Sheila Patrick notes that these seemingly innocuous events created competitive tensions within the collected crowd, leading to impromptu buying frenzies so that the majority of sales took place on opening night.<sup>72</sup> The sherry party was a sophisticated departure from the “afternoon tea and sandwiches” openings favoured by the artists’ groups, and is indicative of a more urbane art audience in the process of being groomed in Brisbane’s art world.

<sup>63</sup> Fisher, “John Cooper Biography”.

<sup>64</sup> Peter Skinner, “John Cooper and the Moreton Galleries: a Study of a Brisbane Art Dealer and Gallery Owner, 1933-1950”, (Honours’ thesis, University of Queensland, 1984), 19.

<sup>65</sup> Fisher, “John Cooper Biography”.

<sup>66</sup> Fisher, “John Cooper Biography”.

<sup>67</sup> “31 Paintings Sell Quickly,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 7, 1946.

<sup>68</sup> “31 Paintings Sell Quickly”.

<sup>69</sup> “Brisbane Art Level Higher,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), February 7, 1946.

<sup>70</sup> “31 Paintings Sell Quickly”.

<sup>71</sup> “Sherry Party,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 18, 1949.; Fisher, “John Cooper Biography”.

<sup>72</sup> Patrick, “Buying a Painting?”



Under Cooper's direction, the Moreton Galleries built a strong reputation with the local art cognoscenti as a quality art gallery. However, although Cooper's gallery was part of the new cultural dynamic that was evolving in Brisbane, in which an awareness of art was more readily viewed as part of a professional, sophisticated lifestyle, the Moreton Galleries was essentially a purveyor of conventional forms of art that perpetuated the staid cycle of art consumption synonymous with artists' groups.

Cooper's tuberculosis recurred in 1950, and Moreton Galleries was sold to the respected local artist James Weineke. As a leading artist in the HDGA, Weineke was well known as a strongly conventional artist who, like Cooper, had conservative tastes in art.<sup>73</sup> Brisbane's art market was in danger of slipping once again into the predictable patterns of complacency that characterised its existence before Cooper, and the department stores, had broadened its scope. What Brisbane's art world needed at this point was an entrepreneur who, through innovation and vision, would provide a stimulus that would disturb the stable patterns that were once again forming. Shortly after Weineke purchased the Moreton Galleries, another important weak tie emerged in Brisbane's art world as Brian Johnstone opened the Marodian Gallery in December 1950, at 452 Upper Edward Street in Spring Hill.

### **The Marodian/Johnstone Gallery**

Brian Johnstone and Hugh Hale opened the Marodian Gallery with the aim of "put[ting] an original picture in every home in Queensland".<sup>74</sup> Johnstone was an unlikely candidate to open an art gallery. He was born into an army family and trained as an officer in the Australian Army at Duntroon.<sup>75</sup> In 1949, he was appointed aide-de-camp to Sir John Lavarack, the Governor of Queensland, but he resigned his commission in 1951,<sup>76</sup> shortly after opening the new gallery. Hugh Hale was a Brisbane interior decorator, and the gallery was very much an adjunct to that business.<sup>77</sup> According to the *Courier-Mail*, Johnstone wanted to source works from "young unknown artists", and its patrons from the "range of moderate wage earners" of Brisbane's growing middle class.<sup>78</sup> To show the artworks to best advantage, the Marodian featured a décor of neutral matte grey for the walls and modern fluorescent lighting.

<sup>73</sup> Helen Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects of the Contemporary Art Society Queensland Branch* (Brisbane: Boolarong, 1991), 19.

<sup>74</sup> "Aid Artists in Spring Hill Gallery," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), December 12, 1950.

<sup>75</sup> Louise Martin-Chew, "Johnstone, Brian William Wallace (1920–1988)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed September 3, 2014, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/johnstone-brian-william-wallace-12704/text22905>

<sup>76</sup> Martin-Chew, "Johnstone, Brian".

<sup>77</sup> Simon Elliott, and Louise Martin-Chew, "The Johnstone Gallery: a Pivotal Influence in Queensland Visual Arts," in *Art Off Centre: Placing Queensland Art*, ed. Glenn R. Cooke, (Brisbane: Queensland Studies Centre, 1997), 172.

<sup>78</sup> "Aid Artists in Spring Hill Gallery".

The opening exhibition of the Gallery showed the works of a number of reputable local artists, including Margaret Olley, Vida Lahey, and William Bustard, whose works were guaranteed to sell well.<sup>79</sup> The exhibition was not ground breaking, but the quality of the artists represented helped establish the Marodian as an important addition to the Brisbane art scene. Johnstone assembled a stable of young Brisbane artists including Olley, Margaret Cilento, Patricia Prentice, Donald Cowen, and Quentin Hole, all of whom had risen through the exhibiting ranks of the RQAS, HDGA, and YAG.<sup>80</sup>

A disagreement over the direction the gallery should take caused the Marodian to close in December 1951.<sup>81</sup> While Hale saw art as part of an interior decoration scheme, Johnstone was determined that the works shown in the gallery should not be dictated by sales alone and showed a marked preference for more challenging art such as the provocative and decorative work of Elaine Haxton shown in June,<sup>82</sup> and Donald Friend shown in September.<sup>83</sup> However, it was Johnstone's decision to show Arthur Boyd's highly individualistic and "somewhat startling" exhibition that included his provocative allegorical studies in October 1951<sup>84</sup> that caused the rift. After a Christmas show in which all work was priced under 10 guineas, the gallery closed.<sup>85</sup>

Johnstone lost no time in developing a successor to the Marodian Gallery, and the original Johnstone Gallery was opened by Brian and his wife Marjorie in February 1952. Its location was in a basement that had previously been a bomb shelter under the Brisbane Arcade in the city centre. It was not easy to find, as an article from the *Australasian Post* suggests:

Although the gallery is in the main block of the city, a stranger trying to find it needs a little knowledge of bushcraft. Reaching the Brisbane Arcade, the visitor is advised to go underground via the stone staircase near the Adelaide Street entrance of the building, turn left just before reaching the garbage tins, and enter alongside the little office of Mr Johnstone.<sup>86</sup>

The location of galleries down amongst the garbage tins or on the uppermost floors of commercial city buildings was not a matter of romantic, artistic appeal. Such locations provided the most viable business solution in the matter of cheaper rents, but were not conducive to encouraging a passing trade. Although the Johnstone Gallery was not large, it was eye-catching, with its external colour scheme of red and white stripes evoking an enjoyable Parisian mood and the interior suggesting

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<sup>79</sup> The first exhibition included the work of Olley, William Bustard, Kenneth Macqueen, Vida Lahey, Erik Langker, Douglass Pratt, and Alan D Baker. Bustard, Macqueen, and Lahey were long time members of the RQAS; Langker and Pratt were seasoned exhibitors with the Royal Art Society in NSW. Baker did flower pieces that Langer described as commonplace, *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), December 8, 1950.

<sup>80</sup> Warwick Lawrence, "Christmas Art Show," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), December 11, 1951.

<sup>81</sup> Elliott, and Martin-Chew, "The Johnstone Gallery," 172.

<sup>82</sup> Warwick Lawrence, "Gay, Colourful Paintings," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), June 7, 1951.

<sup>83</sup> Warwick Lawrence, "Donald Friend's Art," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 25, 1951.

<sup>84</sup> Warwick Lawrence, "This Artist Will Shock," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 24, 1951

<sup>85</sup> Warwick Lawrence, "Christmas Art Show," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), December 11, 1951.

<sup>86</sup> Article cited in Elliot and Martin-Chew, "The Johnstone Gallery," 172.

tropical lushness with cane furniture and a room divider of stout bamboo sections.<sup>87</sup> The paintings were hung on walls lined with calico curtains and lit by banks of fluorescent lights.

Although his reputation as an art dealer had yet to be established in Brisbane or Australia, by giving the gallery his own name, Johnstone emphasised, as he had been unable to do at the Marodian, that the works on show reflected his personal taste in art. He was determined that sales would not dictate the type of work shown, and to this end, he sought out the best of Australia's young painters, including Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale, Charles Blackman, Arthur Boyd, John Perceval, John Passmore, Clifton Pugh, James Gleeson, and Jon Molvig, and introduced them to Brisbane's art buying public. In the early 1950s, a clientele for such artists did not really exist in Brisbane, but the Johnstone Gallery set about creating it. By targeting young radical artists, Johnstone positioned himself within the avant-garde of Australian art rather than among the traditionalists, and the gallery became "the centre of the modern art world in Queensland".<sup>88</sup>

As part of their reordering of Brisbane's art world in 1954, Brian and Marjorie opened a private "Home Salon" at their home at 6 Cintra Road, Bowen Hills, to complement their city gallery.<sup>89</sup> The Home Salon was designed to provide a preview of the current show for preferred clients of the gallery, allowing them to quietly view and purchase works outside the excitement of an opening event. Later, the Home Salon evolved into a monthly social gathering known as the Sunday Morning Preview. Attracting up to 150 visitors on any one day, these previews were informal gatherings lasting from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and attendance was regarded as essential by the local art cognoscenti. The Sunday Morning Previews provided a place, previously unknown in Brisbane, where art lovers could freely gather, experience, socialise, and discuss trends in art apparent in the latest Johnstone exhibition. Simon Elliott, who regularly attended these events as a child, remembers the Sunday gatherings as being children-friendly events, where the adults talked largely, though not exclusively, about art while the children played in the sub-tropical garden that surrounded the gallery.<sup>90</sup> The Johnstones were encouraging another generation of art lovers in the city, and social events such as the Sunday Morning Preview added another layer to the developing cultural thickness of Brisbane's art world.

Brian's ill-health, (like Cooper, Johnstone suffered from tuberculosis), forced the closure of the original Johnstone Gallery in December 1957, but a new Johnstone Gallery opened late in 1958 at the Johnstones' home in Bowen Hills. Brian and Marjorie created a unique Queensland experience in art galleries by joining together two old Queenslander worker's cottages to create a

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<sup>87</sup> Photograph, Johnstone Gallery Archive.

<sup>88</sup> Elliott and Martin-Chew, "The Johnstone Gallery," 172.

<sup>89</sup> Martin-Chew, "Johnstone, Brian".

<sup>90</sup> Simon Elliott, "A Night in the JOL: The Johnstone Gallery," panel discussion at John Oxley Library, August 11, 2014.

rambling new gallery.<sup>91</sup> Utilising the same matte grey walls that had featured at the Marodian Gallery, art was hung in a spacious and luxurious setting that made a mockery of the crowded displays of the artists' groups' annual exhibitions and the space restrictions prevalent in inner-city galleries. The poet Thomas Shapcott recalls that the gallery was comprised of big airy rooms with high ceilings and wide verandas, and tongue and groove timber walls that seemed impervious to damage.<sup>92</sup> The new gallery, with its traditional Queenslander setting, proudly proclaimed its Queensland character and the sale of art boomed within its walls.<sup>93</sup>

Complementing the experience of viewing art in a professional, yet homely, setting, the Johnstones introduced the concept of a full colour catalogue that could be taken away as a memento of the event. Souvenir catalogues were elegant, well-designed mementos that reflected well on the professionalism of the gallery while at the same time promoting the career of the artist through biographical notes on their life, education, and achievements. Just as Cooper's sherry parties had added glamour and sophistication to Brisbane's art world in the 1940s, so the practice of offering a token of what audiences had seen added to the growing sense that one was having an artistic community experience when attending an art show opening in the 1950s.

Brisbane's art buying public was reckoned to be little different from that of other Australian art centres, with *Bulletin* journalist Phyllis Woolcock suggesting that it fell into a recognisable pattern of four categories:

Those who buy for investments because paintings look better on walls than share certificates; women who buy art in the same interior decorator spirit as they buy new curtains; those who yield to the not-so-hidden persuaders who urge the status value of collections — and names; the genuine art lovers who buy with appreciation and a quickened response to the magic of painting.<sup>94</sup>

Thanks to the efforts of the Johnstone Gallery and the Moreton Galleries, Brisbane's art market was flourishing in the 1960s with a "very high painting per capita" selling power at solo shows.<sup>95</sup> Noting that most of the sales took place on the opening day, figures provided by Brian Johnstone in relation to five 1963 exhibitions at the gallery show sales of more than £4000 each: Margaret Olley (£4000), Lawrence Daws (£4000), Charles Blackman (£4700), Donald Friend (£4000), and Ray Croke (£5500).<sup>96</sup> By 1969, the Johnstone Gallery was the largest commercial gallery in Australia as well as being one of the most prestigious and it was chosen by Arthur Boyd to host the "world" premiere of his show offering \$100,000 in works in 1969.<sup>97</sup> The gallery often tended to act in an unofficial

<sup>91</sup> Ross Johnston, "The Johnstone Gallery," *Art and Australia*, (April 1974): 395.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Shapcott, "The Brian Johnstone Gallery," *Overland* 182. (Autumn 2006): 47.

<sup>93</sup> Phyllis Woolcock, "Brisbane's Boom," *Bulletin* (Sydney), April 4, 1964, 37.

<sup>94</sup> Woolcock, "Brisbane's Boom," 37.

<sup>95</sup> Woolcock, "Brisbane's Boom," 37.

<sup>96</sup> Woolcock, "Brisbane's Boom," 37.

<sup>97</sup> Frederic Rogers, "Brisbane Art Premiere has Wide Interest," *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), August 10, 1969.

“off Broadway” capacity, previewing new works before they were presented to the “real” markets in Sydney or Melbourne, or in this case, Arthur Tooth’s London gallery. The works shown in 1969 were from Boyd’s *Potter* series, in which he reflected on the lives of his parents, potters Merric and Doris Boyd.<sup>98</sup> Boyd’s show was reviewed by Frederic Rogers in the *Sunday Mail* where he declared that Brisbane art lovers had witnessed “a new standard for Australian art”.<sup>99</sup>

The charismatic Johnstones and their gallery provided a focal point for Brisbane artists and patrons of the 1950s and 1960s to access and discuss the latest trends in Australian art. Through their Sunday Morning Previews especially, Brian and Marjorie positioned themselves in Brisbane’s art system rather in the way that John and Sunday Reed had done at Heide in Melbourne in the 1940s, and Mirka and Georges Mora did in the 1950s.<sup>100</sup> The Reeds gathered a ménage of young artists, including Arthur Boyd and Sidney Nolan, about them in their home at Heide, while the Moras did the same at their Collins Street flat when they welcomed some young refugees from Queensland’s art world in the figures of Barrett Reid (Barjai), Laurence Hope (Miya Studio), and Charles Blackman (Miya Studio) in 1953.<sup>101</sup> The Johnstones encouraged young local artists such as Margaret Olley, Andrew Sibley, and Sam Fullbrook, and, according to Thomas Shapcott, the gallery was the “hub of creative and artistic life in Brisbane”.<sup>102</sup> The Johnstone Gallery closed in 1972, because, while it was still successful, Brian no longer felt himself to be sympathetic to the newer trends in art such as hardedge, colour field, conceptual, and minimal art that were creeping into Brisbane’s art scene, and rather than show art that he didn’t care for, he decided to close the gallery.<sup>103</sup>

The professional success of the display and sales methods of the Johnstone Gallery only served to emphasise the amateur nature of the annual artists’ exhibitions of the RQAS and HDGA. The poor sales figures that accompanied the move of the group exhibitions to the Valley was inevitable, as competition increased for the patronage cultivated by the success of the Moreton and Johnstone Galleries. For Brisbane artists, the Johnstone Gallery finally provided them with the opportunity to see cutting edge Australian art, to talk about it, and to decide how it fitted their concept of art and what they wanted to do with it. Increased institutional thickness was created in Brisbane’s art world by the institution and activities of two permanent commercial galleries that showed complementary styles of art.

<sup>98</sup> Ursula Hoff, *The Art of Arthur Boyd*, (London: André Deutsch, 1986), 61-62.

<sup>99</sup> Frederic Rogers, “Brisbane Art Premiere has Wide Interest,” *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), August 10, 1969.

<sup>100</sup> Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors: the Revolutionary Years in Australian Art*, (Melbourne: Penguin, 1988), 216; Heathcote, *Quiet Revolution*, 34.

<sup>101</sup> Heathcote, *Quiet Revolution*, 25-29.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas Shapcott cited in Elliott and Martin-Chew, “The Johnstone Gallery,” 174.

<sup>103</sup> Thomas Shapcott, “The Brian Johnstone Gallery,” *Overland* 182 (Autumn 2006): 50.

### A New Generation of Galleries

The Moreton Galleries and the Johnstone Gallery dominated Brisbane's art market throughout the 1950s and 1960s, and although the group exhibitions of the RQAS and HDGA continued, the perceived importance to Brisbane's art scene of large ensemble exhibitions was increasingly diminished as "one man shows of varying quality" took their place.<sup>104</sup> New galleries continued to add to Brisbane's cultural institutional thickness, as Dr. Ruth Smout, the sister of artist Margaret Cilento, opened the Kennigo Street Gallery in Fortitude Valley in 1966. Smout recognised that Brisbane's art market, for all the progress it had made through the work of the Moreton and Johnstone galleries, was still largely a closed shop to struggling young local artists.<sup>105</sup>

Paradoxically, while many well-known southern artists tested the worth of their latest works at the Johnstone Gallery, young Brisbane artists often had to take their work to the southern markets to enable them to get on the Australian art market circuit.<sup>106</sup> Australian artists of the calibre of Judy Cassab, Jon Molvig, and Fred Williams were part of the Kennigo Street stable, but Smout also encouraged young local artists such as Kevin Grealy, Harry Memmott, Russell Kingston, Don Smith, and Clarrie Ventnor to hold solo shows in an annexe to the main gallery. Smout's gallery was held in high regard by local artists such as Jon Molvig, Peter Abraham, and Andrew Sibley, who exhibited there, but she also encouraged Brisbane's amateur artists to "try their wings" in her gallery, to the extent that Kennigo Street Gallery was the venue for the 1966 RQAS annual exhibition.

While artists' groups had dominated the art market in Brisbane in the 1940s, they were effectively squeezed aside by well-credentialed galleries such as the Johnstone and the Moreton, who catered for the "high" end of the 1950s market. Although the RQAS and the HDGA continued to nurture the many artists that formed the greater part of Brisbane's art world through their annual exhibitions, a more innovative concept in art marketing that added even more support for these artists was introduced when the Design Arts Centre (DAC) opened at 67 Elizabeth Street on 6 April, 1966. Based on the concept of "Den Permanente" that began in Copenhagen in 1931 to support Danish artists, the DAC was a permanent exhibition venue, with organisational office support, where all artists, including "those hundreds of art workers whose skills might otherwise remain unheard of" could show their work.<sup>107</sup>

Under the direction of Lilly Hitch, the DAC concept provided exhibition space that artists could hire in a professionally run gallery. Like any professional gallery, the DAC provided professional support and aided in the promotion of artists' careers by noting prizes won and

<sup>104</sup> E. Lilian Pedersen, circular to HDGA members, 1972.

<sup>105</sup> Shane Lewis, "From Old Club to Art Centre," *Courier Mail* (Brisbane), May 20, 1969.

<sup>106</sup> Woolcock, "Brisbane's Boom".

<sup>107</sup> Lilly Hitch, promotional flyer 1965, *Design Art Centre*, Irene Amos Papers.

exhibitions for which their artworks had been accepted in didactics. Income for the centre was derived from the hire of exhibition space and sale attracted no commission. However a caveat was imposed that required popular artists with gallery representation to have sales from the DAC redirected to their representative gallery and commission was then payable to that gallery. This caveat on sales was put in place so that the popular artists with commercial representation did not squeeze “the little people and the interest they can provide” out of the market.<sup>108</sup> Artists were able to remain autonomous and always retained control over the direction that their work would take, although the DAC occasionally encouraged them to “send more of that type” of work because it sold well.<sup>109</sup> The DAC added more depth to Brisbane’s art landscape by providing another level of institutional support for Brisbane’s artists.

While Brian Johnstone was preparing the Johnstone Gallery for the 1969 exhibition of Arthur Boyd’s work, two young entrepreneurs opened a new gallery at 111 Musgrave Road, Red Hill. Financed by Ruth Smout, Gallery One Eleven opened in March 1969, and immediately created a niche for itself as a specialist contemporary art gallery with a show featuring the work of John Aland, Mervyn Moriarty, Andrew Sibley, and Nevil Matthews, who had been part of the alternative groups that developed at St Mary’s Studio in the 1950s. Gallery One Eleven directors Ian Reece, a former student of Bronwyn Yeates (St Mary’s) in Spring Hill, and Ray Hughes, a primary school teacher with an interest in children’s art, presented the first homogeneous showing in Brisbane of hardedge, colour field, flat abstraction, conceptual, and minimal art in the *Field, Paddock or Enclosure?* exhibition of 1969.<sup>110</sup> The title of the exhibition referenced a watershed moment in Australian art when *The Field* exhibition was mounted to celebrate the opening of the National Gallery of Victoria’s new home on St Kilda Road, in 1968. *The Field* exhibition featured works by Australian artists who engaged with non-figurative forms of art in the 1960s, and the parody *Field, Paddock or Enclosure?* brought to Brisbane an exhibition striving “to define a particular direction in Australian Contemporary Art”.<sup>111</sup> While Brian Johnstone did not care for this type of art,<sup>112</sup> the fact that Brisbane’s wider art market recognised it as another avenue of art exploration is indicative of the progress made in providing Brisbane art audiences with an expanded field of art experiences.

## Conclusion

This chapter has traced the changes that took place in the infrastructure of the art market in Brisbane between 1940 and 1970. In the early 1940s, when the annual exhibitions of artists’ groups,

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<sup>108</sup> “Artist Reservation Form,” *Design Art Centre*, DAC Gallery File.

<sup>109</sup> Irene Amos Archive.

<sup>110</sup> Lewis, “From Old Club to Art Centre.”

<sup>111</sup> Lewis, “From Old Club to Art Centre.”

<sup>112</sup> Shapcott, “The Brian Johnstone Gallery,” 50.

for all intents and purposes, *were* the Brisbane art market, artists' groups maintained a public profile for the visual arts and provided the only regular support for local artists in the sale of their work. Because of the extreme institutional thinness of Brisbane's art market at that time, it would have been unthinkable in 1940 for a Brisbane artist to have "gallery representation".

As Brisbane modernised, exhibitions of art in department store art galleries presented art as a natural part of modern life, and although these galleries did not develop out of the needs of artists' groups, the advent of the department store gallery in Brisbane gave the visual arts unparalleled prominence in the daily life of Brisbane's general population. Art and artists' groups benefitted as a result, with strong attendance at city art shows. As part of the shopping experience, the department store gallery provided a large, professionally appointed space where art works could be shown, and viewed, to advantage, and allowed artists to reach a much wider audience than was previously possible even through the artists' groups large annual exhibitions.

Developing in Brisbane at the same time as the department store galleries were a number of small professional, commercial galleries. Both the department store art galleries and the boutique galleries were significant developments in Brisbane's art world because they provided continuous, ever changing, exhibition programmes. The development of an art market dominated by small galleries such as the Moreton and the Johnstone appears to have impacted negatively on the sales results of the RQAS and HDGA exhibitions, but it is also the case that the small size of the commercial galleries meant that it was no longer beyond the scope of even a part-time artist to supply enough pictures for a show and more artists confidently began to exhibit solo. The presence of continuous showings of art at these commercial enterprises also provided a valuable reference resource in the formal and informal art training of Brisbane's art public.

By 1970, institutional thickness in the art market of Brisbane had been achieved through the presence of many small galleries, and artists, no longer constrained by a restricted market, blossomed. Brisbane's art market had enough boutique galleries to cater for virtually all tastes in art: mimetic, figurative and non-figurative, abstract, minimalist, expressionist, surrealist, or colour-field. Prestigious galleries, such as the Moreton and Johnstone, showed the works of many of Australia's best established artists, while galleries such as Kennigo Street (as Franz Beak-Gow Gallery), and Gallery One Eleven exhibited the works of cutting edge, emerging interstate and local artists. DAC, and a myriad of smaller galleries, catered for the needs of the many other artists who provided the mass of work that kept Brisbane's art world progressing.

Although the annual exhibitions of artists' groups were no longer the cultural beacons in an otherwise culturally barren landscape, and their importance declined as the modern commercial art gallery assumed dominance, they continued to provide another level of cultural development in Brisbane's art world throughout the period 1940 to 1970. The primary purpose for the establishment



of most artists' group was to provide exhibition opportunities for its many members, but as the need for this primary purpose declined, the dominance of artists' groups also faded.

## Chapter 3

### Conserving Queensland Art

Though every artist may not go to Rome, art, in its most perfect and attractive forms, may be brought within the reach of all, and this is done by the formation of public art galleries [...] this is to be borne in mind that people will never acquire a taste for art, and enjoy the pleasures and benefits which flow from it, unless they have the opportunity of doing so.<sup>1</sup>

Art museums or art galleries form an integral part of any urban fine art system. In the late nineteenth century when the national collections of the Australian colonies were born, the public art museum was seen as a place learning and uplifting entertainment for communities. Forming a public art gallery in Queensland, at that time, was not a priority of the Government as the cultivation of the fine arts was seen only as an outcome of wealth, “ease and leisure”.<sup>2</sup> The Queensland National Art Gallery (QNAG) was formed in 1895, and was the first, and for many years, the only fine art collection and conservational facility in Brisbane. It was not until 1940, that it was joined by the John Darnell Fine Art Collection (Darnell Collection) established under the auspices of the University of Queensland.

In the previous chapters, I have surveyed the education of artists and the marketing of art in Brisbane. This chapter further explores the development of Brisbane’s art landscape by examining the facilities that were developed to collect and conserve art, and examines in particular the contributions made by QNAG and the Darnell Collection between 1940 and 1970. Artists’ groups were intimately involved in the formation of QNAG, and I argue that, until conditions in Brisbane’s art world became more conducive for the professional and independent growth of the facility in 1949, this art gallery was able to function only through the support of the RQAS. The Darnell Collection was the product of a different age and, from its beginning, was fully supported by the University, allowing for strategic planning and growth.

A number of key points about conservation of art in Queensland are raised in this chapter, including the development of QNAG, the exhibition of the Randall Collection of art, the financial difficulties that hindered the growth and development of QNAG, initiatives introduced to encourage the development of local art, and the formation of the Darnell Collection. Throughout this chapter, the terms Brisbane and Queensland art have been used interchangeably. Most of the Queensland art

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<sup>1</sup> “Queensland Art Gallery,” *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), July 30, 1888.

<sup>2</sup> “Queensland Art Gallery”.

conserved by QNAG and the Darnell Collection was the work of Brisbane artists. If an artist's work was acquired outside Brisbane, that point will be noted.

Ambiguity of purpose surrounded the Queensland National Art Gallery (QNAG) from its beginning. Brisbane artists hoped that the presence of a public art collection would provide a ready market for their works, as had happened with the AGNSW. As the Sydney art world developed in the nineteenth century, the AGNSW assumed prominence in that community as the focus of an art market that supported and encouraged the dependent community of local artists.<sup>3</sup> The Queensland Government viewed the establishment of QNAG as tangible evidence that Queensland was indeed a civilised society. Godfrey Rivers, the driving force behind the foundation of QNAG, felt that it would be the start of a great art collection. While together these hopes for QNAG represented an ideal situation for the development of a great institution, the reality was that QNAG remained on the periphery of Brisbane's art world, struggling for relevance and "making do" with management by enthusiastic amateurs, an inadequate budget that did not allow it to plan and develop its collection, and only temporary accommodation for that collection. It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that QNAG, through the *Queensland Art Gallery Act of 1959*, was finally brought under the aegis of the state government as the Queensland Art Gallery (QAG), subsequently assuming the leadership role previously held by the RQAS, as the accepted authority on art in the state.

By way of contrast, the JDACC at the University of Queensland was clear about the purpose of their collection from the very first meeting of the founding committee on December 16, 1940. The inaugural committee of Professor H.C. Richards (chairman), Professor J.V. Duhig, Robert Cummings, and Richard Pennington (librarian) agreed that the Darnell Collection would, as a priority, develop a representative collection of contemporary Queensland art.<sup>4</sup> Ambitious plans were already being made in 1941 for the inclusion of an art gallery in the central tower of the new buildings for the university, then under construction at St. Lucia, so that the collection originally designated for the enjoyment of staff and students could be shown to advantage. The University Senate also requested that the collection be opened to the general public "one afternoon a week in the presence of a caretaker".<sup>5</sup> The *Courier-Mail* reported in April 1945 that "Queensland University has its own art gallery, and it is the first university in the Commonwealth to own its own collection of paintings". The collection grew to become the second largest public art collection in Queensland.

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<sup>3</sup> Johnson, *The Sydney Art Patronage System 1890-1940* (Sydney: Bungoona, 1997), 38.

<sup>4</sup> JDFAC Minutes, December 16, 1940.

<sup>5</sup> JDFAC Minutes, April 1941.

## Collection and Conservation

Art museums are collection agencies and conservation facilities, where objects, elevated to the “status of works of art” and reflecting the world from which they have come, are retained and displayed.<sup>6</sup> The term “conservation” is preferred by Bernard Smith to describe the collection of contemporary local works before their significance is fully mediated by the market. The distinction made between collection and conservation then is that the collection of art is deemed to refer to the acquisition of art of proven historical significance from the wider art world, whereas conservation refers to the acquisition of contemporary works of local significance. Such a distinction is important in this thesis because of the emphasis it gives to the purchase of contemporary works for public collections seen to support the local art world.

The story of the art museum is rooted in the rich cultural history of Europe. From the time of the establishment of the Louvre as an art museum in revolutionary France in 1793, European governments began to recognise the propaganda value that would accrue from making dynastic art collections accessible to the public.<sup>7</sup> Only in the late nineteenth century, when the major art museums of Australia were founded, did Australia’s colonies begin to assemble their own “dynastic” collections. Colonial galleries and museums favoured the British, rather than the European, tradition for the collection and display of art. The European tradition used the ostentatious royal palaces and their collections of art as the basis for their public museums, while the British art museum derived from the “gentlemanly collections” of the aristocracy.<sup>8</sup> In Britain, the newly-emerged commercial class were determined to advertise their cultivated, gentlemanly status through the collection of art specifically prescribed in the current canons of good taste.<sup>9</sup>

Colonial governments saw public art collections as part of the ethos of cultured Australia, and as virtual certificates of civilisation. John Docker suggests that the respectable society of major urban centres in nineteenth century Australia defined itself around certain key values, with Melbourne, proud of its strong urban intellectual traditions that included powerful newspapers and magazines, setting its key value as intellectualism.<sup>10</sup> Concerned Melbourne citizens, including judge Redmond Barry, saw the establishment of a public Art Gallery as an absolute necessity for promoting ideas of the city’s intellectual quality through its collection of art.<sup>11</sup> When the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) was founded in 1861, it was imagined as a way to cultivate the minds of

<sup>6</sup> Smith, “Two Art Systems,” 171.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew McClellan, “A Brief History of the Art Museum Public,” in *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*, ed. Andrew McClellan (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995), 38.

<sup>9</sup> Pamela Fletcher and Anne Helmreich, eds., *The Rise of the Modern Art Market in London, 1850-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 48.

<sup>10</sup> John Docker, “Sydney Versus Melbourne Revisited,” in *The Sydney-Melbourne Book* ed. Jim Davidson (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986), 159.

<sup>11</sup> Docker, “Sydney versus Melbourne,” 159.

its citizens while also providing safe and enjoyable entertainment.<sup>12</sup> Sydney, on the other hand, set its key value as commerce.<sup>13</sup> Docker suggests that Sydney's intellectuals felt marginalised in a city that was dominated by business concerns, and the formation of a public Art Gallery was left in the hands of a special interest group whose primary goal, apart from creating a fine public art collection to rival that of Melbourne's, was to establish a strong art market for local artists.<sup>14</sup> The Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) was formed in 1880 through the hard work of an artists' group. As Heather Johnson has argued, the Art Society of New South Wales developed the AGNSW into the state's most authoritative and important market.<sup>15</sup> Well into the twentieth century, artists consistently reserved their best works for inclusion in the society's annual exhibition so that it would be seen by the trustees and possibly be purchased for the state collection.<sup>16</sup>

In Queensland, the key value espoused by the government for the young colony was egalitarianism with its roots in a rural working class rather than in an intellectual or commercial suburbia.<sup>17</sup> Donald Braben suggests that the philosophy of social utility propounded by Jeremy Bentham in the nineteenth century led, in no small part, to the "undervaluing of aesthetic studies" and the placing of "undue stress on basic utilitarian skills" in colonies such as Queensland.<sup>18</sup> In 1885, the *Brisbane Courier* noted that cultural institutions "do not appeal to our legislators with the force that telegraph lines, railways, river improvements, and other public works do".<sup>19</sup> This undervaluing of cultural considerations is further exemplified later in the same article, where it was noted that:

It is to our discredit as a community that while we have a museum, and that a good one, in Brisbane, still Queensland is destitute of a public library and a national art gallery in the metropolis.<sup>20</sup>

Shortly after this article was published, three local artists, Isaac Walter Jenner, Oscar Friström, and Eddie Hutchinson, offered to donate £300 worth of their paintings in an effort to encourage the formation of an art gallery for the colony.<sup>21</sup> Jenner and Friström considered that a public gallery, in the mould of the Royal Academy in London or the Salon in Paris, would become a major patron to

<sup>12</sup> Docker, "Sydney versus Melbourne," 159.

<sup>13</sup> Docker, "Sydney versus Melbourne," 159.; Smith, "Two Art Systems," 172.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, "Two Art Systems," 172.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, *Sydney Art Patronage*, 9.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, *Sydney Art Patronage*, 42.

<sup>17</sup> Keith Bradbury, "The Queensland Art Society 1887-1892," (Unspecified dissertation, University of Queensland, dated 198?), 7.; William Hatherell, *The Third Metropolis: Imagining Brisbane Through Art and Literature 1940-1970*, (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2007), 18.

<sup>18</sup> Donald Braben, "A Survey of Art Teacher Education in Queensland 1860-1976," (Masters' thesis, City of Birmingham Polytechnic, 1981), 6.

<sup>19</sup> "The Brisbane Courier," *Brisbane Courier*, June 29, 1885.

<sup>20</sup> "The Brisbane Courier," *Brisbane Courier*, June 29, 1885.

<sup>21</sup> Eddie Hutchinson, "The Queensland Art Gallery- an Offer," *Brisbane Courier*, November 20 1894.

support local artists as had occurred in New South Wales.<sup>22</sup> Their offer, although generous, was unacceptable to the government on the grounds that the Treasury lacked the funds to support, or the space to house, such a collection.<sup>23</sup> With their offer rejected, Jenner and Friström turned their attention instead to the development of an art society for the colony, which they hoped would, in the absence of a public art collection, address the critical need for a reliable art market in Brisbane.

### **Beginning the Queensland Collection**

Following the failure of Jenner, Friström and Hutchinson to establish a public art collection, the idea of forming an art gallery was shelved by local artists until the arrival in Brisbane in 1890 of a dynamic young English artist, Godfrey Rivers.<sup>24</sup> Rivers had trained in London at the Slade School (1883) and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1884, before moving to Australia and establishing himself as a painter in Sydney with the Art Society of New South Wales.<sup>25</sup> In 1890, he was appointed Drawing Master at the Central Technical College following the death of Joseph Clarke. From this point onward, Rivers rapidly became a central figure in Brisbane's embryonic art world. Through his positions of drawing master and Chairman of the QAS (1892-1902 and 1904-1908), Rivers established himself as part of Brisbane's social elite, becoming the first artist to be elected to membership of the prestigious Queensland Club.<sup>26</sup>

A bequest of eleven pictures by sixteenth and seventeenth century Dutch and Flemish artists by the Honourable Thomas Lodge Murray Prior MLC, in 1892 that led the conservative Queensland Premier, Hugh Nelson, to rethink the issue of a public art collection.<sup>27</sup> Nelson turned to Rivers, as chairman of the QAS and the best-credentialed artist in the colony, to develop a plan for the public display of the bequest. Rivers was so enthusiastic about the project that he offered to undertake unpaid day-to-day management of the gallery as curator, while acting as the inaugural secretary to the Trustees, and providing them with expert knowledge of art. He acted in this capacity until 1915. There may have been benefits to this dedication however, because Rivers' work was regularly acquired by the gallery over these years. Of the seventeen pieces of Rivers' work currently held in the Queensland collection, twelve were acquired by purchase or donation during his tenure as curator of the gallery.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson, *Sydney Art Patronage*, 1

<sup>23</sup> Hutchinson, "The Queensland Art Gallery- an Offer".

<sup>24</sup> La Quenouille, "Mr. R. Godfrey Rivers's Studio," *Brisbane Courier*, June 17, 1891.

<sup>25</sup> "The Art Society of New South Wales," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 15, 1886.

<sup>26</sup> Bettina MacAulay, "Richard Godfrey Rivers, Private and Public Art," in *Art Off Centre: Placing Queensland Art*, ed. Glenn R. Cooke (Brisbane: Queensland Studies Centre, 1997), 81.

<sup>27</sup> "The Proposed Art Gallery: The Late Hon. M. Murray-Prior's Legacy," *Brisbane Courier*, November 22, 1894.

The inaugural exhibition of QNAG in 1895 consisted of twenty-five art works, thirteen of which were owned by the colony and twelve that were loaned by private citizens.<sup>28</sup> The works in the collection comprised the Murray Prior bequest; the painting *Departure of the Coldstream Guards from Gravesend* that was a gift from the British-India Steamship Company; and River's own work, *Woolshed, New South Wales*.<sup>29</sup> The gallery and the collection were small and housed in just two rooms of the Town Hall, but it was "confidently hoped" by the Trustees that such a nucleus would inspire "patriotic citizens" to donate further works and "prove an argument in favour of Parliament voting money to add to the collection, when money could be spared for such a purpose".<sup>30</sup> For its first year of operation, the gallery was voted a government grant of £550.

It was the task of the curator to present significant works for their consideration for inclusion in the collection. Immediate plans were made to add to the collection, but hopes that QNAG would provide the cornerstone of a strong local art market were dashed as a pattern of collection of British and European art immediately emerged. From the initial government grant of £550 in 1895, the sum of £400 was designated for the purchase of contemporary British art.<sup>31</sup> The remaining £150 was to be used for maintenance contingencies, and for buying local or Australian works. Blandford Fletcher's painting *Evicted* (1887), purchased in 1896 for 300 guineas, set the collection's tone in accordance with standard practice of British Victorian collections; the work should be British, contemporary, representational, anecdotal, and easy to understand, and therefore an effective means of reflecting the moral values to be maintained by society.<sup>32</sup> The pattern of collecting overseas art, where possible, continued through the decades, with the trustees dedicating approximately half the annual purchasing budget to acquiring European art.<sup>33</sup> QNAG quietly prospered under the strong, almost obsessive leadership of Rivers, and QNAG's collection soon outgrew the room at the Town Hall and moved to two rooms in the impressive Executive Building (now the Treasury Casino) in George Street in 1905. Rivers remained as Curator until he left Brisbane in 1915. In 1931, QNAG was moved to the Concert Hall of the Exhibition Building on Gregory Terrace, and although it was seen as a temporary solution only, the gallery was located there until 1974.

Another early Brisbane collection that must be briefly considered is the Randall Collection. Richard John Randall was a Brisbane born artist who died at the age of thirty-seven in 1906. Randall worked in oils, watercolour, and pastels, and was a gifted artist who studied in Brisbane

<sup>28</sup> "The Opening Ceremony" *Brisbane Courier* 30 Mar. 1895, p6

<sup>29</sup> "The Opening Ceremony" *Brisbane Courier* 30 Mar. 1895, p6

<sup>30</sup> "Queensland Art Gallery: The Opening Day," *Brisbane Courier*, March 29, 1895

<sup>31</sup> *Queensland National Art Gallery Trustees' Report 1896*, 1.

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Cant, *Collecting and Curatorship: the Art Gallery of South Australia 1920-1959* (Adelaide: Seaview Press, 2000), 6.; *Queensland Art Gallery: Selected Works*, (South Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1982), 13.

<sup>33</sup> "State Urged to Foster Queensland Art," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 11, 1940.

and England and was considered to be good enough to be “hung on the line” at the Royal Academy in 1897.<sup>34</sup> This was a prestigious accolade as to be “hung on the line” was a practice reserved for meritorious work, which was displayed at eye level rather than above or below, in the annual exhibition. After his death, five of his works were selected by Godfrey Rivers for consideration by the Trustees of QNAG but none were purchased.<sup>35</sup>

The Randall Collection comprised over 400 works by Randall that were collected as a memorial to the artist by his distraught father, George. The only selection criterion was that the works were by Richard Randall. In donating the collection to the municipality of South Brisbane, where Randall lived and worked, George Randall stipulated that the paintings be properly housed and open to the public at least one day each week. The paintings were on display in the South Brisbane Town Hall before becoming the property of the newly declared City of Brisbane in 1925. The collection was moved to the modern exhibition space that had been incorporated into the newly constructed Brisbane City Hall on Albert Street in 1932.

The large Randall Collection became the most prominent display of original art works in Brisbane, and its location in the City Hall gallery added to the ambiguity that characterised QNAG’s status in Brisbane’s art world. With QNAG being inconveniently located well away from the city centre, it is thought that many tourists visiting the city between 1932 and 1942 may inadvertently have visited the Randall Collection of paintings at the City Hall in mistake for the QNAG collection, giving rise to the persistent assumption reported in the *Courier-Mail* that “art taste in Brisbane is of a low standard”.<sup>36</sup> The collection was finally placed in storage in 1942, when the City Hall exhibition space was closed for security reasons during World War Two.

### **Managing QNAG’s Collection**

In the context of the poor reputation of art standards in Queensland in the 1930s, Professor Henry Caselli Richards emerged as the most remarkable participant in Brisbane’s art world since Godfrey Rivers. Richards was born in Melbourne and became Professor of Geology and Mineralogy at the University of Queensland in 1912.<sup>37</sup> He first came to prominence in art circles in 1932, when he was asked by the Australian government, on behalf of the philanthropic Carnegie Corporation of New York, to join Sydney Frank Markham in a survey of Australian art galleries and museums. Markham was a British politician and secretary of the UK Museums Association, who held strong views on the professionalisation and funding of museums and art galleries.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> “The Late Richard John Randall,” obituary *Brisbane Courier* (Brisbane), October 20, 1906.

<sup>35</sup> “The Late Richard John Randall.”

<sup>36</sup> “Randall Pictures,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 4, 1940.

<sup>37</sup> “Tribute to the Late Prof. Richards,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), June 17, 1947.

<sup>38</sup> Ian McShane, “Carnegie Cultural Philanthropy and the 1933 Australian Museums Inquiry,” (January 15, 2014): 9-11. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2398736>



Markham and Richards completed a comprehensive survey on the size and efficacy of Australian galleries, the quality of the collections, and government support received for both metropolitan and regional galleries throughout Australia. At four-pence per capita in government support spending, it is no surprise that Queensland's premier gallery emerged from the survey as the worst-resourced gallery, regional or metropolitan, in Australia.<sup>39</sup> Markham and Richards presented their report to the Carnegie Corporation in 1934, and Richards went on to become an important tie between Brisbane's small art world and the wider art world.

Richards visited America and the Carnegie Corporation in 1936, where he researched modern collection and display techniques within American art museums and institutes.<sup>40</sup> The data he collected was presented later in 1936 to a conference, convened on behalf of the Carnegie Corporation, of directors of Australian and New Zealand art galleries and museums. As a result of this conference, a professional organisation, the Australian and New Zealand Museum and Art Galleries' Association (ANZMAG), was formed with Richards doubling as its president and QNAG's representative. The aim of the organisation was to foster cooperation of museum and art galleries in the south Pacific region.<sup>41</sup> Richards remained in this position until his death in 1947.

Ian McShane suggests that the modest amount of Carnegie funds directed toward museums and art galleries in Australia for the purpose of providing travelling exhibitions, and conferences, failed to invigorate the museum and art gallery movement in Australia, and that Markham and Richards' ambitions for museums and galleries in Australia were "scarcely realised".<sup>42</sup> QNAG showed no immediate benefits of involvement with the Carnegie Corporation other than Richards' close association with ANZMAG, which linked the management of Queensland's gallery to the network of art galleries in Australia and New Zealand.

Management of QNAG was characterised by a lack of professional leadership after Rivers resigned in 1915, and insufficient financial assistance by the State government. With the departure of Rivers, no single figure with comparable knowledge of art was available in Brisbane. His successor as curator was James Watts "whose training and qualifications in art [were] negligible"<sup>43</sup> and the task of connoisseurship in the gallery passed to an appointed committee of three artists known as the Art Advisory Board (AAB).<sup>44</sup> Nominations for the committee were accepted from the Queensland Art Society (later the Royal Queensland Art Society), the Queensland Authors and Artists Association, and the Queensland Art Fund. The AAB researched, selected, and commented

<sup>39</sup> S.F. Markham and H.C. Richards, *A Report on the Museums and Art Galleries of Australia and New Zealand* (London: Museums Association, 1933), 9.

<sup>40</sup> "Developing Culture Institutions: Carnegie Corporation Willing to Help," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), March 14, 1936.

<sup>41</sup> "Museums and Art Galleries Unite," *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), May 10, 1936.

<sup>42</sup> McShane, "Carnegie Cultural Philanthropy," 13.

<sup>43</sup> QNAG Trustees' memo, dated February 11, 1949.

<sup>44</sup> QNAG Trustees' memos dated February 11, 1949; 25 August, 1949; 14 September, 1949.

on prospective works for the gallery, but the final decision on purchases was made solely by the trustees.<sup>45</sup> Members of the AAB in 1940 included architect Robert Cummings, and artists Charles Lancaster and Edward Colclough, all of whom were long time members of the RQAS. The AAB worked effectively but Rivers' clear vision of building a strong, representative collection of contemporary British art, interspersed with significant Australian and local works was lost until Watts retired and a professional director was appointed in 1949.

The Board of Trustees fulfilled two roles. The first was a management role to oversee the overall administration of the gallery and to arrange and finance exhibitions when necessary, while the second was that of connoisseurship in the purchase of works for the gallery to complement the collection. Members of the initial Board of Trustees were representative of Brisbane's urban community elite and included the Hon. H. Tozer (Colonial Secretary); Sir Samuel Griffith (Chief Justice); Captain W.M. Townley (Sherriff); Boyd Morehead (former Premier of Queensland and businessman); and R.W. Thurlow (businessman, and in 1896, Mayor of Brisbane).<sup>46</sup> Although the gallery was not a functionary of the Government, this makeup of the board reflects a nineteenth century attitude situating the gallery as a civic polity. Appointment to a position on the Board of Trustees, although unpaid, continued to be a sought after honour, and in 1942, the Board, while still representative of an urban community elite, showed a marked shift toward the professions through the presence of Sir James Blair (former Chief Justice); Professor Henry Richards and Professor Jeremiah Stable (University of Queensland); dentist Dr F.W. Robinson; and businessman M.S. Herring. These men spent much time deliberating over what the gallery could afford to buy, but their taste, as has been noted, remained for British or European art in preference to Australian or local art, and approximately half the purchasing budget was still spent on European art.<sup>47</sup>

Financing Queensland's public collection followed the nineteenth century British model whereby, once a home had been provided for the collection, the government's only input was to vote (or not) an annual monetary grant for the purchase of paintings.<sup>48</sup> The provision of an annual grant gave the Queensland government recognition as the "principal benefactor", but otherwise it played no part in the development, maintenance, or operation of QNAG.<sup>49</sup> From 1936, QNAG's government grant was supplemented by a £15,000 bequest from tobacco merchant, John Darnell. Darnell is the same benefactor after whom the Darnell Collection is named. Darnell died in 1930 leaving substantial sums of £5,000 to the university,<sup>50</sup> and £10,000 to QNAG. As far as is known,

<sup>45</sup> "Lack of Funds the Difficulty," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), July 20, 1940.

<sup>46</sup> "New Mayor of Brisbane," *Brisbane Courier*, February 15, 1896.

<sup>47</sup> "Australian Art in Gallery," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), July 23, 1940.

<sup>48</sup> N. M. Pearson, *The State of the Visual Arts: A Discussion of State Intervention in the Visual Arts in Britain (1760-1981)* (London: Open University Press, 1985), cited in Cant, 15.

<sup>49</sup> "State Urged to Foster Queensland Art," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 11, 1940.

<sup>50</sup> The university Senate directed the money be used for the purchase of art works instead of books

he had no connections to either body. Under the terms of his Will however, the money for QNAG would only become available if an equal sum was raised by “public subscription or otherwise” within five years of his death.<sup>51</sup> A further stipulation was that of the resultant £20,000, £5,000 was to be used for the upkeep of the Randall Collection. It was only after the intervention of Daphne Mayo and Vida Lahey of the QAF that the State Government pledged £4000 in January of 1935 and the Brisbane City Council, £2000. The remainder was finally raised by public subscription within days of the deadline in June 1935, and in 1936, QNAG received its bequest valued at £15,000. The principal was invested and the interest (approximately £540 per annum) was used for the purchase of paintings.

Darnell’s bequest eased the financial pressure on the Trustees, but running costs such as salaries for a Curator and an assistant, repairs and maintenance of the buildings, and expenses related to bringing travelling exhibitions to Brisbane, still had to be met. By the 1940s, the government grant was at least reliable, but was consistently reported in the press as inadequate for the purpose of building a strong collection. Indeed, in 1940, Forgan Smith, Premier of Queensland, emphasised that “the gallery was not a Government institution” and the Trustees do “a good job with the money at their disposal”.<sup>52</sup> The value of the grant for QNAG in 1895 was set at £550. Between 1933 and 1944 it was set at £700; in 1945 it rose to £1250; in 1948 it was £2500; then £3750 in 1949 (to accommodate the £1000 salary for a director); £7000 in 1952 (for the special purchase of 50 Australian paintings). In 1958, the grant had risen to £12000.<sup>53</sup> In 1959 the gallery became a Government institution. To place these figures in perspective, QNAG’s budget in 1944 allowed £1052 for salaries, maintenance, and contingencies out of the annual grant of £1250. This left £198 for QNAG trustees to purchase art works.<sup>54</sup>

In 1944, Queensland’s premier Frank Cooper approached his counterparts in New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia, seeking clarification of funding arrangements for other state art museums. This survey found that the NGV received £1250 from the government for the purchase of paintings in addition to £24,000 annual income from the Felton Bequest, while the AGNSW received £3000 from the government solely for the purchase of paintings. The Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA) provided figures for salaries of £2829 and contingencies of £442, which were met by the government, in addition to a one-off government grant of £10,000 to extend the gallery building. In contrast to QNAG, all these public art galleries, being statutory bodies of their respective governments, had salaries, maintenance, and contingencies (including framing) met by

<sup>51</sup> “John Darnell Bequest: Raising Money for Art,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), January 22, 1935.

<sup>52</sup> “State Urged to Foster Queensland Art”.

<sup>53</sup> Assorted memos in Queensland National Art Gallery papers, Queensland State Archives.

<sup>54</sup> Memo from Undersecretary of the Premier’s Department to the Premier of Queensland dated October 20, 1944. All figures quoted in this paragraph come from this memo.

the public purse. Even when the interest from the Darnell bequest is included, these figures speak to the fact that the development of QNAG into a facility that was capable of supporting further growth in Brisbane's art world was problematic. However, the QNAG Trustees were resourceful in their attitude, and in 1940 they initiated discussions with artists' groups to establish a Permanent Exhibition of Queensland Art that would bring the gallery a much needed revenue stream.

### **The Permanent Exhibition of Queensland Art**

The Permanent Exhibition represented a remarkably innovative scheme that was developed in late 1940 to support local artists, encourage the production of local art, and provide an additional source of income for the gallery. The position of the Permanent Exhibition in Brisbane's art world is contentious as to whether it forms part of the art market or forms part of the conservation facilities. I have placed it within the conservation facilities because it was an initiative of the Trustees, and while they hoped sales would be made, selling was incidental to the promotion of Queensland art. The Permanent Exhibition allowed the gallery to exhibit quality Queensland art without having to purchase the work.<sup>55</sup> The trustees made available an annexe off the main gallery of QNAG that was furnished to accommodate a rotating display of contemporary works by Queensland artists, either for direct sale or sale under a hire purchase agreement.<sup>56</sup> Art critic and feature writer for the *Courier-Mail*, Firmin McKinnon suggested that the "system is entirely novel to Queensland" and "should have a stimulating effect upon the appreciation of art in this city" as it gave the Brisbane art public the opportunity for the first time of purchasing original works at any time.<sup>57</sup>

Although the Permanent Exhibition, which opened on February 7, 1941, was set up by the Trustees of QNAG, it was administered by a Combined Art Committee (CAC) drawn from a broad range of art lovers in Brisbane and comprised Mr. M.S. Herring (chairman CAC, QNAG Trustee, and architect); Mr. J.V.D. Coutts (secretary CAC, Queensland Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute of Architects); J. V. Duhig (chairman RQAS, JDACC member, and from 1941, patron of HDGA); Henry Richards (QNAG Trustee, chairman JDACC, chairman ANZMAG); Dr. F.W. Whitehouse (geology lecturer, University of Queensland); and Percy Stanhope Hobday (artist). Artists delivered their work to the gallery on a designated day for consideration by the selection committee, which was appointed by the Combined Art Committee. The first selection committee consisted of Hobday, Mona Elliott from the RQAS, Charles Lancaster representing the Queensland Authors and Artists Association (QAAA), Lewis J. Harvey from the Arts and Crafts Society, and Coutts and Charles (C.W.T.) Fulton from the Queensland Chapter of the Royal Australian Institute

<sup>55</sup> "Queensland Art Exhibition Opens on Friday," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), February 5, 1941.

<sup>56</sup> Firmin McKinnon, "Art by Hire Purchase: Queensland Plan," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 5, 1940.

<sup>57</sup> McKinnon, "Art by Hire Purchase".

of Architects. The wide scope of the selection committee was to encourage diversity in the works selected for show.

Participation in the Permanent Exhibition was open to all Queensland artists whether or not they were members of an artists' group. For an annual fee of 5/-, artists could display up to three pictures, that were changed quarterly. To encourage a reasonable financial return for the artists, the Combined Art Committee set a minimum price for a painting at £3/3/- and a drawing at £2/2/- (a man's suit cost approximately £3/3/- in 1945). By comparison, drawings commonly fetched £1/1/- or less at the annual group exhibitions. Another requirement of works submitted to the selection committee was that at least one of the works submitted had to be new. Such conditions gave added impetus to the art world by encouraging the continual production of art, while, at the same time, artists were able to put unsold work back onto the market in the hope of attracting a buyer. Artist Vida Lahey, for example, showed a well-travelled picture in 1941 that had not sold:

The picture [unnamed] of outstanding historical value is one of the old Normal School in Edward Street, showing St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in the middle distance and St. Paul's Presbyterian Church as a background. Since the picture was first painted by Miss Vida Lahey, and shown at the New English Art Club in London, that view of Brisbane has gone.<sup>58</sup>

While this painting had "outstanding historical value" for Brisbane audiences, it would also have considerable artistic cachet because it had previously been accepted and shown in London at the New English Art Club.<sup>59</sup> Buyers at the Permanent Exhibition had the choice of oils, watercolours, black and whites (drawings), pottery, illuminated manuscripts, or embossed leatherwork, just as they did at the artists' groups' annual exhibitions.

The first Permanent Exhibition of Queensland Art featured 52 works by 26 of Brisbane's best-known artists including W.G. Grant, Gwendolyn Grant, Charles Lancaster, Caroline Barker, Mona Elliott, Melville Haysom, Frank Sherrin, E. Lilian Pedersen, and James Wieneke. All artists who participated in the first show were members of the RQAS or the HDGA and this remained the trend throughout the existence of the Permanent Exhibition. While artists were quick to appreciate the benefit of this initiative, the art public took some time to do so and sales from the first three months were modest, with only four paintings being sold.

An advantage that the Permanent Exhibition had over the ephemeral artists' exhibitions was in the use of the modern commercial marketing technique known as hire purchase.<sup>60</sup> As an innovative method of selling art, hire purchase had been trialled in London from 1935 at the very

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<sup>58</sup> "50 Pictures in New Art Gallery Exhibition," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), May 12, 1941.

<sup>59</sup> "50 Pictures".

<sup>60</sup> McKinnon, "Art by Hire Purchase".

reputable Arthur Tooth and Sons Galleries.<sup>61</sup> By paying a modest deposit on the work of their choice, buyers could then take the work home immediately and pay the remainder in small monthly instalments. There is no evidence to suggest that hire purchase encouraged sales. Newspaper reports indicate that because of the Gallery's out of the way location, initial patronage was poor,<sup>62</sup> but the QNAG Trustees' Report for 1944 shows that sales (number unspecified) totalling £160/12/6 were achieved in 1943.<sup>63</sup> By way of comparison, the 1942 RQAS annual exhibition realised sales of £156/9/- for thirty works.<sup>64</sup> These figures reveal that, after a slow beginning, there was little difference in sales between the pressured sales atmosphere of the artists' groups' annual exhibitions and a permanent display of art that was not manned by full time sales staff. However, the Permanent Exhibition did reflect well on the Trustees' desire to foster the production of art in Queensland and promote Brisbane based artists, and it continued to operate until 1947, by which time it was competing with the professional Moreton Galleries situated in the heart of the city.

### **The Collections in the 1940s**

The government's *Queensland Year Book 1940* numbers the Queensland collection at 677 pictures (oils, watercolours, black and white), of which 381 had been presented to the gallery by benefactors, and another 89 were on loan, but these figures appear to be considerably inflated to reflect positively on the government.<sup>65</sup> For example, figures presented by Dr. F.W. Robinson of the QNAG Trustees, in the first comprehensive catalogue of the collection compiled in 1942, suggest that the collection was actually much smaller, comprising only 213 works of art representing 106 artists. Of these works, a mere 53 had been purchased while the remainder had been gifted. Both sets of figures show a reliance by the Trustees on gifted works to build the collection. This is hardly surprising given the limited budget at the Trustees disposal. But while many great works may come the way of a gallery through gifts and bequests, it is not possible to build a representative collection of art works simply through the receipt of gifts, and it is only through the works purchased that a clear direction in the collection policy can be detected.

QNAG still did not have a clear collection policy and much of the purchasing budget was still directed toward the acquisition of English or European art. However, in 1940, with little money to spend on purchases, the gallery purchased eight paintings locally for a total outlay of 86 guineas.

<sup>66</sup> Five of these works, including *Self Portrait* by Ella D. Robinson, *Jacaranda* by Charles

<sup>61</sup> "By Instalments," *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), July 6, 1935.

<sup>62</sup> "Permanent Art Exhibition Being Neglected," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), March 14, 1941.

<sup>63</sup> "Permanent Art Exhibition".

<sup>64</sup> The RQAS exhibition catalogue of 1948 shows the exhibition comprised 154 works; 108 of which were priced at 10 guineas or under.

<sup>65</sup> *Queensland Year Book 1940* (Brisbane: Queensland Government), 95.

<sup>66</sup> "Australian Art in Gallery," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), July 23, 1940.

Lancaster, *Mt Warning from Razorback* by Frank Sherrin, *Farmyard Fowls* by Frankie Payne (Mrs Clifton), and *The Obi, from Mapleton Range* by Frank Waldo Potts, were purchased from the RQAS annual exhibition. The remaining three works came from a small local exhibition of the work of Noel Wood and RQAS member, Roy Dalgarno. The acquisition of local contemporary works was not a major consideration of QNAG, but the annual Trustees' reports suggest that local paintings continued to be acquired from exhibitions of artists' groups throughout the 1940s, and between 1941 and 1947, thirteen more local works were conserved by QNAG.

### **The Darnell Collection**

A much more coordinated approach to the collection of local art was shown by the University of Queensland with the establishment of the Darnell Collection in December 1940. As early as their second meeting, the JDACC was making ambitious plans for a gallery to be included in the new university buildings then being constructed at St. Lucia. Although J.V. Duhig donated a large number of books on art to begin the collection, the impetus for the Darnell Collection came from a £5000 bequest from the late John Darnell. Darnell, who died in 1930, not only provisionally bequeathed the sum £10,000 to QNAG as discussed earlier, but also directed that a further £12,000 be designated for the endowment of a Chair of English at the University of Queensland. Finally, Darnell left a further £5000 to the University to be used for library purchases, but it was decided by the University Senate to direct the bequest toward establishing an art collection instead.<sup>67</sup> The bequests were to be known as the Darnell Bequests.

The Darnell Collection began with the intention of supporting local artists where possible, and this policy was evident from the first exhibition it mounted in the Department of Geology at the University of Queensland in 1945.<sup>68</sup> This inaugural exhibition consisted of 64 works by 48 Australian artists, 22 of whom were from Queensland.<sup>69</sup> The JDACC had requested in 1944 that a list be drawn up of Queensland artists whose work might be considered for the collection.<sup>70</sup> There is no extant evidence of this list, but acquisitions for Darnell Collection in 1944 totalled 11 works, 9 of which were by Queensland artists including Frankie Payne (Mrs Clifton), Edward Colclough, Charles Lancaster, Kenneth Macqueen, Patricia Prentice, Frank Sherrin (two works), Lloyd Rees, and James Wieneke. All these artworks were purchased at either the RQAS or HDGA annual exhibitions. In addition, Colclough, Macqueen, and Sherrin each gifted a work to the Darnell Collection, while Payne and Rees heavily discounted their works in order to have them conserved. Payne, for example, reduced the price of her work *In Sunlight*, from 25 guineas to 10 guineas, and

<sup>67</sup> "Darnell Bequest: to Queensland University," *Cairns Post* March 3, 1931.

<sup>68</sup> "University has First Art Show," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), April 13, 1945.

<sup>69</sup> "University has First Art Show."

<sup>70</sup> JDFAC Minutes, August 20, 1944.

Rees not only reduced the price of his “rather unorthodox oil *Dusk on the Lane Cove River*” from 35 guineas to 15 guineas, but agreed to replace it with the less contentious *Meadow Lands at Orange*.<sup>71</sup> This last transaction suggests that the JDACC still supported a conventional approach to art.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Darnell Collection continued to support Queensland art and in 1952 moved from George Street to a purpose built gallery in the main building (Forgan Smith) of the University at its St Lucia site. Until the opening of the new gallery, works were stored haphazardly throughout the rooms of the university and frequently “went missing” only to be found later. The opening exhibition at St Lucia included the works of well known Australian artists such as Conrad Martens, Tom Roberts and Sir Arthur Streeton, but was significant because it included contemporary works of Laurence Hope, Kenneth Macqueen, and Lloyd Rees. From 1950, new works for the collection were sourced from the Moreton or Johnstone galleries rather than the artists’ group exhibitions and included *Suburban Shopping Centre* by Joy Roggenkamp, *Sand Dunes* by Kenneth Macqueen, *Dutchman’s Pipe* by Vida Lahey, and *Tree Near Archerfield* by William Bustard. Acquisitions continued to be made of works by local artists including George Williamson Bronwyn Yeates, John Rigby, Mervyn Moriarty, Jon Molvig, John Aland, Nevil Matthews, and Gordon Shepherdson.

In 1962, the University Senate began discussions on the feasibility of establishing degree or diploma courses in fine art to complement the Darnell Collection, and to provide greater accessibility to art education in Queensland. As a result, the first university fine arts course in Queensland began in 1971 when Nancy Underhill lectured on Renaissance art.

### **Conservation of Local Art**

Art-works purchased for public collections are generally recognised by artists and critics as “exceptional and spectacular pieces”, and the prospect of having a piece of work conserved in a public collection was important to artists as a vindication of their efforts.<sup>72</sup> Throughout the 1940s, representatives of both QNAG and JDACC continued to attend the annual exhibitions of the artists’ groups with a view to purchasing exceptional pieces for their collections. Purchases by both collections at the annual exhibitions of the RQAS, HDGA, and the Younger Artists’ Group were always highly anticipated by artists, and the prestige of having a work publicly conserved was evident in artists’ groups congratulatory acknowledgements in their Annual Reports. The *Courier-Mail* would often also bring such an event to the notice of the art loving public in a small report:

<sup>71</sup> JDFAC Minutes, November 30, 1944. Why the painting was considered unorthodox is not documented in the minutes.

<sup>72</sup> Roger Fry cited in Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 29.



Mr. C.H. Lancaster, with the sale of five oils, has been the most successful exhibitor at the Royal Queensland Art Society's exhibition at the City Hall Gallery. Next on the list are Mr. Melville Haysom with three oils, one of which goes to the National Art Gallery, and Mr. Hubert Jarvis with three watercolours.<sup>73</sup>

Occasionally a wistful note would appear in an Annual Report of an artists' group suggesting that the Trustees were "not in a buying mood" at the annual exhibition.<sup>74</sup> Local artists who were members of the RQAS and HDGA who had works acquired by QNAG in the 1940s include Ella D. Robinson, C.H. Lancaster, Vida Lahey, Frank Sherrin, Mrs Clifton (Frankie Payne), F. W. Potts, Melville Haysom, William Bustard, P. Stanhope Hobday, W.G. Grant, L.J. Harvey, and Peter Abrahams from the RQAS, while Lloyd Rees, James Wieneke, and E. Lilian Pedersen from the HDGA also had works conserved. The Darnell Collection acquired many of the same artists, but added Patricia Prentice, Betty Cameron, and Kenneth Macqueen to their collection.

As Brisbane's commercial gallery system developed after 1950, QNAG and JDACC relied less on the annual exhibitions by the artists' groups and more on the small shows mounted at the Moreton and Johnstone galleries for their acquisitions. Vida Lahey's unfinished catalogue of the Darnell Collection from 1954 suggests that from 1950, most works by Queensland artists were purchased from shows at either of these galleries. Where once the annual exhibitions of artists' groups provided the only opportunities for the conservation of art works of any significance in Brisbane, the practice of buying from commercial galleries considerably reduced the importance of artists' groups in Brisbane's art world. The appointment of Robert Campbell as the first professional Director for QNAG in 1949 further reduced the public role of the RQAS as the leader of Brisbane's art world. Campbell's appointment meant that the long standing relationship between the RQAS and QNAG became obsolete, and the role artists' groups played in the selection of work for the QNAG collection, begun with Godfrey Rivers in 1895, and consolidated through the AAB, was finally ended. The appointment of a professional Director for QNAG is another indication that the dominant role once enjoyed in Brisbane's art world by amateur artists' groups was being redefined at the end of the 1940s.

### **Becoming Professional at QNAG: The Directors**

The employment of a professional Director was a transformational innovation in the development of QNAG, and probably the most momentous step it had taken since its inception in 1895. While the Trustees still controlled purchases for the collection, each of the directors, as Rivers had done, influenced the course the collection would take through their individual preferences and selections

<sup>73</sup> "Art Show Sells 29 Pictures," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 17, 1941.

<sup>74</sup> HDGA Archive.

of appropriate works. Scottish-born Robert Campbell, the first Director of QNAG, began his artistic career in Brisbane in 1917 when he exhibited as a full member of QAS at the age of fourteen.<sup>75</sup> He moved away from Brisbane to study art, and lectured in Art History at adult education classes and at the Teachers' Training College in Launceston before being appointed as curator of the National Art Gallery of Western Australia, before being appointed as Director of QNAG. In Brisbane, he found an "antiquated gallery" occupying an unsuitable temporary home well away from the centre of the city and he determined to remodel the facilities into "something of which we can be really proud".<sup>76</sup> Campbell's vision doubled the hanging space for paintings, installed a false ceiling to exclude natural light that cast unseemly reflections on the works, removed guard rails that kept viewers from getting too close to the pictures, removed protective glass cases from sculptures, and added 20 percent additional space for the viewing public.<sup>77</sup>

The new look of QNAG was complemented by modern fluorescent lighting, a grey-green colour scheme, and the fact that paintings were now hung at eye level rather than above.<sup>78</sup> The changes were more than cosmetic, as Campbell also swept away what I have identified as an apologetic "making do" attitude of the Trustees. Rather than asking the government for help in financing the modernisation of the gallery, the Trustees were prepared to further deplete their financial reserves by borrowing from the capital of the Darnell Bequest.<sup>79</sup> Campbell, on the other hand, confronted the government over the issue of cost, pointing out that the government was meeting the "whole of the cost of buildings and alterations to the University, Museum, etc".<sup>80</sup> Indeed, at the time of the refurbishment of QNAG in 1949/1950, the Queensland Government was undertaking the full construction the University Art Gallery at St. Lucia, including the installation of special lighting needed to show the works to advantage.<sup>81</sup> Campbell prevailed, and the government agreed to meet the costs of the renovations at QNAG.<sup>82</sup> As a result of Campbell's efforts, QNAG was transformed into the "most modern, well lit, and tasteful [Gallery] of its kind in Australia", according to Daryl Lindsay, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria.<sup>83</sup> However, shortly after the renovations were completed in 1950, Campbell resigned to take up the directorship of Art Gallery of South Australia.

Campbell's priority as Director of QNAG was the modernisation of the facilities, but his successor, Robert Haines, set about modernising the organisation. When Haines arrived to take up

<sup>75</sup> Max Fatchen, "He Believes in Bringing Art to the People," *The Mail* (Adelaide), May 5, 1951.

<sup>76</sup> "Art Leader to take S.A. Job", *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), January 26, 1951; "Big Hope in Art Gallery", *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), November 8, 1949.

<sup>77</sup> "Modern Home for Art," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 31, 1950.

<sup>78</sup> "Modern Home for Art".

<sup>79</sup> QNAG memo dated September 14, 1949.

<sup>80</sup> QNAG letter to Department of Public Instruction dated 28 November 1950.

<sup>81</sup> Letter to University Registrar from the Office of the Co-ordinator General of Public Works, dated August 24, 1949.

<sup>82</sup> Queensland Art Gallery, QSA.

<sup>83</sup> Daryl Lindsay, letter to Robert Campbell, dated November 14, 1950.

his position in 1951, he was appalled to discover that Queensland's art collection was administered as a charity operating by a "Set of Rules" rather than a business plan, and that apart from approving an inadequate yearly monetary grant, the state government played no part in its operations.<sup>84</sup> Haines oversaw the transformation of QNAG, through an act of parliament known as the *Art Gallery of Queensland Act of 1959*, into the Queensland Art Gallery (QAG) as part of the state's centenary celebrations. After sixty-five years of "making do", QAG was finally brought under the aegis of the State Government and its future became financially secure.

Haines was also responsible for forming the Art Gallery Society in 1951, which comprised a group of interested citizens who sought to raise money to assist the gallery financially through the provision of competitions and social events.<sup>85</sup> The formation of the Art Gallery Society also removed another function from the RQAS by providing a group where the dilettantes, so much a part of the structure of any art society, could gather and discuss art on an intellectual plane. The RQAS, as a learned society, had provided this function since its inception. Haines resigned in March 1960 as the result of a dispute with the government about the future of the art gallery.

Campbell and Haines did little to conserve Brisbane art under their directorships, but there was an upsurge in the number of local paintings purchased with the appointment of Laurie Thomas as Director in 1961. Thomas believed that "it is the artist who is working today who should be of particular concern to a gallery director" and by seeking to source this "living art", Thomas sought to extend the gallery's interconnectedness with Brisbane's art world by befriending the local artistic community, especially the alternative artists' groups that had grown up around Spring Hill, and the studio at St Mary's Anglican Church at Kangaroo Point.<sup>86</sup> He was gregarious and articulate, but his inclination toward contemporary art and his quest for acquiring art from practicing local artists did not have the support of the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, solicitor and businessman Sir Leon Trout, whose preference was for European traditional works. When Thomas resigned as Director of QAG in 1967, he accused the Queensland Government of lacking any kind of art consciousness, and as a consequence never regarding art as "anything but a luxury".<sup>87</sup> According to Helen Fridemanis, Thomas's resignation played into the hands of Sir Leon, who was able to secure the

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<sup>84</sup> Patricia L. Ryan, *Friends for Forty Years: History of the Queensland Art Gallery Society 1951 to 1991* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery Society, 1993), 9. A "Set of Rules" is a legal document that governs the operation of a not-for-profit organisation. It is not a business plan or a policy document.

<sup>85</sup> Ryan, *Friends for Forty Years*.

<sup>86</sup> Helen Fridemanis, "Contemporary Art Society, Queensland Branch 1961-1973: a Study of the Post-War Emergence and Dissemination of Aesthetic Modernism in Brisbane," (Masters' thesis, University of Queensland, 1989), 56; George Bell used the term "living art" in 1938 in conjunction with the formation of the first Contemporary art Society in Victoria.

<sup>87</sup> Fridemanis, "Contemporary Art Society," 57; "Johnstone Gallery Scrapbook 1958-1962," 142.

services of the conservative director of the local commercial Moreton Galleries, James Wieneke, as the new Director of QAG.<sup>88</sup>

The appointment of Wieneke as Thomas's replacement was a disappointment to many artists and art lovers in Brisbane. It was seen by some, including prominent local artist Vida Lahey, as a backward step for Queensland art.<sup>89</sup> Although a watercolour artist of some talent, Wieneke had received only a basic technical education in art through the CTC, but as Helen Fridemanis notes, he acquitted himself quite well as the gallery Director because any "shortcomings were not detrimental to the progress of the years that followed – possibly because the position [of Director] had always been relatively powerless in relation to that of the trustees".<sup>90</sup> In the late 1960s, some of the most interesting art ever produced in Brisbane was available through the Contemporary Art Society Queensland Branch (CAS) exhibitions and at a number of local commercial galleries, but little of this work was conserved by QNAG. The absence of this work in the collection has probably more to do with the conservative tastes of Trout, rather than those exercised by Weineke as Director.

Trout presided over the Board of Trustees from 1965 to 1978, and although his tastes in art may have been conservative, he was responsible for achieving economic stability and restoring a vision for the gallery. Like Rivers campaigning for a gallery in Queensland in the 1890s, Trout initiated and forcefully advocated the plan to include an art gallery in the proposed Queensland cultural centre in South Brisbane. From 1931, the gallery's ambiguous position within the Brisbane art world had been highlighted by its sharing of sub-standard accommodation with the Queensland Museum, but the stylish new art gallery that opened at Southbank in 1982, finally made an unambiguous statement about the importance to Queensland of its art collection.

## Conclusion

QNAG represented the hopes and aspirations of artists in Brisbane's art world when it was founded in 1895. The QAS was enthusiastic about the formation of a public art collection, presuming that QNAG would need a steady flow of locally produced paintings to develop a collection that reflected life in Queensland, and therefore seeing it as a potentially vital and influential market in which local artists could participate. For many years, QNAG remained an underfunded and undervalued resource for the Brisbane community, and the Trustees' administration of the institution was fraught with difficulties.

The fortunes of QNAG remained closely allied with the RQAS until 1949 when the appointment of QNAG's first professional Director caused a re-evaluation of its position in

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<sup>88</sup> Fridemanis, "Contemporary Art Society," 19.

<sup>89</sup> Fridemanis, "Contemporary Art Society," 19.

<sup>90</sup> Helen Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects of the Contemporary Art Society Queensland Branch* (Brisbane: Boolarong, 1991), 19.

Brisbane's art world. From this time, QNAG developed away from the RQAS, with many of the roles originally claimed by the art society being reassigned to QNAG. The QNAG director became the spokesperson on art matters in Brisbane, and also performed the connoisseurship role originally taken by the RQAS. Finally, the formation of the Art Gallery Society offered the dilettantes, who had turned previously to the RQAS for stimulating discussion about art in Brisbane, a group of their own. QNAG had begun the period from 1940 to 1970 by positively integrating with Brisbane's art world through the Permanent Exhibition of Queensland Art. However, apart from the period of Laurie Thomas's directorship (1961-1967), QAG became increasingly divorced from Brisbane's art world from 1949.

Museums and art galleries establish standards for representation and display, and act as catalysts within the market-place through their purchasing and exhibiting policies and prejudices.<sup>91</sup> Neither QNAG nor the Darnell Collection created a demand for Queensland-produced art, even within Queensland. Ian Burn suggests that there exists in regional art worlds a widely accepted belief that local art is only of value to local populations while the value of art from other centres is able to transcend borders.<sup>92</sup> One of the most damaging consequences of this belief is the tendency for local cultural activity to be experienced in a devalued form and for culturally specific characteristics to be explained in negative terms. Little consideration has been given here to negotiating the terms of Brisbane's participation in the broader Australian art market, but the relationship between places, whether regional or metropolitan, and the wider story of art is an area that requires more research.

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<sup>91</sup> Ian Burn, *The Necessity of Australian Art* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1988), 135.

<sup>92</sup> Ian Burn, *The Necessity of Australian Art*, 136.

## Chapter 4

### “Monstrous Daubings”<sup>1</sup>: Writing about Brisbane Art

Art criticism is talk about art and it may be professional, amateur, informed or uninformed, sensitive or obtuse, good or bad.<sup>2</sup>

Often working in a symbiotic relationship with dealers and retailers of art, the art critic plays an important role in disseminating information about artists and galleries, thereby bringing artists and patrons together in an understanding and appreciative milieu for a product that is unique. Art writing is one of the hallmarks of a mature art system, but Brisbane in the 1940s, as an undeveloped art system, could provide only limited opportunities. The three previous chapters in Part One have examined the effects that developments in education, the art market, and conservation policies had on the Brisbane art world. The focus of this chapter will be the scope of art writing in Brisbane. Those that were available included newspaper art criticism, catalogue essays, and writing for small magazines. Brisbane’s art world had always been readily supported by local newspapers, and newspaper art criticism was the dominant form of art writing. While not a daily feature of the newspaper, it formed a small part of a regularly produced and relatively inexpensive chronicle that was often conveniently delivered daily to the householder’s door before breakfast. At figures of nearly 82,000 in 1940, the *Courier-Mail* had the largest daily circulation in Brisbane.<sup>3</sup>

The efficacy of newspaper art criticism is difficult to evaluate because there is no clear way to measure readership of the review. Only contentious reviews generated any written responses from readers, either in agreement with or against the sentiments of the reviewer, and these were published in the “Letters” column of the newspaper. Readership of the catalogue essay is easier to ascertain given that the people attending the exhibition are already interested in art. An exhibition catalogue doubled as entry tickets to the group exhibitions and catalogue sales figures were used to estimate attendance. Finally, a number of attempts were made to foster deeper and more philosophical forms of art writing through the establishment of local journals such as *Muses Magazine*, *Barjai*, *Australian Art News Bulletin*, and the *Art News* of the RQAS, and the contribution made by these will be briefly examined. Through a study of these writings, it is possible to discern how artists, critics, and the general public in a small, undeveloped art world

<sup>1</sup> E.C.W. “Shock Tactics Shock.” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), February 18, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> T.F. Heath, “The Uses of Criticism in the Visual Arts,” *Australian UNESCO Seminar, Criticism in the Arts*, (Sydney: Sydney UP, 1968), 49.

<sup>3</sup> Audit Bureau of Circulations, *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), November 23, 1940.

engaged with the debate, endemic to many art worlds at this time, surrounding non-imitative, modernist art and imitative, traditionalist art.

### Early Art Publishing

Art writing was first developed in Australia in newspaper art reviews, with a review of Augustus Earle's latest lithographs appearing in *The Monitor* (Sydney) in January 1827, being one of the earliest. Leigh Astbury suggests that developing alongside this tradition of the newspaper art review were a series of what he aptly describes as "brave but short lived cultural journals".<sup>4</sup> As was to be expected, Sydney and Melbourne, with their larger populations, dominated such early publishing ventures with magazines such as the *Australasian Critic* (1890-1891) from Melbourne, and the *Australasian Art Review* from Sydney (1899-1900).<sup>5</sup> Fine art publishing emerged in Sydney in 1916 with the appearance of the magazine *Art in Australia*. Edited and published by Sydney Ure Smith, Bertram Stevens, and Charles Lloyd Jones, *Art in Australia*, as Nancy Underhill observes, was "more like a deluxe special publication than a serial magazine".<sup>6</sup> David Carter notes that as a magazine specifically devoted to one subject, namely the fine arts, *Art in Australia* was unusual at the time, and he argues that the purpose of the publication was to create a public and a market for art, especially Australian art, in Australia.<sup>7</sup> Underhill and Astbury demonstrate that the production of *Art in Australia* was reliant on the capacity of another of Ure Smith's magazines, *The Home*, to generate sufficient profits for him to indulge in his passion for fine art printing. Primarily an upmarket women's magazine, *The Home* also published articles on modern contemporary art, such as Margaret Preston's article "Why I Became a Convert to Modern Art".<sup>8</sup> It was the strength of Sydney's commercial business world allied with the institutional depth of Sydney's art world that allowed such ventures as *Art in Australia* to succeed, where stand-alone publications failed.

Brisbane, with its smaller, less developed art market, had no hope of sustaining a publication like *Art in Australia*. The need for art criticism arose in Brisbane when the QAS mounted its first annual exhibition in 1888. The *Brisbane Courier* provided valuable free publicity for the art exhibition in the form of an art review, citing venue and opening times for the reader's convenience. These early reviews were verbose, with the *Brisbane Courier* coverage of the 1889 Annual Exhibition of the QAS utilising one and a half columns of print space for the approximately 2,250 word review. By comparison, a review in the 1960s was limited to around 200 words. While

<sup>4</sup> Leigh Astbury, "Art Publishing," in *A History of the Book in Australia 1890-1945*, ed. Martyn Lyons and John Arnold (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2001), 314.

<sup>5</sup> Astbury, "Art Publishing," 314.

<sup>6</sup> Nancy Underhill, *Making Australian Art 1916-49: Sydney Ure Smith Patron and Publisher* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991), 132.

<sup>7</sup> David Carter, *Always Almost Modern: Australian Print Cultures and Modernity* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2013), 46.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret Preston, "Why I Became a Convert to Modern Art," *The Home* 4, no. 2 (June 1923): 67.

providing descriptive analysis of some of the paintings, the tone of the nineteenth century review was one of fulsome praise, both for the staging of the exhibition and the works on show:

No.42, “On the Edge of the Scrub,” an original oil by Captain Townley, is a creditable production representing an Australian scene with a waterhole and gum trees in the foreground backed up with thick scrub. The effects of light and shade and the general tone of the painting are excellent.<sup>9</sup>

The purpose of the nineteenth century review was to map the exhibition for a prospective audience by providing the exhibit number, the name of the work and the artist, and a succinct description of the work’s content and merit. Such reviews were directed toward a general social audience, but by highlighting the presence of Lady Musgrave, wife of the Governor of Queensland, to perform the opening ceremony, the review seeks to show the importance of the event and to encourage patrons to attend the very “credible” exhibition for the real purpose of making sales.<sup>10</sup>

By 1927, the *Brisbane Courier* considered that there was sufficient interest in art in Brisbane to commission Melbourne-based author and journalist William Moore to write a 1500 word fortnightly art column titled “Art and Artists”. In all, Moore produced 84 of these articles between January 1927 and August 1933, on a wide range of subjects of interest to Queensland art lovers. His October 25, 1930 column included a review of Vida Lahey’s current Melbourne exhibition, art news from London and New York, mention of a recent exhibition of New Zealand prints (held in New Zealand), a short analysis of current state of the art market in Australia, and some gossip about Australian artists. Moore’s articles lacked critical aesthetic judgement, which is attributable to his journalistic background and lack of formal art training, but they served to link Brisbane artists and audiences with the wider art world.

The year 1927 also saw efforts being made in Brisbane to publish a cultural magazine, the *Muses Magazine*. The *Muses Magazine* was a glossy publication of 28 pages that aspired to be the “official organ of the intellectual life of Queensland”.<sup>11</sup> The first issue was published in November by Luis Amadeo Pâres at the Magazine Hall of the Muses, located at 323 George Street in Brisbane. The Hall of the Muses became an unofficial meeting place for “impoverished European bohemians” in Brisbane, and also served as the Bolivian Consulate in 1927 as Pâres became acting Consul for the Republic.<sup>12</sup> Pâres was by profession, a musician, and he raised the money and community interest needed to launch the *Muses Magazine* by organising a “grand concert” featuring 1000

<sup>9</sup> “The Art Society’s Exhibition,” *Brisbane Courier*, August 18, 1888.

<sup>10</sup> “The Art Society’s Exhibition,” *The Queenslander* (Brisbane), August 25, 1888.

<sup>11</sup> *Muses Magazine* 1 (November 1927): 1.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Kirkpatrick and Robert Dixon eds., *Republics of Letters: Literary Communities in Australia* (Sydney: Sydney UP, 2012), 44.



violins at Brisbane's Exhibition Building (Old Museum) in September 1927.<sup>13</sup> The concert was a resounding success with all 6000 tickets sold. The profits of £1600 were used to start the *Muses Magazine*.<sup>14</sup>

The magazine was an ambitious attempt, but entirely in the style of portmanteau magazines as noted previously by Carter<sup>15</sup>, to provide the local community with a monthly review of cultural life in Queensland. Containing articles on art, literature, music, drama, horticulture, Esperanto, and astronomy, the venture was to be well supported by the local business community as indicated by the quality advertisements appearing in its pages. Through these advertisements, a wide readership can be assumed, catering for those interested in art photography and music to those who might require electroplating services. *Muses Magazine* was financed by prepaid subscriptions, which were received not only from throughout Queensland, but also from Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and fifteen countries abroad.<sup>16</sup> Subscriptions were 12/- per annum. In his *History of Magazine Publishing in Australia*, Frank Greenop argues that attempting to have sales, rather than advertising, pay for production was the reason so many magazines did not succeed beyond a few issues. As cultural enterprises, they may have filled a lacuna in cultural life, but as economic enterprises they lacked a circulation that would make them viable. Unlike Ure Smith in Sydney, Pâres had no bestselling magazine to subsidise his passion for culture.

The RQAS and the Queensland Authors' and Artists' Association were listed as supporters of the *Muses Magazine*, but there seems to have been considerable difficulty in getting regular contributors from either group. In the absence of professional art writers, art writing became the province of artists themselves, and their contributions were usually in the form of a historical or didactic treatise on art subjects. Artists Edward Colclough and Charles Lancaster contributed essays on "Art in Queensland" and "Stained Glass" while journalist Firmin McKinnon added "The Perfect Artist". There is no critical element to these articles and the trite evaluations, such as "up to his usual standard, and will give much pleasure to his admirers", did little to further appreciation of art in Brisbane.<sup>17</sup> The art component of the magazine consisted of such articles, but black and white reproductions of local art works by Richard Randall, Colclough, and Frank Sherrin also dotted its pages. The end for the publication came quickly after Pâres reported in the first anniversary issue that *Muses* was doing well; as a result, his creditors demanded payment and, after publishing

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<sup>13</sup> Kirkpatrick and Dixon, *Republics of Letters*, 47. A photograph recording the concert concluded every issue of *Muses Magazine*.

<sup>14</sup> Kirkpatrick and Dixon, *Republics of Letters*, 47.

<sup>15</sup> Carter, *Always Almost Modern*,: 46.

<sup>16</sup> *Muses Magazine* 2, no.1 (1928): 1.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Colclough, "Royal Queensland Art Society Exhibition," *Muses Magazine* (December 1928), 16.

fourteen issues, the magazine ceased production in 1928 and Pâres was declared bankrupt shortly afterwards.<sup>18</sup>

### Newspaper Art Criticism

The newspaper art review was by far the most popular form of art writing in Brisbane. Brisbane was home to a number of newspapers between 1940 and 1970, including the daily morning broadsheet the *Courier-Mail*; the tabloid *Telegraph* that was published in the afternoon; the tabloid weekly communist newspaper the *Queensland Guardian*; the tabloid *Truth*, published on Sundays; and the broadsheet *Sunday Mail*. All these newspapers published reviews of art exhibitions in Brisbane, although the *Queensland Guardian*, because of political affiliations, reviewed only the exhibitions of the Miya Studio. This was a tactic in line with the practice in the art worlds of Sydney and Melbourne, where the Communist Party sought to enlist the support of artists in their crusade against fascism after 1941.<sup>19</sup> Between 1933 and 1947, circulation of daily newspapers in Brisbane more than quadrupled from 62,000 in 1933 to 282,000 by 1947.<sup>20</sup> To put this in perspective and using the same time frame, Sydney and Melbourne newspapers doubled their circulation figures, while Adelaide's consumption of newspapers rose by about 66 percent.<sup>21</sup>

Examination of the newspapers from this period show that distinctively modern features began to appear in the 1940s as they became increasingly sectionalised into news, general interest, women's interests, entertainment, and sport. Prior to World War Two, the *Courier-Mail* was a large, daily broadsheet publication of between twenty and thirty pages with general interest articles on art, such as the site of the new art gallery, children's art, or acquisitions by QNAG, dotted throughout its pages. As the effects of World War Two were felt, the paper was reduced to between six and twelve pages, and page two became standardised to include a daily editorial, a political cartoon, the crossword, and "Letters to the Editor". Art reviews were uncommon in the early 1940s for the simple reason that there were few local art shows but by 1946, the art review, if there was one, could be found on page two. While other page two features such as literary reviews, gardening tips, history, natural history, science, and religious articles appeared on predetermined days of the week, the art review could appear on any day of the week, on multiple days of the week, or not at all.

In Brisbane in the 1940s, the newspaper art review was regarded as a minor form of journalism that required no particular training or knowledge and, as a result, reviews were written

<sup>18</sup> Kirkpatrick and Dixon, *Republics of Letters*, 51.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors: the Revolutionary Years in Australian Art* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1988), 125.

<sup>20</sup> Martyn Lyons, and John Arnold eds., *A History of the Book in Australia 1891-1945: A National Culture in a Colonised Market* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2001): 258.

<sup>21</sup> Lyons and Arnold, *History of the Book*, 258.

by a variety of senior journalists with cultural credentials. While southern newspapers had a long tradition of employing well-known artists as art critics (Sir Arthur Streeton at *The Argus* and Adrian Lawlor at the Melbourne *Sun*), the *Courier-Mail* was content to employ journalists with no art training at all. Most prominent amongst these was Firmin McKinnon, who provided regular art reviews from 1940 until 1947. McKinnon was followed by Elizabeth Webb (E.C.W.) in 1947-1948; W.L. (Warwick Lawrence) from 1949 to 1951; Professor C.G. Cooper (chairman of RQAS) in 1949; Paul Grano (poet) in 1950; Elizabeth Young in 1950-1951; Winifred Moore (W.M., journalist of women's issues and student of Gertrude Langer) in 1951-1952; and Ernest Briggs (music critic) in 1952. It would be a mistake to consider these journalists as being of lesser skill because they chose to work in a small city like Brisbane, as many had enjoyed successful national and international careers prior to settling in Brisbane. Gertrude Langer, the best known of the Brisbane critics joined the paper in 1953. The *Courier-Mail*'s art critics provided the art public with reviews that gave workmanlike descriptions of the art on show, mapped exhibitions by highlighting personal favourites, and in some cases attempted to analyse, interpret, and evaluate the work.

Firmin McKinnon, Elizabeth Webb, and Gertrude Langer provide exemplars of three traits of art writing that I have identified in Brisbane. Firmin McKinnon represents the "old school" of critics that was indefatigably supportive of the artists.<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Webb was a confrontational, reactionary critic who launched vitriolic attacks, not just against the moderns, but against what she identified as poor standards in art. Gertrude Langer represents a new regime of art reviewers, trained in the history and appreciation of art, and who sought to educate her readers in order to create an art aware public in Brisbane.

McKinnon joined the *Brisbane Courier* as a parliamentary reporter in 1919 and had risen to become acting editor in 1932 and 1933.<sup>23</sup> Bypassed as editor for the newly formed *Courier-Mail* in 1933, McKinnon became the newspaper's first art critic, as well as being responsible for literary, music and performing arts criticism.<sup>24</sup> He was recognised in local journalistic circles in the 1930s as a formidable reviewer of Australian books.<sup>25</sup> Writing as Firmin McKinnon, T.F.M. or F. McK., McKinnon was an enthusiastic supporter of the visual arts locally and was especially sympathetic to the work of artists' groups and encouraged their presence in the community.<sup>26</sup> In accordance with the journalistic style of the period, as identified by Alan McCullough, McKinnon was prone to

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<sup>22</sup> Alan Mc Cullough, "Criticism of an Era," in *Criticism in the Arts* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1968), 82.

<sup>23</sup> Desmond MacAuley, "Thomas Firmin McKinnon," *Australian Dictionary of Biography Online*, accessed October 12, 2012. <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/mckinnon-thomas-firmin-7400>

<sup>24</sup> MacAuley, "Thomas Firmin McKinnon."

<sup>25</sup> MacAuley, "Thomas Firmin McKinnon."

<sup>26</sup> MacAuley, "Thomas Firmin McKinnon."

indulge in immoderate praise for an exhibition.<sup>27</sup> For example, in this review of the 1941 RQAS exhibition:

Art Society show is “Best ever” – says Firmin McKinnon. The best collection of pictures that has ever been presented by the Royal Queensland Art Society. That will be the general opinion of those who view the 230 exhibits at the City Hall gallery of the society’s 53rd annual exhibition... Some local artists really have excellent work, but the blue ribbon goes to Lloyd Rees, an old Brisbane boy, but now a well-known artist in Sydney, for a garden scene in autumn light... Other first-class landscapes in oils are shown by William Bustard, C. H. Lancaster, Hubert Jarvis, Melville Haysom, and Frank Sherrin... There are no modernist pictures in the exhibition, but probably even that fantastic experiment has had a useful purpose in arousing artists to a sense of better work.<sup>28</sup>

McKinnon understood that the review was a validation of the artist’s participation in the art scene, and in this review considered the work of nineteen artists meritorious enough to be mentioned, albeit mostly in lists of names. Parochial homage is paid to Lloyd Rees, a local artist then successful in Sydney. McKinnon also applauded the local “first class landscapes” that were “notable for their composition and draughtsmanship”, making special mention of the “strikingly realistic composition of ‘The Jetty’ by Hubert Jarvis”.<sup>29</sup> McKinnon acknowledges the modernist trend toward non-imitative art as a “fantastic experiment”, but suggests that it has had a positive effect on traditional art by making artists more careful with their technique. McKinnon’s attitude was far from reactionary, but there is a sense of relief that there were no “modernist pictures”, suggesting his attitude was ranged on the side of traditional art.

The Half Dozen Group of Artists (HDGA) exhibitions were even more problematic for these general reviewers, in that art-works ranging from embroidery to sculpture were on show. However, McKinnon typically reflects the values of the community and gently educates his audience:

Varied, interesting and satisfying; that is how most of those who see it will regard the first annual exhibition of the Half Dozen Group now on view at the City Hall Gallery... The modernist touch is supplied by Ann Ross’s decorative mural panels, all full of life; and L. G. Shillam, who returned last year from Europe. Mr Shillam’s imagination and fondness for abstract art, however, is best seen in his carvings, not highly finished carvings as those of Mr Harvey, but just emergent from the material.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, in this review (published one month before the previous RQAS review), McKinnon accepts the presence of “the modernist touch” in some of the art works, citing Ross’s mural panels as being “decorative”, and Leonard Shillam’s sculpture, although “not [as] highly finished” as Mr

<sup>27</sup> McCullough, “Criticism of an Era,” 82.

<sup>28</sup> Firmin McKinnon. “Art Society Show Is ‘Best Ever,’” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 2, 1941.

<sup>29</sup> McKinnon, “Art Society Show”.

<sup>30</sup> Firmin McKinnon, “‘Half Dozen Group’s’ Art Show Varied and Interesting,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 4, 1941.

Harvey's, as worthy examples.<sup>31</sup> Within the limits of being beautiful to look at and showing obvious skill in handling of materials, the modern was acceptable to McKinnon and, by inference, to the readers of the *Courier-Mail*. However, when confronted by the 1946 exhibition of the Miya Studio, he struggled to maintain his usual supportive manner, and dismissed their modernist efforts with a proverbial shudder:

The second annual exhibition by students of the Miya Studio to be opened this afternoon in the Canberra Gallery by Dr Gertrude Langer, is youthful in age and youthful in behaviourism. There are a few promising efforts, notably those by Pamela Seaman [sic], K. E. Roggenkamp and Joy Roggenkamp, but others are just distortions, revealing neither drawing nor colour harmony.<sup>32</sup>

McKinnon reveals paternalistic support for the “promising efforts” of certain artists, but his review reflects the dominant preference for mimetic art. In both the RQAS and HDGA reviews, he suggests that modernism, when exemplified by skilful techniques, was acceptable, while the “distortions” obvious in the work of the Miya Studio artists was not. McKinnon is writing from the position of an informed amateur. In his reviews, there is no implied separation in the voice of the critic and the audience. All speak from the same implied level of competence in assessing the merit of the works exhibited.

McKinnon retired in 1946,<sup>33</sup> and was followed by Elizabeth Webb, who worked as a feature columnist with the Brisbane *Sunday Mail* and as an occasional art critic for the *Courier-Mail* between 1946 and 1948, but she was most active in 1947. Webb was born in Cunnamulla in outback Queensland in 1910, and went on to pursue a career as a journalist in the very modern medium of radio in London and Sydney from 1932.<sup>34</sup> She developed a combined reputation as a “formidable journalist and superb communicator” according to Sharyn Pearce.<sup>35</sup> Sometimes known by the by-line E.C.W., Webb's taste in visual art, like McKinnon's, was for the traditional, but she considered that frank discussions about the “shortcomings of modern Australian society”, including its art, were to be encouraged where possible.<sup>36</sup>

To this end, Webb launched a scathing attack on the 1947 RQAS annual exhibition. For unknown reasons, Webb actually wrote two reviews of this show for the *Courier-Mail*. The first, “New Names in Art Exhibition,” was a supportive review published on July 29, 1947, while the second review, “Art Exhibits Not Up to Standard” published on August 6, 1947, was harshly

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<sup>31</sup> L. J. Harvey was well respected internationally for his work with wood. Harvey was also the master of an identifiable “school” of ceramics in Brisbane. He was a member of both the RQAS and the HDGA until his death just prior to a RQAS council meeting in 1949. “Artist, 78, Drops Dead,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), July 20, 1949.

<sup>32</sup> Firmin McKinnon, “Variety in Art Shows,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 17, 1946.

<sup>33</sup> MacAuley, “Thomas Firmin McKinnon.”

<sup>34</sup> Jean Bruce, “Elizabeth Webb Calling,” *Australian Womens' Weekly* March 17, 1971: 21.

<sup>35</sup> Sharyn Pearce, “‘Speaking Personally’ and Propaganda: Elizabeth Webb's Wartime Journalism,” *Imago* 1, no. 1 (1989): 47.

<sup>36</sup> Pearce, “Speaking Personally,” 52.

critical, not of the general standard of art presented, but of the RQAS and its selection committee for the exhibition as a whole.<sup>37</sup> Webb suggested:

Out of this extensive jumbled assortment [164 works were hung from 278 entries]<sup>38</sup> only a handful of paintings are really qualified to hang under the auspices of any Royal Art Society. For the rest, surely only sympathy, sentiment, and string pulling could have let them past the judgement gate.<sup>39</sup>

The review generated considerable response from members of the RQAS and the art loving public with eight letters being published in the “Readers’ Letters” column of the *Courier-Mail* over the following days. Letters of support for the RQAS came from RQAS artists E. Lilian Pedersen, Marion Finlayson, and Roberta R[idgeway]. Pedersen saw the review as an attack on the integrity of the society saying that “neither ‘sympathy,’ ‘sentiment’ nor ‘string pulling’” entered into the “sincere attempt” to “lift up the standard of the show”.<sup>40</sup> Finlayson, on the other hand, took exception to Webb’s attack on William Grant and his work “Hillside in particular:

W.G. Grant's water-colour, “Hillside”, does little towards presenting its author as an artist, yet he is represented in the Exhibition by no less than four works. Why?<sup>41</sup>

Despite his age (71 at the time), Grant was a remarkably modern painter whose work, with its expressionistic, sketchy style, was all about interpretation rather than imitation of landscape and figures. Lloyd Rees described Grant’s work as some of the most dynamic that was being produced in Queensland, while art historian, Keith Bradbury, would later identify Grant as “a significant transitional figure” in Brisbane art.<sup>42</sup> Ridgeway suggested that to “materially assist the RQA Society in elevating its standards,” art critics needed to construct their reviews on “knowledge and artistry satisfying to our cultural demands”.<sup>43</sup> Webb’s treatment of Grant’s work reflects the prevalent negative attitudes of the 1940s to the many new forms of art produced in the twentieth century where distortion of colour and form meant works were labelled as merely the work of inept artists.

The letters received from the general public were, on the whole, supportive of Webb. R.H.C. adjudged the show as amateurish rubbish and suggested that Webb had “always given us an honest, straightforward review”.<sup>44</sup> P.P. also commented favourably on the quality of her reviews writing that “the storm in the teacup” over the art show “emphasises our crying need for good, healthy, constructive criticism”.<sup>45</sup> Reader W. Utting identified himself/herself as a “keen” art lover who

<sup>37</sup> E.C.W., “New Names in Art Exhibition,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), July 29, 1947.

<sup>38</sup> E.C.W., “New Names in Art Exhibition.”

<sup>39</sup> E.C.W., “Art Exhibits Not Up to Standard,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 6, 1947.

<sup>40</sup> E Lilian Pedersen, “Record Attendance,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 9, 1947.

<sup>41</sup> E.C.W., “Art Exhibits Not Up to Standard.”

<sup>42</sup> Keith Bradbury, “Grant, Gwendolyn Muriel (1877-1968),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography Online* <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/grant-gwendolyn-muriel-10342>. William Grant was Gwendolyn’s husband.

<sup>43</sup> Roberta R., “Art Criticism,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 7, 1947.

<sup>44</sup> R.H.C., “No Jargon,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 8, 1947.

<sup>45</sup> P.P., “Brisbane Can’t Take It,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 9, 1947.

wanted to buy paintings at the exhibition, but suggested that the few good pictures were “spoilt by their being in a clutter of poor work”.<sup>46</sup> “Flat Lux” also visited the exhibition and agreed with Webb’s assessment saying that the “pictures now on view...are not representative of their best work”.<sup>47</sup> Responses to Webb’s criticism indicate that a range of people, from educated art lovers to those with only limited art knowledge, read the art reviews in the *Courier-Mail*. Webb’s criticism and the responses it generated indicate that by 1947, Brisbane art lovers, because of their exposure to a variety of art experiences through art appreciation classes, the department store galleries and the commercial gallery system, were in a better position to comment on the quality of what they viewed and the RQAS was no longer seen as the infallible arbiter of taste it once had been.

Webb continued to write provocative and abrasive reviews. In February 1948, for example, she described the works of Sidney Nolan, on show at the Moreton Galleries, as “monstrous daubings” and regretted the “deliberate maltreatment of so much useful and hard-to-come-by building material”, a reference to Nolan’s use of masonite as his painting support.<sup>48</sup> At least three readers (including the poet Judith Wright) wrote in Nolan’s defence describing Webb’s review as “an hysterical and ill-balanced attack” that was a “display of provincialism which is a disgrace to Brisbane’s standards of judgement”.<sup>49</sup> James Trevelyan, a reader from Taringa, suggested that “unable to meet the demands of these powerful works, your critic resorts to low insult and becomes one with those who arraigned Gaugin [*sic*] in 1890 and Picasso in 1910”. The works in Nolan’s show included the 1947 painting *Mrs Fraser*, now in the collection of the Queensland Art Gallery (acquired 1995). While the controversy stirred by Webb’s review of the RQAS show led to record attendances,<sup>50</sup> the press did not help Nolan’s show and only two of the works were sold. Art criticism for the *Courier-Mail* was taken over by Warwick Lawrence in 1948 and Webb faded from the Brisbane scene. In 1956, Webb left for London where she worked as a freelance interviewer for the BBC.<sup>51</sup>

### **Gertrude Langer Years 1953-1970**

The appointment of Dr. Gertrude Langer as art critic for the *Courier-Mail* in 1953 heralded a new era of art criticism in Brisbane. Langer’s involvement with Brisbane’s art world has been established in Chapter 1, where she was positioned as an important and knowledgeable figure, giving public lectures on art and conducting private salon style art lectures from 1941. While initially not keen to take the position as art critic because the artists were her friends, Langer

<sup>46</sup> W. Utting, “Art Criticism,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 12, 1947.

<sup>47</sup> “Flat Lux”, “Not Best Work,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 12, 1947.

<sup>48</sup> E.C.W., “‘Shock Tactics’ Shock,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), February 18, 1948.

<sup>49</sup> Judith Wright, “Provincialism,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), February 19, 1948.

<sup>50</sup> E Lilian Pedersen, “Record Attendance,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 9, 1947.

<sup>51</sup> Jean Bruce, “Elizabeth Webb Calling,” *Australian Womens’ Weekly* March 17, 1971: 21.

believed she could use the art review to advocate for the development of both a contemporary style of painting and an appreciation of contemporary art in Brisbane.<sup>52</sup> In light of this, Langer constantly searched for evidence of creativity in the work under review, rather than pure skill in the handling of materials in order to produce a realistic representation of an object or scene. Langer wanted art that specifically drew attention to the fact that an art-work was not an imitation of reality, but a reality in itself.

The art world that Langer was writing for in 1953 was very different from that of Firmin McKinnon. Margaret Cilento had returned from her studies overseas, bringing modern teaching methods learned in New York and Paris to the alternative art classes at St. Mary's studio; there were two important commercial galleries showing the latest works of nationally acclaimed young artists such as Arthur Boyd and Sidney Nolan; and Queensland's art collection had rediscovered its importance under the leadership of a professional director. These changes had redefined the status of artists' groups as the arbiters of taste and style within Brisbane's art world, but their annual exhibitions remained as a major feature on the art calendar, and still needed to be reviewed. Langer had none of McKinnon's enthusiasm for these exhibitions suggesting the exhibiting artists appeared to be "beginners or amateurs, with gifts ever so slight"<sup>53</sup>

While reviewing the abundant mixture of good, bad, but mostly indifferent work that characterised the large exhibitions was never easy, Langer found some evidence that artists in the 1954 RQAS exhibition were creatively embracing contemporary ideas, and shows her audience where these ideas may begin:

Melville Haysom, in his painting, "Air, Earth, Water," as seen from 4000 ft. exploits new possibilities of extracting an interesting pattern from impressions gained in air travel. The original framing of this painting is well suited.<sup>54</sup>

The style of the review is not substantially different from earlier reviews, in that it expresses brief appreciative or negative observations about the works on show. However, using a discourse more relevant to a visually literate audience, Langer introduces a different criterion for judging the work than that deployed by earlier critics. The "possibilities of extracting an interesting pattern" speaks to an audience more educated in and appreciative of post-impressionist art than that which shared McKinnon's evaluation of a gentle "garden scene in autumn light" in 1941. McKinnon, with no training in the principles of art, was restricted to commenting on generalities about overall composition and colour harmonies within the limits of representational criteria, and doing so at the level of competence of an informed amateur. Rather differently, Langer's specialist art education

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<sup>52</sup> Gertrude Langer and Barbara Blackman, *Gertrude Langer interviewed by Barbara Blackman*. [Sound recording], January 1, 1982, accessed September 5, 2012, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.oh-vn584284>.

<sup>53</sup> Gertrude Langer, "Art Society Exhibition," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 7, 1954.

<sup>54</sup> Gertrude Langer, "Society has a Mixed Crop," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), July 31, 1953.



allows her to comment on how successfully artists negotiated problems such as the treatment of space or the extraction of abstract forms from the subject. Foremost, Langer, although an advocate of the contemporary in art, wanted to direct all artists toward originality of ideas, solving problems in relation to the formal abstraction of shapes, and personal interpretations of their subjects whether in traditional or contemporary art forms.

Langer found the HDGA exhibitions also dominated by representational, mimetic works. The HDGA prided itself on being a more contemporary group than the RQAS, but the modernist influence in their exhibitions seemed just as elusive.<sup>55</sup> Reviewing what was a largely traditionalist show, in 1953, Langer refers to the pleasant impression created by the HDGA exhibition, but it is the daring work of Margaret Cilento that she highlighted:

The most startling picture is Margaret Cilento's "Sunday Afternoon," a large mural-like oil in which daring primary colours are superimposed on a strongly patterned area. The influence of French contemporaries is obvious.<sup>56</sup>

Langer sets herself apart from the general newspaper reading audience by confidently declaring that the influence of "French contemporaries is obvious". Because the annual exhibitions of the artists' groups provided many citizens with their only art experiences, the influence of the "French contemporaries" would not have been "obvious" to the majority of her readers. This is no longer a friendly chat about art between equals, as was the case with McKinnon. Because of her professional art training, Langer confidently assumed a didactic role, asserting the importance of the "primary colours [...] on a strongly patterned area" to the success of the painting. While Langer was asking her audience to look critically, rather than passively, at the work on show, many saw it simply as bias toward contemporary style to the detriment of traditionalist artists.<sup>57</sup> When reviewing the RQAS and HDGA exhibitions Langer rarely used artistic jargon, in deference to her general audience. However, by the time she was reviewing exhibitions of the Contemporary Art Society in the 1960s, Langer's reviews had assumed a much more educated tone. Langer was no longer writing for the amateur, but for the cognoscenti.

An important reason for the emergence of an educated discourse in art criticism was the increase in popularity of individual or small group shows that occurred as more professionally-run commercial galleries appeared on the scene. As shown in Chapter 2, both the Johnstone and Moreton galleries established continuous exhibition schedules and the art shows they hosted provided many more opportunities for writing reviews. As a result, a new, more sophisticated

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<sup>55</sup> The idea of the Half Dozen Group of Artists as a more contemporary group comes from the makeup of the initial membership. Ann Ross, Leonard Shillam and Rosalie Wilson all worked in the "modern" style. Also modernist artists of the calibre of Rah Fizelle and Margaret Preston exhibited with the group. See Chapter 5.

<sup>56</sup> Gertrude Langer, "Masterly and Sensitive Work," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 1, 1953.

<sup>57</sup> Frank Sherrin, "Art Critic Criticised," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 8, 1953.

stream of art criticism developed away from the artists' group exhibitions. The journey was not always smooth and Langer was often accused by Brisbane artists of foregrounding contemporary non-representational art to the detriment of the mimetic styles they generally favoured.<sup>58</sup> However, Langer's review of a Max Ragless exhibition at the Moreton Galleries in 1956 reflects her capacity as an art critic who appreciated excellence in art regardless of the style in which it is delivered. Ragless was a South Australian artist who exhibited regularly in Brisbane and throughout Australia. Langer was impressed:

It is in the oils that Ragless puts himself into the front rank of contemporary Australian landscape painters. Although there is enough realism to satisfy the more conventional taste, there is also enough formal abstraction and personal interpretation to make his work appealing to contemporary demands [...] [T]he basic structure of the picture is always firmly established.<sup>59</sup>

Ragless was far from being an experimental modernist like Nolan, but neither was his work simply mimetic. By stating that there is "enough realism" and "enough formal abstraction and personal interpretation", Langer signposts her respect for his creativity and clarifies for her readers that this is what art needed to be: a personal response to a given stimulus rather than a technical exercise in rendering a likeness. Langer's review of the exhibition included instructive information for the public that explained what might otherwise have been considered flaws in the paintings by the untrained. Such a phrase as "canvas exposed to provide sparkle" clarifies that this was not an unfinished work but the intentional use of a creative technique; "ridges of paint left by the firm brushstrokes" were explained as intentionally creating interesting effects on the surface of the painting rather than being evidence of poor brush technique; and the colours used by Ragless are "personal and particularly fresh" rather than being dull and imitative.<sup>60</sup> Unlike Elizabeth Webb, who often used an abrasive style of review to provoke a reaction, Langer was creating a knowledgeable, art aware public.

### **Dealing With the Modern in Art**

Dealing with the modern in art was a problem that beset critics around the world in the twentieth century. Providing a contemporary insight into how the new art was viewed is Arthur Danto's 1964 paper, "The Artworld". Danto addresses the negative attitudes toward the new art, in which artists relegated mimesis "to the periphery of critical concern". Arguing that these new art objects could only be considered to be art, if they were part of an art world,<sup>61</sup> Danto's position is consistent with

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<sup>58</sup> Frank Sherrin, letter to the editor, *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 8, 1953: 2; E. Lilian Pedersen, personal letter to T.C. Bray, September 5, 1962. (T.C. Bray was editor of the *Courier-Mail*).

<sup>59</sup> Gertrude Langer, "Ragless in Front Rank," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 20, 1956.

<sup>60</sup> Langer, "Ragless in Front Rank".

<sup>61</sup> Arthur Danto, "The Art World," *Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964), 571.

Gertrude Langer's belief, expressed above, that an art-work was not an imitation of reality, but a reality in itself. Art was undergoing transformation in Brisbane between 1940 and 1970 from a mimetic style grounded in impressionism, which was deemed by many artists and critics to be totally sufficient in the production of art, to a plethora of non-mimetic styles that seemed to have no relation to the world of art as they understood it.

Firmin McKinnon writing in 1940, for example, delights in the imitation of reality that was provided by William Bustard's group of seven (unnamed) oils in the RQAS exhibition, observing that:

The central picture is distinguished for its strikingly attractive composition, its drawing, and colour. It is a scene at the gateway of a charming garden with heavily foliated trees through which peeps a flowering jacaranda while in the foreground there is a bordering hedge of variegated shrubs and flowers.<sup>62</sup>

However, Elizabeth Webb, confronted by "non-imitations" (Danto's term) at the 1947 Miya Studio annual exhibition, could only see them as "perversions" or as the fraudulent expressions of pseudo-aesthetes:

Malformations of the human body are the subject of our pity, but some members of the Miya Studio have set out to glorify these atrocities and (sublime insult) actually affix a price to their efforts.

Others appear to be struggling for sincere expression, and one can only hope that these genuine art lovers can escape perversion at the hands of the pseudo aesthetics [*sic*] whose vision is already soured.<sup>63</sup>

Such attitudes might be taken to indicate the provinciality of Brisbane's art world, but Brisbane critics and audiences were not alone in their views. Howard Ashton, a Sydney artist/critic, suggested that artist Roland Wakelin painted "like that pork butcher of a painter that they call Cezanne".<sup>64</sup> In 1953, Owen M. Thomson, a Wahroonga reader of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, expressed his opinion of the modern work:

This new approach has gathered momentum through countless "isms" resulting in a hopeless mess which is altogether foreign to the basic sublime intentions of art.

This dictum of perverting expression has given us paintings that, no matter how deeply a person is gripped by sophistication, represent only the childlike droolings of unsettled people too lazy to overcome the technical aids of expression.<sup>65</sup>

Thomson's letter illustrates a common perception among audiences that a preference for the non-mimetic in art was linked to the artist's inability to produce a representational likeness. Danto suggests that the problem was world-wide, and that effective scholarship that would reposition the

<sup>62</sup> Firmin McKinnon, "Oils a Notable Feature," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 30, 1940.

<sup>63</sup> Elizabeth Webb, "Art and Pseudo-Art," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 24, 1947.

<sup>64</sup> Howard Ashton cited in Alan McCullough, "Criticism of an Era", 82.

<sup>65</sup> Owen M. Thomson, letter to the editor, *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney), March 4, 1953.

new art forms and render them understandable took some time to develop. In the meantime, critics such as Gertrude Langer tried to educate the art-loving public in the issues surrounding non-representational art. When she reviewed Nolan's *Drought* series showing at the Johnstone Gallery in 1953, Langer articulated many of the views that Danto would later propose:

Here is an artist who does not look upon the world with the eye of a photographic camera but lets it filter through the mind an original mind at that.

Nolan is concerned neither with the illusionistic rendering of appearances (a kind of art seen here ad nauseum [*sic*]) nor with empty pattern making.

His work is a visual harmony created out of a set of visual experiences, which he first jots down in sketches and notes before the final statement takes form in his mind.<sup>66</sup>

Dismissing the importance of photographic detail in determining if these works were in fact art, Langer suggests that the work is art because it has meaning conferred by having passed through the filters of Nolan's mind. Langer was intent on conveying to her audience the quality she saw in Nolan's work as he created "visual harmonies" out of a "set of visual experiences" rather than mimetically rendering appearances. Langer's review conjures a feeling of excitement at being in the presence of fine art, and it was through reviews such as this, that she attempted to stimulate and equip her Brisbane audience to begin their journey into understanding non-mimetic art.

The formation of the Queensland branch of the Contemporary Art Society (CAS) in 1962 gave Langer further opportunities to change the discourse about Brisbane art. She was happy to work with the group "to practise and promote the concepts and appreciation of modernism" through her reviews.<sup>67</sup> Langer valued the efforts of the CAS, citing their first exhibition as "the most interesting group exhibition by local painters held so far".<sup>68</sup> Maintaining her strict standards, the following year she rated the works as "barely average", but considered Roy Churcher's large abstract *Preconception*, as his best painting to date.<sup>69</sup> The vocabulary in this review is charged with art terminology as Langer assesses that Churcher, "with an impressive economy of means", has achieved a "convincing force", and the "large forms in tension have true livingness".<sup>70</sup> While her meaning is not instantly obvious, Langer's educated artistic discourse was assumed to be understood by her readers. Consider the language used in this excerpt from Langer's review of the 1969 CAS exhibition: "staggered, outlined modules fly diagonally through the white field and are intervalled in the right place by one painted dark".<sup>71</sup> Newspaper art criticism in Brisbane had come a long way since Firmin McKinnon declared that the highlights of the 1941 HDGA show were to be

<sup>66</sup> Gertrude Langer, "Visual Harmony," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 15, 1953.

<sup>67</sup> Helen Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects of the Contemporary Art Society Queensland Branch* (Brisbane: Boolarong, 1991), 42.

<sup>68</sup> Gertrude Langer, "Contemporary Art Body Puts on its First Show," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), April 21, 1962.

<sup>69</sup> Gertrude Langer, "Contemporary Art on Show," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), April 24, 1963.

<sup>70</sup> Langer, "Contemporary Art on Show".

<sup>71</sup> Gertrude Langer, "Right Paintings in the Right Place," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 2, 1969.

found in the “charming needlework pictures and designs of Miss Rosalie Wilson and the profoundly interesting carvings of Mr L. J. Harvey”.<sup>72</sup>

### **The Catalogue Essay**

The catalogue essay was the second most common form of art writing in Brisbane’s art world in the 1940s by dint of being an essential feature of the exhibition catalogue produced for the artists’ groups’ annual shows. Purchase of a catalogue doubled as the entry ticket to the exhibition. A catalogue comprised a catalogue essay or “foreword”, a list of exhibits by category (oils, watercolour, black and white, for example) with accompanying artist’s name, and the price of the work. The catalogue essay not only introduced the group, but also made a statement of the group’s aims and accomplishments. James Elkins suggests that the catalogue essay, because it is part of the process of making the exhibition a success, is typically congratulatory in tone and inevitably biased toward the works on show.<sup>73</sup> As Chairman of the RQAS, Dr J.V. Duhig, writing the catalogue essay for the 1943 RQAS exhibition, may have expressed some reservations about the “monotony of style, and especially content” that he saw in the work of RQAS artists and wistfully longed for them to be more modern in their approach to art, but he wrote:

I find our allied friends from U.S.A. so enthusiastic about the difference of our scene, and of our work from their background of vision and so excited by its freshness and vigour, that I turn to our artists’ work with a new vision and new faith and hope. We are not doing so badly after all [...] I commend this exhibition to the kind and generous consideration of the art-loving public of our allied friends of the U.S.A., and of Brisbane and Queensland generally.<sup>74</sup>

While Duhig settled for “not doing so badly”, the new chairman in 1947, Dr. H.A. Goldfinch, reminded patrons preparing to view the annual exhibition that for many years, the RQAS “had kept alive, and endeavoured to advance the cause of art in this State”.<sup>75</sup> With this congratulatory thought in mind, Goldsmith prepared audiences for works that might challenge their preconceptions:

True art is dynamic and changes its form from time to time, which is not always agreeable or acceptable. If such a style is unacceptable to the community in which it is developed, it is forgotten. The really good art lives on to enrich the culture of a future generation.<sup>76</sup>

This is the exhibition that was criticised by Elizabeth Webb for allowing the work of W.G. Grant to occupy hanging space. Goldfinch, by contrast, puts a forward-thinking view by asking the viewing

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<sup>72</sup> Firmin McKinnon, “Half Dozen Group’s Show”.

<sup>73</sup> James Elkins, *What Happened to Art Criticism?* (Chicago IL: Prickly Paradigm, 2003), 16.

<sup>74</sup> *RQAS 56th Annual Exhibition Exhibition Catalogue*.

<sup>75</sup> *RQAS 60th Annual Exhibition Exhibition Catalogue*.

<sup>76</sup> *RQAS 60th Annual Exhibition Exhibition Catalogue*.

audience to keep an open mind when viewing the exhibition, and using his essay to educate the audience that art was changing, and they could choose to be part of the change.

Catalogue essays written for the HDGA follow the same pattern of being polite and self-congratulatory, but Frank Sherrin's 1949 essay also acknowledges, as a reason for the promising changes to art, the greater depth of supports for artists now available through Brisbane's art world:

The time has passed when anything will do for Art lovers here. Too many fine exhibitions have been seen, and the influence of the Art Panels in Brisbane newspaper offices, the frequency of press Art notices, broadcasts, the better type of picture on the walls of friends' homes, the general boil-over from the cauldron of Art affairs—all these things make for a better standard of picture-making and a greater appreciation by the Public.<sup>77</sup>

The "Art Panels" Sherrin refers to were a 1946 initiative of the *Courier-Mail* where three moderately sized, original art works were displayed securely for a week at a time in the vestibule of the newspaper's building. Works by artists such as Arthur Streeton, Hans Heysen, Elioth Gruner, Sidney Nolan, and Elaine Haxton were shown in the panel after being loaned by their owners. Later, the *Telegraph* also instigated such a system, and because the newspaper offices were always extremely busy the Art Panels provided great exposure for art as part of everyday life. Sherrin's essay lists many of the physical changes that had increased Brisbane's cultural depth since the HDGA began in 1941, and reveals professional excitement that Brisbane artists and audiences have, as a result, become more discriminating. Although the essay is self-congratulatory about what has been achieved, it reveals that at that point, the HDGA had no clear vision of what the future might bring.

The catalogue essays of the RQAS and HDGA were written by artists and professional men with no literary pretensions and they rehashed old ideas. This changed when Laurence Collinson wrote the catalogue essay for the first Younger Artists' Group (YAG) exhibition in October 1945. Collinson was a leader of the youthful literary group *Barjai* that emerged in 1943 at Brisbane State High School. In 1945, he had been elected leader of the newly formed YAG and, as tradition demanded, he composed a short essay for the catalogue. This beautifully written essay integrates a vision of a future for Brisbane's art world in which modern artists will build on their past and not constantly relive it.<sup>78</sup> However, all conventional guidelines of the catalogue essay are ignored in the second paragraph where he launches a blistering attack on the state of Queensland art:

Queensland art today is practically sterile. Year after year after year the same pretty still lifes, the same pretty landscapes, the same pretty figure studies are disgorged in their hundreds. Technically pleasing many of these paintings are, but the ability to make a good representation of a natural object on canvas is no proof that the craftsman is also an artist. It would seem that the discoveries and rediscoveries in art over the past fifty years, the wars,

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<sup>77</sup> HDGA Annual Exhibition Catalogue 1949.

<sup>78</sup> Appendix 1.

the revolutions, the terrible events that have taken place in that time, have made little or no impression on our local painters: they are working with their eyes closed. But our local art lovers are equally at fault; they allow the printed drivel of our local “art-critics” to obscure, with few exceptions, their native judgement; they continue to view without protest, these mass-produced (what other word is there?) and pitiful objects.<sup>79</sup>

Collinson takes to task the entire system of art as it existed in Queensland: the artists who work “with their eyes closed” to mass produce the same “pretty” pictures year after year; the art-lovers who flock to the shows every year; and the critics whose “printed drivel” obscures the fact that the work is stale. The essay goes on to condemn the local art training institution, saying that the use of the term “art school” was unjustifiable. The essay was publicised by the press under the headline ‘Queensland Art Sterile’.<sup>80</sup>

Collinson wrote the foreword with the intention of sparking some kind of debate in local art circles about the state of Queensland art, but in this he was to be disappointed. Two letters relating to the incident were published in the “Reader’s Letters” section of the *Courier-Mail*, but neither addressed the aesthetic position espoused by Collinson; rather, it was the inadequacies of the young artist’s social conduct that raised the ire of readers.<sup>81</sup> The RQAS did not publicly comment on the controversy, and consequently no spirited dialogue that may have impacted on art attitudes in Brisbane ensued. Having failed in their challenge to the art system in place in Brisbane using the tool of art writing, the young artists behind the controversy moved quickly to establish an artists’ group, Miya Studio, totally independent of the RQAS, through which they could continue to push their ideas for a more relevant form of art for Brisbane.

### Small Art Magazines

A variety of magazines such as *Muses Magazine*, *Barjai*, *Australian Art News Bulletin*, and *Art News* were produced in Brisbane, but they were generally short-lived experiments. The art writing was in the form of an essay that was largely descriptive and subjective, reflecting the likes and dislikes of the writer. Whereas the *Muses Magazine* followed an older model of general magazines, *Barjai* can be claimed as one of the first examples operating on the model of the modernist little magazines to be published in Brisbane. Begun by senior students from Brisbane State High School in 1943, *Barjai: A Meeting Place for Youth* was produced as a simple roneoed journal that attempted to encourage discussion about literature and art.<sup>82</sup> The magazine was modelled on *Angry Penguins*, a surrealist poetry magazine founded in Melbourne by an eighteen year old Max Harris in

<sup>79</sup> Laurence Collinson, “Foreword,” *Younger Artists Group Annual Exhibition Catalogue*, 1945.

<sup>80</sup> “Queensland Art Sterile,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 29, 1945.

<sup>81</sup> June Vogarty, letter to the editor, *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 31, 1945.; Alice Bott, letter to the editor, *Courier-Mail*, November 1, 1945.

<sup>82</sup> *Barjai* was professionally printed after issue no. 12, dated from January 1944.

1940. *Barjai* was primarily a literary journal, but it also offered some nascent analytical art criticism articles from Barrett (Barrie) Reid and Cecel Knopke. Although defining himself as “having no pretensions to be an art critic”, Reid reviewed the first Younger Artists’ Group (YAG) exhibition, and emerged from the pages as Brisbane’s first modern art critic. Six artists – Laurence Collinson, Pamela Seeman, Laurence Hope, Joy Roggenkamp, Peter Abraham, and Peter Neylan – were singled out for inclusion in Reid’s review, and while his evaluation of the work of Laurence Hope shows how the modern critic may champion an artist to increase their reputation, it is the style that he has used to set his views before the public that is the hallmark of a good critic:

Laurence Hope is a “natural”, a very sensitive artist already expressing his peculiar vision in a competent way. There is little outside influence. One feels that this boy would have painted in exactly the same way in any country in any age. There is a splendid promise here and even much achievement.<sup>83</sup>

Unlike the descriptive reviews of the newspapers of that time, Reid writes with elegance and assurance, identifying in Hope’s work the individuality and timeless quality as the strengths of a true artist. Reid’s review offered great promise through its style and insights into the practising of art criticism in Brisbane, but sadly, Brisbane’s art world could not yet accommodate such a promising young art writer, and he left for Melbourne in 1951, becoming, along with Laurence Hope an integral part of that city’s art scene. Reid later developed a career as a poet, writer, and art critic. Reid’s review was published shortly before *Barjai* ceased publication in 1946.

Between 1948 and 1951, further attempts were made to develop some form of art journal for Brisbane. In 1948, John Cooper, owner of the Moreton Galleries, created *Australian Art News Bulletin* as a small booklet of ten pages containing reviews, gossip, essays, and advertisements from local artists about professional services and classes. Evidence of only one published issue has been found. Following an upsurge of interest in art in Brisbane in 1950,<sup>84</sup> the RQAS introduced a small magazine in 1951 entitled *Art News*. *Art News* was advertised as a “lavishly illustrated” journal providing articles of interest for those involved in the art world.<sup>85</sup> Content still resembled that of the older style model of magazines exemplified by *Muses Magazine*, with essays on topics such as landscape in art being included, but the magazine also contained articles on technical processes in the production of art. Advertising space was sold as a way of funding the magazine, but it seems that it became increasingly difficult to obtain because the *Art News* was directed toward such a small specialist market. Although *Art News* was sold through bookshops and artists’ supply shops, it was probably overpriced at 2/- and it also fell victim to the attempt to have sales pay for production. The rationale behind the production of *Art News* framed it as a cultural enterprise rather

<sup>83</sup> Barrett Reid, “The Younger Artists’ Group Exhibition,” *Barjai* November 1945, 9.

<sup>84</sup> “Hundreds of Dabblers: City Art Boom”, *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), December 9, 1949.

<sup>85</sup> “Book Review,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), April 28, 1951.



than an economic one, and because of unexpectedly high production costs and low sales, *Art News* ceased publication after only four issues.

Although not a commercial production, the Contemporary Art Society (CAS) initiated the CAS Broadsheet in 1962, as a forum where an individual's thoughts and ideas could be tested through publication.<sup>86</sup> Unfortunately, just as in other attempts to encourage a more in-depth form of art writing in Brisbane, early editors, including artists Andrew Sibley and Roy Churcher, and ABC journalist Tony Morphett, found it extremely difficult to initiate debate or to draw forth any written comments from members. Tony Morphett despaired: "if a Contemporary Art Society should be anything, it should be a battleground of ideas. Frontiers of any sort, whether intellectual or physical, are not notoriously peaceful places".<sup>87</sup> Nancy Underhill provided strong support for the CAS as the editor for the CAS Broadsheet in 1965, presenting well-articulated ideas and arguments designed to stimulate discussion about art.<sup>88</sup> Once again, it didn't work. As editor of the newsletter that replaced the broadsheet in 1966, John Dalton, an architect, invited members to submit "short incisive arguments, ideas, grunts and grouses" but, while much had changed in Brisbane's art world, the traditional reluctance of Brisbane artists to commit themselves to any debate on art remained. The CAS Broadsheet ceased publication when the affairs of the CAS were wound up in 1973. Unlike Sydney and Melbourne, where art became a battleground of ideas, artists and critics, artists in Brisbane had to get along in a small society.<sup>89</sup>

## Conclusion

The publications discussed in this chapter were set up in good faith as ways of improving the facilities for serious writers about art in Brisbane. Newspaper art criticism became the most successful form of art writing in Brisbane because the infrastructure of the newspaper, in the form of printing and circulation, was already well established. The independent specialist art publications that emerged had to establish their own networks of production and distribution, but the critical mass of institutional supports they needed to survive, such as art events, artists, artistic output, and even the audience needed to sustain a quality journal, was still not present in Brisbane.

Art writing is an important feature of a mature art world as it connects the ideas of artists with the expectations of the audience. The small size of the cultural pool that provided participants knowledgeable about art hindered the development of art writing in Brisbane, but over the years the expectations of Brisbane art audiences were sustained through the writings of McKinnon, Webb,

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<sup>86</sup> *CAS Broadsheet*, August 1962.

<sup>87</sup> *CAS Broadsheet*, August 1962.

<sup>88</sup> Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 47.

<sup>89</sup> William Hatherell, *The Third Metropolis: Imagining Brisbane through Art and Literature 1940-1970*. (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2007), 10.

and other art reviewers. With the emergence of Langer as a reviewer, Brisbane finally had a knowledgeable and articulate critic who took her audience on a journey of discovery of a world not confined to that of representational art. Using her newspaper column, Langer developed a sophisticated standard of art writing in the only public forum that was viable in Brisbane. With the increasing presence of modern contemporary art, competing ideas about art were prevalent throughout this period. The reviewers helped their readers negotiate their way through the popular and the experimental; the conservative and the radical; the imitative and the non-imitative. Although not written for posterity, newspaper art criticism remains the only form of discourse that remains as witness to the reception given to contemporary art produced in Brisbane between 1940 and 1970.

## Part Two

### Chapter 5

#### Encouraging Many: Royal Queensland Art Society and the Half Dozen Group of Artists

Art world participants think a large number of people, not just the very best, worth bothering about, for the practical reasons that you have to encourage many in order to find the few, and there is no telling when someone not worth bothering about will suddenly become worth it after all.<sup>1</sup>

Brisbane's self-organised network of artists and art institutions began with the formation of the Queensland Art Society (QAS) in 1887, and until the early 1970s, artists' groups assumed great responsibility in Brisbane's art world. The QAS encouraged many artists, amateur and professional, to participate in art activities in Brisbane, and in the process cultivated a more culturally dense environment that allowed great changes to take place. Through their annual exhibition, the QAS ensured the continuous production of new art-works, which in turn stimulated the growth of the art market and promoted art writing. As acknowledgement of its preeminent position within Brisbane's art system, the QAS sought and was granted a Royal Charter in 1926 and became known as the Royal Queensland Art Society (RQAS). However, at the height of its dominance, four of its members created a new artists' group that became known as the Half Dozen Group of Artists (HDGA) whose aim was to cater to the needs of professional artists in Brisbane. The RQAS and the HDGA shared a similar demographic, but their contrasting agendas of inclusiveness and exclusiveness complemented each other in the community, and both groups worked tirelessly to improve conditions for artists in Brisbane.

This chapter examines the RQAS and the HDGA as two nodes of the tightly knit artist network active in Brisbane in the 1940s. Both played an important role in organising the practices of production and dissemination of art. In an art world dominated by mature, amateur artists, I argue that the significance of the RQAS and HDGA lay in their commitment to the exhibition of art and innovations directed toward encouraging greater youthful participation in the visual arts. Young

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<sup>1</sup> Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 231.

artists had always been welcomed at the RQAS, but the introduction of discounted youth membership in 1941, and the establishment the Younger Artists' Group in 1945, opened greater exhibiting opportunities for young emerging artists of the calibre of Margaret Olley, Margaret Cilento, and John Rigby. The HDGA, also looking to support young artists, created a travelling scholarship scheme to support young artists wishing to undertake further study interstate or overseas. These actions provided the human impetus that propelled Brisbane's art world towards cultural maturity in the 1960s.

### **Formation of the QAS**

Prior to the formation of the QAS, art activities in Brisbane were undertaken on an individual basis. Drawing classes were offered at the School of Arts in Ann Street and fine art could be exhibited, along with the pumpkins and industrial exhibits, at the Queensland National Agriculture and Industrial Association's annual exhibition from 1876.<sup>2</sup> In 1881, Joseph Clarke's position as the Drawing Master at the School of Arts was the most prestigious fine-art appointment available in Brisbane. However, in 1883 three artists arrived separately in the colony: Isaac Walter Jenner, a self-taught professional artist from Brighton in England; Louis Wirth, a professional artist who had studied in England; and Oscar Friström, a self-taught Swedish artist. United through their common interest in art, the men were determined to develop cultural pursuits in the colony. As discussed in Chapter 3, their initial plan was to form a public art gallery but when that failed to eventuate, they turned their attention to the formation of an art society that would promote the exhibition and sale of local artworks.

Contrary to the expectations of the artists, Clarke was vehemently opposed to the formation of an organised group of artists for the purposes of exhibiting locally produced artwork suggesting:

I did my utmost to show that it was altogether premature to think of such a thing: that there were not a sufficient number of artists, whether amateur or professional, resident in or near Brisbane to furnish new and original work for the periodical exhibition and that therefore any attempt at the kind must fail.<sup>3</sup>

With Clarke firmly against the formation of an art society, the prospects for implementation of the plan looked bleak, but preliminary meetings for the proposed society were reportedly "well attended".<sup>4</sup> A working committee of nine was elected in August 1887, and the QAS was formally constituted as an independent, not-for-profit organisation.<sup>5</sup> Early records of the QAS were destroyed by fire in 1912, but it is fairly certain that the society was modelled on the "learned societies" that

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Maynard, Aspects of Taste: Fine Art Exhibitions in Brisbane 1876-1887, *John Oxley Journal* 1, no. 6 (1980), 16. [http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/eserv/UQ:243632/John\\_Oxley\\_Jnl\\_v1no6\\_1980\\_p16\\_p29.pdf](http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/eserv/UQ:243632/John_Oxley_Jnl_v1no6_1980_p16_p29.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> "The Queensland Art Society," *Brisbane Courier*, August 23, 1888.

<sup>4</sup> "The Brisbane Courier," *Brisbane Courier*, August 6, 1887

<sup>5</sup> "The Brisbane Courier".

had flourished in England from the seventeenth century. Learned societies were formed to “to encourage and promote” a particular branch of learning and encouraged a membership that provided an intellectual mixture of professionals and amateurs as well as wealthy dilettantes.<sup>6</sup> Dr J.V. Duhig, Chairman of the RQAS from 1937 to 1946, wrote, in 1949, of the RQAS as being a learned society.<sup>7</sup> The RQAS aimed “to encourage and promote the cultivation and appreciation of the fine arts, to extend the spirit of good fellowship among artists and all those interested in art and to hold annually one or more exhibitions of pictures and other objects of art”.<sup>8</sup> While Jenner’s reasons for setting up the QAS as a forum for the exchange of ideas about art seem quite altruistic, Julie Brown and Margaret Maynard suggest it was his desire for a regular commercial outlet for art through the provision of annual exhibitions for Brisbane artists that was the priority in founding the QAS.<sup>9</sup>

Jenner, Wirth, and Friström were outsiders, and they performed the function of “weak ties” by introducing the new idea of a social and professional group for art lovers. “Weak ties”, according to Granovetter, are those who form a link between “our” immediate social circle, and another circle of people who promulgate ideas different from our own.<sup>10</sup> Clarke represented the fixed ideas of an art establishment in Brisbane that saw the facilities for artists as adequate for the needs of the colony. By forming themselves into an influential consortium and forcing the formation of an artists’ group, the three artists were able to bring about changes in the way art was produced and consumed in Brisbane and to redirect the course of Brisbane’s art history. The QAS held its first exhibition in 1888, and Brisbane finally possessed an embryonic art world comprising three nodes of influence: an art educational facility, an art market, and an artists’ group.

Godfrey Rivers provided Brisbane’s developing art world with another weak tie, bringing the latest ideas from Sydney to the local art community.<sup>11</sup> Rivers introduced fashionable ideas of bohemianism from Sydney to Brisbane through his unconventional “at home” gatherings at his studio in the School of Arts grounds in the 1890s. Bohemianism referred to behaviour that was less formal than that accepted by society. At these gatherings, it was not unusual for influential citizens such as the Chief Justice to be served afternoon tea by River’s mother while Rivers conducted others through his studio to view his work.<sup>12</sup> Rivers exerted a powerful influence on local artists

<sup>6</sup> Royal Society of London, “History,” <http://royalsociety.org/about-us/history/> accessed May 5, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> J.V. Duhig, letter to H. A. Richardson dated May 22, 1949.

<sup>8</sup> RQAS Minute Book, Special General Meeting, September 19, 1949.

<sup>9</sup> Julie K. Brown and Margaret Maynard, *Fine Art Exhibitions in Brisbane 1884-1916* (Brisbane: Fryer Memorial Library, 1980), 185.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 6 (May 1973): 1375.

<sup>11</sup> La Quenouille, “Mr. R. Godfrey Rivers’s Studio,” *Brisbane Courier*, June 17, 1891.

<sup>12</sup> La Quenouille, “Mr. R. Godfrey Rivers’s Studio”.

and introduced a lyrical style of bush romanticism that became entrenched as the favoured style for Brisbane artists until the late 1940s.<sup>13</sup>

### **An Anachronism that Worked: The RQAS**

By 1940, although an anachronism from another age, the RQAS was still the dominant force in Brisbane's art world, recognised by both the government and citizens of Brisbane as Queensland's leading authority on art matters. Howard S Becker suggests that an important feature of an organised art world is that some "people are commonly seen by many or most interested parties as more entitled to speak on behalf of the art world than others".<sup>14</sup> This entitlement, Becker contends, stems from their being recognised by other participants in the art world simply "as the people entitled to do that".<sup>15</sup> In the art worlds of Sydney or Melbourne, this position was more generally occupied by the art museums, art dealers or even publishers like Sydney Ure Smith who, according to Carter, was able to use his influential magazine *Art in Australia* to create a public as well as a market for Australian art in Australia.<sup>16</sup> In Brisbane, the RQAS was recognised by the participants in its art world as being the entity entitled to act on their behalf. No other institution in Brisbane possessed the knowledge or expertise required to make informed comment about the state of the visual arts, and it therefore became the generally accepted prerogative of the Chairman of the RQAS, rather than the Trustees of QNAG, to act as the community spokesperson on matters pertaining to art.

The issues that exercised most consideration within the RQAS Council were those of membership and the annual exhibition. While membership is discussed here, the annual exhibitions are discussed in conjunction with those of the HDGA later in this chapter. The Council met monthly to oversee the day to day running of the RQAS, and nominations for positions were accepted from general members. Elections took place at the Annual General Meeting, held in March. Membership brought many benefits for artists such as being able to exhibit their work to attract patronage, but its intention was also to bring together like-minded people for art based activities be they life-drawing classes or art discussion groups. The aim of the RQAS is well summed up by an early member, G.M.H. Addison, who wrote in the catalogue essay for 1898 that the society would be "filled with

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<sup>13</sup> Bettina MacAulay, "Richard Godfrey Rivers, Private and Public Art," in *Art Off Centre: Placing Queensland Art*, ed. Glenn R. Cooke (Brisbane: Queensland Studies Centre, 1997), 81.

<sup>14</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 151.

<sup>15</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 151.

<sup>16</sup> David Carter, *Always Almost Modern: Australian Print Cultures and Modernity* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2013), 46.

members from unexpected quarters, who had long yearned for that mutual criticism and interchange of thought so necessary to progress in the painter's art".<sup>17</sup>

The RQAS received no government support and relied on annual membership subscriptions that were set at £1/1/- to fund its activities. While not cheap, membership was valued and remained consistent, averaging around 175, throughout the 1940s.<sup>18</sup> Junior memberships were first offered in 1941 with the annual subscription set at 5/-, and were available for young artists up to and including the age of twenty, who were members of a *bona fide* art class.<sup>19</sup> In the first year, nine juniors took up membership, but by 1945 it had grown to twenty-seven.<sup>20</sup> The introduction of junior memberships coincided with the emergence of the group of talented junior artists, including Margaret Olley, and was possibly implemented as an incentive to keep these artists working in Brisbane's art world, and more particularly, as members of the RQAS.

The process of gaining membership of the RQAS was not restrictive and no evidence has been found to suggest that membership was ever refused. A prospective member was required to write a formal letter of enquiry to the secretary giving details of their artistic interests, experience and the name of the RQAS member who was sponsoring them. For example, E. Lilian Pedersen sponsored Laurence Collinson's application for membership of the RQAS in 1944.<sup>21</sup> Election to membership took place at a monthly RQAS Council meeting, and the applicant was then advised by letter, and payment of the subscription was requested. The procedure was, in effect, a way of enhancing the aura of prestige and professionalism surrounding the RQAS, and those admitted to membership, whether amateur or professional, were seen by non-artists as being privy to specialised knowledge about the world of art. The RQAS represented largely amateur artists, but presented itself as a quasi-professional association charged with looking after the interests of all its members by providing a well-run exhibition.

As the leader of Brisbane's art world, the RQAS, through the formality of its management structure and involvement of Brisbane's cultural, intellectual, and social elite, inspired confidence in the general population that they were well served in art matters by the group. Governance of the RQAS was through an appointed Board of Trustees and an elected Council consisting of a Chairman, two vice-Chairmen, a Secretary, Treasurer, and six Council members. Until an internal dispute in 1949 that threatened to tear the RQAS apart, the position of Chairman was an appointment made by invitation from the Trustees to a person of "long standing and solid work for the society" or to an influential lay person with a significant interest in the visual arts. Duhig was

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<sup>17</sup> G.M.H. Addison, in *Thorns and Petals: 100 Years of the Royal Queensland Art Society* by Keith Bradbury and Glenn R. Cooke (Brisbane: Royal Queensland Art Society, 1988), 14.

<sup>18</sup> *RQAS Annual Report and Financial Statement 1945; RQAS Annual Report and Financial Statement 1947.*

<sup>19</sup> RQAS Archive.

<sup>20</sup> *RQAS Annual Report and Financial Statement 1945.*

<sup>21</sup> RQAS Archive.

appointed Chairman of the RQAS in 1937, and held the position until 1946. On the other hand, the three Trustees were appointed *in perpetua* by the Council to oversee the preservation of the Society's assets. The Trustees throughout the 1940s were Professor Robert Percy Cummings, Lewis Jarvis Harvey, and Duhig. Although the Trustees were not involved with the daily organisation of the group, they acted as adjudicators when required in internal disputes. When the entire RQAS Council resigned as a result of the 1949 internal dispute, the Trustees were required to step in to call fresh elections. Because the internal organisation of the RQAS precluded too much power residing with one individual, no one, including the Chairman, had the authority to do so.<sup>22</sup> The strength of the internal protocols that governed the RQAS allowed the group to survive with little outward sign of the turmoil that had engulfed it.

As Queensland's leading authority on art matters, the RQAS, and its Chairman in particular, enjoyed considerable prestige within the community in the 1940s, and Duhig epitomised the art society's ideal type of leader. Duhig, as an affluent medical practitioner, university lecturer, and art collector with a considerable personal art library, was a member of Brisbane's cultural and intellectual elite,<sup>23</sup> and his social position fortuitously brought the RQAS into closer contact with that section of Brisbane society possessing a concentration of disposable wealth, who were therefore more able and likely to act as patrons of the arts. Duhig, whether by choice or not, never became a Trustee of QNAG. Instead, he worked within the RQAS for the progression of art in Brisbane.

Duhig was an enthusiastic advocate for Brisbane art. After travelling to Europe in 1938, he returned eager to encourage the Trustees of QNAG to consider the collection of local Queensland art rather than building their collection with what he saw as second rate overseas art.<sup>24</sup> Suggesting that, as he had seen in Europe, "every [public] art gallery should make a collection of the contemporary art of its own nation", Duhig also pushed for the conservation of contemporary Queensland art throughout the 1940s as a member of the John Darnell Art Collection Committee (JDACC). Here, as we have seen, he had some success. While this was an admirable sentiment, Ian Burn suggests that the reality of peripheral art worlds, such as Brisbane's, is that cultural status is not conveyed by what an art world produces, but by its capacity to purchase and import art works from national or international sources.<sup>25</sup> This was the case with QNAG, which continued to favour

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<sup>22</sup> Henderson and Lahey (Solicitors), letter to Professor C. G. Cooper dated July 25, 1949.

<sup>23</sup> C.A.C. Leggett, "Duhig, James Vincent (1889-1963)", *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/duhig-james-vincent-6035>

<sup>24</sup> "Artists Ahead of Their Time: Plea for National Collections," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), April 7, 1938.

<sup>25</sup> Ian Burn, Ian, Nigel Lendon, Charles Merewether, and Ann Stephen, *The Necessity of Australian Art* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1988), 138.



British or European art in preference to Australian or local art, and approximately half the purchasing budget was still spent on European art.<sup>26</sup>

During his tenure as chairman, Duhig worked tirelessly to promote the RQAS and publicly raised issues connected to art at every opportunity. These matters included the importance of supporting local artists, the inadequacies of local art education, and the need for and the position of a new public art gallery. For example, in 1941, when art students brought the inadequacies of local art education to the attention of the general public through the *Sunday Mail*, it was to the RQAS that students turned for support. The headline, “Art Society’s Chief Support for Students”, promotes the entitlement of the art society to become involved in an art educational dispute. Suggesting that greater “consideration should be given to art training in the State” in an effort to retain the services of local artists within the community, Duhig was at pains to point out the leadership role of the RQAS in such an issue, where a special junior membership subscription had been recently introduced to encourage younger artists in the community to participate in the art society.<sup>27</sup>

Duhig returned to this theme in 1945, when speaking at the opening of an exhibition by Toowoomba born artist Douglas Annand. Revealing his understanding of the parlous state of art in Queensland, Duhig forcefully suggested that “Queensland’s cultural life could not be fully enriched while artists” left the state to gain recognition or a suitable education.<sup>28</sup> In the 200 word article “Culture Here Needs Boost” that followed the opening of Annand’s show, a mere four lines were devoted to the show itself while the remainder dealt with issues raised by Duhig that faced Brisbane artists and the art public, such as the need for a new art gallery, more creative art in schools, and improvements to the teaching methods at the CTC.<sup>29</sup> Later that same year, when Duhig opened the first Younger Artists’ Group show in October 1945, his comments suggest that the RQAS was working hard to enrich Brisbane’s cultural life through its support of young artists in a “show probably unique in Australia”.<sup>30</sup> Praising the work exhibited as “first rate stuff [...] with a laudable desire to get away from the conventional”, Duhig was obviously pleased with the result of the RQAS initiative.

Duhig’s immediate successor was Dr. Harry Goldfinch, a dentist, who was Chairman in 1947 and 1948. Professor C. Gordon Cooper, Professor of Classics at the University of Queensland, was appointed in 1949. None of these appointees, including Duhig, were artists, but they were interested in the arts and were prepared to offer their services for the promotion of art through the RQAS. A schism occurred in the membership of the Society in 1949, and Cooper resigned because

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<sup>26</sup> “Australian Art in Gallery,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), July 23, 1940.

<sup>27</sup> “Art Society Chief’s Support for Students,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane) November 19, 1941.

<sup>28</sup> “Culture Here Needs Boost,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 9, 1945.

<sup>29</sup> “Culture Here Needs Boost”.

<sup>30</sup> “Unusual Art Exhibition By Young Group,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 30, 1945.

of ill health. From that time, as the Society restructured itself, leadership procedures were changed to incorporate an elected President. The first elected President of the RQAS was Clare Mowbray Butler Van Homrigh (commonly referred to as C.M.B. Van Homrigh or simply Van<sup>31</sup>), the director of art education at the Teachers' Training College. As an artist educator, Van Homrigh was intimately connected with the world of art production, and was able to restore harmony at the RQAS. His election represents the end of an era where art dilettantes performed a service as the leaders of Brisbane's art world. It also represents the beginning of a new era where, rather than consulting the Chairman of the RQAS on matters concerning art, professionally qualified personalities including John Cooper (director of Moreton Galleries from 1946), Robert Campbell (first Director of QNAG from 1949), and Brian Johnstone (director of Johnstone Gallery 1951), were being sought out to comment on art matters in Brisbane. In the professional art world that Brisbane was becoming, the importance formerly attached to the position of RQAS Chairman began to wane.

### **The Half Dozen Group of Artists**

When Rivers left the city in 1915, the bush romanticism style of art that he had promoted remained as Brisbane's art legacy, and a period of stagnation ensued until 1941 when E. Lilian Pedersen, another outsider and another weak tie, initiated moves to form an artists' group for professional artists in Brisbane. English born artist Pedersen trained at the Manchester College of Art (1915-1918), married a Queensland pastoralist in 1921, before moving to Central Queensland.<sup>32</sup>

Relocating to Brisbane in 1937 to update her art skills at the CTC, Pedersen was appalled to discover that the RQAS annual exhibition and a rare solo show were all that were offered to artists and the art loving public. Pedersen reasoned that with Brisbane's population having grown to over 350,000, a large enough base of potential patrons existed to support more than one annual exhibition. Her feeling was that the provision of a single group exhibition each year was hampering the professional development of Brisbane's artists, and she set about making her vision of a local professional artists' group a reality.

Pedersen, while only a general member of the RQAS, canvassed support from within the RQAS for the formation of a new group and was given a commitment by six artists, including 1941 RQAS Council members, Frank Sherrin and Mona Elliott. Although Sherrin's foreword in the 1946 HDGA exhibition catalogue indicates that interest in the new group was initially quite limited and only four artists attended the first meeting, the group became a reality and provides a classic example of a breakaway artists' group. According to Raymond Williams, breakaway groups are

<sup>31</sup> Jeff Shaw, colleague of C.M.B. Van Homrigh in 1969, conversation with author, June 29, 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Glenn R. Cooke, "Ella Lilian Pedersen," *Design and Art Australia Online*, <http://www.daa.org.au/bio/ella-lilian-pedersen/biography/>

likely to form when “dissatisfaction with the parent body can only be resolved by action”.<sup>33</sup> The artists who formed the HDGA were not only dissatisfied with the provision of just one exhibiting opportunity for artists in Brisbane each year; they felt that artists in the city needed to be recognised as professionals. The group, the Half Dozen Group of Artists (HDGA) was duly formed as Brisbane’s first artists’ group for professional artists, with the first minuted meeting taking place on April 9, 1941 in the RQAS rooms at Harris Court in George Street.<sup>34</sup>

The artists who formed the HDGA were an unlikely combination to create a group. The *Telegraph*’s review of the group’s first exhibition revealed that, of the founders, Mona Elliott painted still life subjects and Frank Sherrin painted landscapes; Rosalie Wilson was skilled in art needlework, creating original designs using Aboriginal and wartime motifs; Pedersen was best known as a book illuminator, but she was also a book binder, hand weaver and an accomplished painter; Anne Ross showed modernist decorative panels; while Leonard Shillam was a modernist sculptor.<sup>35</sup> This eclectic membership mix was soon joined by Lewis Jarvis Harvey, a noted woodcarver and potter, as well as James Wieneke and Roy Dalgarno, both respected local painters. The HDGA held its first exhibition in September 1941. Ten artists, including former Brisbane artist Lloyd Rees, exhibited work. The modernist work of Wilson, Ross, and Shillam suggested the group was moving in a more contemporary direction. “M. de V. G.”, the critic at the *Telegraph* wrote that Shillam’s semi-abstract sculpture, *Horse*, “could be fully appreciated without associating oneself entirely with the tenets of ‘abstraction in art’”,<sup>36</sup> but the group settled into a familiar conservative tradition of production. Ten artists exhibited in their first exhibition and by the end of their first year, membership of the HDGA had reached thirteen.<sup>37</sup>

The most obvious difference between the HDGA and the RQAS was in their external relations with Brisbane’s art world. The RQAS was an artists’ group for all who were interested in art. The HDGA, as part of its fresh and modern outlook for Brisbane art, designated itself as a group for professional artists, and, in the manner of the Royal Academy (RA), membership was by invitation only. This aim set values of exclusivity and prestige for the group and allowed it to grow, not as a competitor of the RQAS, but as a group that complemented the actions of the largely amateur RQAS. Brisbane had very few artists who were considered to be professional, but the boundaries of professionalism form a contested area in art worlds. The generally accepted view of a professional artist in today’s art world is of a participant who has passed through a series of events

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<sup>33</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), 64-65.

<sup>34</sup> HDGA Minutes April 9, 1941.

<sup>35</sup> M. de V. G., “Half Dozen Group Art Exhibition,” *Telegraph* (Brisbane), September 3, 1941.

<sup>36</sup> M. de V. G., “Half Dozen Group Art Exhibition”.

<sup>37</sup> HDGA Minute Book.

or markers such as education to master knowledge and skills applicable to their craft.<sup>38</sup> However, previous markers of professionalism as an artist have included experience, or a condition of making a living solely from art or art-related activities. The cultural thinness of Brisbane's art world in the 1940s meant that there were few employment opportunities to sustain professional artists, and most were in fact "Sunday painters".<sup>39</sup> For example, Frank Sherrin, President of the HDGA for much of the 1940s, spent his days working in the Postmaster General's Department, but on weekends would embark on sketching and painting trips with other Brisbane artists.<sup>40</sup> What constituted a "professional" artist in the terms of reference of the HDGA is open to conjecture, but it seems they followed other conservative elements in Australian art, outlined by Haese, that held to the belief that artists became "good artists" through years of experience as exhibitors.<sup>41</sup> Therefore the criterion of professionalism the HDGA applied to membership is best regarded as requiring that an artist be an established rather than an emerging artist. A number of artists, synonymous with the Brisbane art scene in the 1940s, such as William Bustard, and Charles Lancaster, who fit this criterion were never invited to join the group, while Vida Lahey, although asked to join, does not appear on exhibitor's lists.

A lack of local professional artists was circumvented by recruiting professional artist members from interstate.<sup>42</sup> Discussion took place regularly at HDGA meetings as to which artists, local or interstate, should be approached regarding invitational membership.<sup>43</sup> Lloyd Rees, a former Brisbane artist, and Margaret Preston, both of whom were well-regarded in Australia's art world, were the first interstate artists to join the HDGA. Initially, the small membership was of concern for the survival of the group, but in 1947, when it was felt that the group was becoming too large and unwieldy, the decision was taken to cap membership at 37. This decision was prompted by membership figures in 1946 that showed the group as having 34 members, 16 of whom came from interstate.<sup>44</sup> Although the presence of interstate artists could have been counter-productive to an aim of strengthening the Brisbane art world, the HDGA felt that reaching out to the wider Australian art world in order to improve the quality of Brisbane's art was important. However, it does raise questions concerning how Brisbane art was valued, suggesting that culturally, Brisbane's art remained primarily of value to Brisbane, while the cultural value of art produced in Sydney or Melbourne was able to transcend state boundaries by being included in local art shows as a way of

<sup>38</sup> Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), xi.

<sup>39</sup> "Sunday painter", Dictionary.com. *Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition*. HarperCollins Publishers. [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sunday painter](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sunday+painter) (accessed: August 04, 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Glenn R. Cooke, "Francis Clinton Sherrin," *Design and Art Australia Online* <http://www.daa.org.au/bio/frank-sherrin/biography/>

<sup>41</sup> Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art* (Melbourne: Penguin 1988), 10.

<sup>42</sup> HDGA Minute Book, 16 Dec. 1942.

<sup>43</sup> HDGA Minute Book.

<sup>44</sup> HDGA Minute Book.

raising the standards.<sup>45</sup> The interstate artists took little interest in Brisbane's art world, with few visiting the exhibitions, and in reality, they viewed membership of the HDGA as just another exhibiting opportunity. Reaching out to Australia's wider art community did not provide a solution to Brisbane's perceived position as an art backwater, because the supports needed to encourage significant change were not present in its 1940s art world.

The internal organisation of the HDGA was modelled on that of the RQAS, but informality characterised the running of the group. Despite the fact that there were only six members at the outset of the HDGA, the group chose to adopt a management system consisting of an elected Executive Committee with a Chairman, vice-Chairman, Secretary/Treasurer and Council. Mona Elliott was elected as the first President, and Pedersen took the role of Secretary/Treasurer, a position she held until 1972. From April to December 1941, only four meetings were held, in part because of a lack of a meeting place, but also because HDGA executive members socialised regularly at the RQAS monthly meetings.<sup>46</sup> A more regular meeting schedule developed when potter and wood-carver Lewis Jarvis Harvey joined the group late in 1941, and offered his studio as a suitable meeting venue. Although the irregularity of meetings is contra-intuitive to the workings of a professional organisation, these were friends as well as colleagues working for the common good, without the hierarchy within the group being unduly stressed. In 1947, as the group grew, founding members retained their status and were deemed to be part of the Committee *in perpetua*.<sup>47</sup>

The HDGA had no need of powerful Trustees to protect their interests and assets, but it sought to validate its importance in Brisbane's art world by appointing influential people to the figurehead positions of Patron. The choice of Patrons reinforced the patterns of strong ties and interconnectedness that characterised Brisbane's art world with J.V. Duhig agreeing to act as one Patron (while also maintaining commitments as Chairman and Trustee of the RQAS). Little is known of the other Patrons, Mrs Prudence E. Allen and Mr G.H. Loch from "Loch Harbour", a pastoralist neighbour of the Pedersens in the St Lawrence district,<sup>48</sup> but, as has already been noted, it is important in the art world to make connections with those members of a society that have either money or social influence, and in all probability the HDGA chose its Patrons for their social or financial links in the community.<sup>49</sup> As a final internal consolidation of their status as an important artists' group in Brisbane's art world, the HDGA was granted Vice-Regal patronage in 1946.

The most important of the rules set by the HDGA at their first meeting was to hold an annual exhibition of members' work with the specified aim of selling art-works.<sup>50</sup> The art produced

<sup>45</sup> Burn, *Necessity for Australian Art*, 136.

<sup>46</sup> HDGA Minute Book.

<sup>47</sup> HDGA Minute Book.

<sup>48</sup> HDGA Minute Book.

<sup>49</sup> Christopher Heathcote, *A Quiet Revolution: The Rise of Australian Art 1946-1968* (Melbourne: Text, 1995), 168.

<sup>50</sup> HDGA Minute Book, April 9, 1941.

for this exhibition was expected to be of “National Gallery standards”, which was the level to which RQAS artists also aspired. There is no evidence to suggest that QNAG imposed such standards, and the concept was open to interpretation by both the artists and the exhibition selection committee of the group. It is taken to mean that works must not be copied and must be of a high technical standard to be considered for acceptance. Another interesting aim of the group was to develop, where possible, the use of Australian materials and designs.<sup>51</sup> The work of Margaret Preston, with her passion for Australian motifs, was much admired by the group and Preston accepted membership in 1942. The final aim of the group was to promote a wider outlook and understanding of individual methods of expression. Initially the wording of asked for “tolerance” rather than understanding but was amended at the first meeting.<sup>52</sup> There is little evidence to suggest that the group actively promoted contemporary forms of art in accordance with this aim, and, in 1962, Pedersen wrote to Mr Theodor Charles Bray, editor of the *Courier-Mail*, requesting that the complementary art review “be dispensed with because of the bias of your critic [Gertrude Langer] who sees virtue only in works in the contemporary style”.<sup>53</sup> Tensions between the group and Gertrude Langer had been growing for some time with Pedersen suggesting as early as 1955:

We deplore the fact that she tends to ignore the other schools of expression that are followed in Queensland. Not only does she disparage many Queensland painters, but misleads the general public into believing that a particular form of art, which she favours, is better because it belongs to that school, than this other, [sic] better known form, followed by Queensland painters.<sup>54</sup>

Langer’s credentials as an art reviewer have been established in Chapter 3. She felt that the HDGA and RQAS annual exhibitions were bastions of mediocrity in art and struggled to make positive statements in her reviews. In Pedersen’s own word, “no doubt all of this is part of the evolution of art in Queensland, ultimate good must come, stagnation can only spell oblivion”.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Annual Exhibition**

With expertise accumulated through fifty years of experience, the RQAS represented the greatest reservoir of knowledge on art matters in Brisbane’s art world in 1940. When it was joined by the HDGA in 1941, the annual exhibitions of the two groups provided the focal points for Brisbane’s art world well into the 1950s. This is an aspect shared with art societies in other parts of Australia, as Heather Johnson claims that the exhibitions of the Royal Art Society and the Society of Artists in Sydney, for example, remained as the highlights of the Sydney art calendar until the mid-1950s.<sup>56</sup>It

<sup>51</sup> HDGA Minute Book, April 9, 1941.

<sup>52</sup> HDGA Minute Book, April 9, 1941.

<sup>53</sup> E. Lilian Pedersen, letter to T.C. Bray dated September 5, 1962.

<sup>54</sup> E. Lilian Pedersen, letter to RQAS dated June 17, 1955.

<sup>55</sup> E. Lilian Pedersen, letter to Robert Campbell dated October 12 1949.

<sup>56</sup> Heather Johnson, *The Sydney Art Patronage System 1890-1940* (Sydney: Bungoona, 1997), 39.

has already been seen that artists there often held their best works for the large group exhibitions rather than consigning them to individual galleries. Similarly, the RQAS and HDGA continued to be the focus of Brisbane's art scene throughout the 1940s. The exhibition catalogues reveal that approximately half the members of the RQAS exhibited annually, while most members of the HDGA exhibited, especially in the early years. Members of the RQAS were entitled to enter up to six works each, but, because of the small size of the group, no restrictions were placed by the HDGA until 1947. The annual exhibition offered the opportunity for a great number of artists to display their works, which was most important in attracting the attention of patrons, including buyers from the public galleries.

Both the RQAS and the HDGA were catholic in their tastes, and placed no restrictions on style: those members who wished to enter experimental art were free to do so. For example, in 1939, the RQAS exhibition featured what was referred to in the *Courier-Mail* as a "puzzle picture" by Gerald Ryan.<sup>57</sup> Entitled *Broken Spirits*, Ryan's painting of a woman sitting at a table drinking wine, shows knowledge and a superficial influence, but not an understanding, of the figurative works of French artist Fernand Léger, whose personalised cubist style was developed in Europe between 1914 and 1920. It is also possible that Ryan's painting was inspired by the exhibition of *British and French Contemporary Art* that was shown at QNAG in 1939, which included works by Braque and Picasso.<sup>58</sup> Whatever the reason for the work, it shows that there were progressive thinkers in Brisbane's art world who struggled to understand new ideas that were presented in isolation in a travelling exhibition.

The annual exhibitions of the RQAS were large, but well-staged and quite professional in their organisation. Consistently, throughout the 1940s, the RQAS annual exhibition exhibited an average of around 240 works per show. While membership entitled all members to submit six works for hanging in the annual exhibition, figures obtained from the *RQAS Annual Report and Financial Statement 1946*, indicate that for the 1945 show, out of a total of 171 members 71 entered over 400 works, of which 237 were hung.<sup>59</sup> Of these works, a total of 64 were sold on behalf of 30 artists. Seven of these paintings were purchased by QNAG, and six by the Teachers' Training College, leaving 51 paintings sold to local collectors.<sup>60</sup> The report also indicates the RQAS was well pleased with the result as sales totalled £740/ 13/-.<sup>61</sup> Sales at the HDGA exhibition in the same year, which featured 55 works, show that 18 out of 31 members realised sales totalling £321/6/10.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Gerald Ryan, "Puzzle Picture", *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 11, 1939.

<sup>58</sup> *British and French Contemporary Art*, Exhibition Catalogue, 1939.

<sup>59</sup> *RQAS Annual Report and Financial Statement 1946*.

<sup>60</sup> *RQAS Annual Report and Financial statement 1946*.

<sup>61</sup> *RQAS Annual Report and Financial Statement 1946*.

<sup>62</sup> *HDGA Financial Report 1946*.

For the HDGA to have credibility in the eyes of the art loving public as an artists' group, it was important, from the beginning, to present itself as the equal of the RQAS. For this reason, the HDGA exhibitions were as comprehensive as possible and held in the same large venues as for the RQAS. With only ten exhibitors for the first exhibition (compared with 56 from the RQAS),<sup>63</sup> the HDGA relied on their artists to enter as many works as possible. For instance, in the 1941 exhibition, Mona Elliott contributed twenty-two paintings, L.J. Harvey contributed forty works of woodcarving and pottery, and Frank Sherrin exhibited a total of sixteen oil paintings.<sup>64</sup> The first exhibition of the HDGA was described as "most artistically arranged, hand-woven curtains lending a charming and homely touch to the display of about 90 pictures, 50 carvings, four hand-lettered books, illuminated poems, dainty book-bindings, [and] some exquisite designs in stitchery".<sup>65</sup> Mona Elliott was the most successful exhibitor making sales of £34/19/5.<sup>66</sup> Leonard Shillam was the only artist to not make a sale in the total of £123/1/9.<sup>67</sup> By way of comparison, at the RQAS exhibition of 1941, sales of 32 pictures totalled £193/4/-.<sup>68</sup> These figures suggest that Pedersen's belief that Brisbane's art world could sustain the presence of two artists' groups had been upheld.

Rules for exhibition at both the RQAS and HDGA stated that works entered, as has been noted earlier, were expected to reach "National Gallery Standards" to qualify for exhibition, but also they could not have been previously exhibited in Queensland.<sup>69</sup> This additional proviso encouraged greater production of original art in both groups, and ensured that artists with dual membership of both the RQAS and HDGA could not exhibit the same works in both exhibitions. Artists who exhibited in both RQAS and HDGA exhibitions in 1941 include James Weineke, Doreen Harris, Mona Elliott, L.J. Harvey, Frank Sherrin, and E. Lilian Pedersen.

The use of a selection committee of three elected from the RQAS Council maintained a professional quality in the RQAS exhibition, and artists such as Bustard, Lancaster, Hobday, Weineke, Pedersen, Patricia Prentice, Caroline Barker, and Vera Leichney regularly appeared as selectors throughout the 1940s. Although the RQAS was run along inclusionary lines for both artists and dilettantes, artists, the society considered, were the only legitimate guardians of quality in painting by virtue of their special aesthetic sensibilities and artistic awareness of the formal principles on which the production of art was based.<sup>70</sup> The selection committee therefore came from the ranks of exhibiting artists. A selection committee was not employed at the HDGA until 1947,

<sup>63</sup> *RQAS Annual Report and Financial Statement 1941*.

<sup>64</sup> Firmin McKinnon, "Half Dozen Group's' Art Show Varied and Interesting," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 4, 1941.

<sup>65</sup> McKinnon, "Half Dozen Group's' Art Show".

<sup>66</sup> HDGA Cash Book, 1941.

<sup>67</sup> HDGA Cash Book, 1941.

<sup>68</sup> *RQAS Annual Report and Financial Statement 1941*.

<sup>69</sup> HDGA Rules, 1943. ; RQAS Rules, 1943.

<sup>70</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 48.



when membership reached 34. No figures are given in the Annual Reports of the HDGA as to the number of entries received or shown. However, with the introduction of a selection committee, the Minutes record that the group felt that the coherence of their exhibition was greatly improved as a result.

Just how crucial the selection committee's work was to the success of the exhibitions, is well-expressed by the *Sydney Morning Herald* art critic (unnamed) who noted that "without careful composition, without ruthless rejection of paintings [...] a show like this must become injurious to all paintings".<sup>71</sup> Paul Grano, art critic of the *Courier-Mail*, concurred with these sentiments when reviewing the RQAS annual exhibition for 1950 when he wondered "if the art society is doing any good for art by encouraging its members' publicity [*sic*] to display their worthy failures".<sup>72</sup> Selection committees were effective only when they made the difficult decisions in defining the boundaries of acceptable art as Warwick Lawrence observed when reviewing the 1951 HDGA exhibition:

As so often happens in shows of this kind where representation is given to the work of as many members as possible, the selection committee must find it hard to use its pruning shears.

**And this show would have been all the better for a little judicious and solid pruning.** [Original bold].<sup>73</sup>

There is little doubt that the large artists' group exhibitions, featuring members' works of widely varying quality and displaying a diverse range of styles, subjects, and media, often presented a confusion of ideas to the viewer.

Nevertheless, reviews from the early 1940s provided affirmation for the artists' groups that they were making a valuable contribution to Brisbane's artistic development by providing exhibitions that were full of interest and variety. While the RQAS exhibitions may have struggled with the wide range of subjects and levels of ability in the exhibits, the HDGA had to contend with the presentation of many forms of art as well, such as in the 1942 exhibition:

The display is not quite as strong in paintings as that of last year, but the pictures with the Chinese art (consisting of ceramics and needlework) [the Chinese art on show was on loan], and the sale exhibits of woodcarving, modelling, pottery, hand-loom weaving, hand block printed fabrics, illuminated lettering, and art needlework, make up a delightful exhibition.<sup>74</sup>

Many of the techniques listed in this *Courier-Mail* article on the HDGA show were not considered to be, in fact, fine art. However, as the artists exhibited their works on the grounds of style rather than replication, the HDGA saw itself as a modern, contemporary artists' group, embracing many

<sup>71</sup> "Society of Artists Exhibition," *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney), August 23, 1945.

<sup>72</sup> Paul Grano, "Low Standard of Paintings," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane) August 22, 1950.

<sup>73</sup> Warwick Lawrence, "Busy Half Dozen Group," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), May 15, 1951.

<sup>74</sup> "Half-Dozen Group's Art Display," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 3, 1942.

art styles. The HDGA never intended to be Brisbane's response to the spread of modernism, or to the formation of Contemporary Art Societies (CAS) that were burgeoning in the Southern states. What the HDGA wanted was to assist in the development of Brisbane's art world by providing artists with more opportunities to exhibit.

The RQAS believed in supporting all artists, rather than just the "very best", as a way of encouraging the progression of art, and exhibitions were arranged on egalitarian grounds with every work hung being deemed worthy of its place.<sup>75</sup> However, criticism was levelled against the RQAS selection/hanging committee in 1943 when Cecel Knopke noted that "year after year, the same artists are given the most advantageous positions".<sup>76</sup> Allocating the most advantageous position for sales was always a financial decision rather than one of aesthetics. Artists such as William Bustard or Charles Lancaster were given the preferred positions in the RQAS exhibitions because they sold well and, ultimately, the object of the exhibition was to produce sales that supported the groups as well as the artists. The Sydney exhibitions of the Royal Art Society and the Society of Artists were not arranged with the egalitarian ideology that characterised the Brisbane exhibitions, and the exhibitions in Sydney increasingly became simply showcase exhibitions of the better known artists.<sup>77</sup> The annual exhibitions of the RQAS and the HDGA marked the only opportunities many Brisbane artists had to recoup their costs through selling their work, and the work that was exhibited was that which met the needs and expectations of a still relatively unsophisticated audience.

Increased exhibiting opportunities may have done little to improve the standard of work in Brisbane's exhibitions, but there is nothing to suggest that the standard of works being exhibited at the RQAS and HDGA exhibitions was declining toward the end of the decade. However, a discernible change of attitude toward their exhibitions did exist as was shown by the art reviews discussed in Chapter 4. Because a new and more sophisticated audience was emerging from the scene generated through the development of the smaller commercial galleries, and greater educational opportunities in the 1950s, the large artists' group exhibitions were no longer the focal points of Brisbane's art calendar.

### **Innovations**

Generational change was identified by both the RQAS and the HDGA as the future of Brisbane's art world. Many active members of the 1940 RQAS Council were members of long standing, with Percy Stanhope Hobday first serving on the Council in 1917, Charles Lancaster (1921), Jeanettie Sheldon and William Bustard (1922), and Frank Sherrin (1927), being some of the most experienced. Although he was one of the longest serving members of the RQAS Council, Hobday, a

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<sup>75</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 231.

<sup>76</sup> Cecel Knopke, "RQAS Exhibition Review", *Barjai* 2, (1943), 9.

<sup>77</sup> Johnson, *Sydney Art Patronage*, 43.

well-respected local artist/teacher, had very progressive ideas on the need for art to reflect the ideas of the society in which it was produced. The modern style of art met with substantial opposition in Brisbane in the 1930s, and Hobday was critical of a failure to grasp that a changing social environment was the base of modern ideas in art.<sup>78</sup> As an artist/teacher, he recognised that a core group of talented junior artists were present in Brisbane in the early 1940s including John Rigby, Joy Roggenkamp, Peter Neylan, and Peter Abraham, while another artist/teacher and RQAS member Caroline Barker was teaching Margaret Olley and Margaret Cilento at Somerville House. An understandable desire to keep these artists active in Brisbane prompted the idea of offering discounted memberships to artists under the age of twenty, who were enrolled in a *bona-fide* art class.<sup>79</sup> This scheme was put in place in 1941 with nine junior members including Margaret Olley, Margaret Cilento, Patricia Prentice, and John Rigby signing up.<sup>80</sup> Junior membership gave the young artists the same rights, privileges and responsibilities to the RQAS as the senior members enjoyed. They were allowed to enter the annual exhibition, but to do so they competed directly with senior artists before the selection committee. A number of the junior artists made it through this process each year. Junior membership proved to be a popular innovation with numbers averaging around thirty annually.<sup>81</sup>

In the 1930s and 1940s, conservative elements in Australian art held fixed ideas about what made “good art” and “good artists”.<sup>82</sup> Richard Haese suggests the prevailing belief within conservative art forces was that a “good artist was one who served a lengthy apprenticeship in the groves of academe” developing the technical skills that would allow them eventually to become “good artists”.<sup>83</sup> The RQAS saw itself, in lieu of the CTC, as providing the “groves of academe” where junior artists from the age of fourteen could serve their apprenticeship to become recognised as artists. Junior memberships were seen not only as a way to encourage more youthful participation in art, but also as a way of inculcating existing knowledge, ideals, and values that the RQAS wished to preserve and pass on to a new generation.

With junior memberships hovering around thirty by mid-decade, the RQAS could be well pleased with junior membership as successful and popular innovation.<sup>84</sup> As a result, the RQAS took the scheme one step further and in 1945, at Council and general meetings, formally constituted, in accordance with RQAS by-laws, an autonomous group for young artists to be known as the

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<sup>78</sup> Keith Bradbury and Glenn R. Cooke, *Thorns and Petals: 100 Years of the Royal Queensland Art Society* (Brisbane: Royal Queensland Art Society, 1988), 45.

<sup>79</sup> Jim Crawford Archive, Fryer Library, Brisbane.

<sup>80</sup> RQAS *Exhibition catalogues 1941, 1943, 1944*.

<sup>81</sup> RQAS *Annual Report and Financial Statements*, various from 1940s.

<sup>82</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 10.

<sup>83</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 10.

<sup>84</sup> RQAS *Annual Report and Financial Statement 1946*.

Younger Artists' Group (YAG).<sup>85</sup> Complete with their own elected Executive and Council, YAG held their first exhibition at the conclusion of the senior show in 1945. The immediate results of the formation of the group were not what the RQAS anticipated, and older members, such as Jeanette Sheldon, questioned the wisdom of the innovation, asking "have the youngsters taken over full control or just waiting the opportunity to do so?"<sup>86</sup> Rebellious tendencies had emerged from within the group and these are discussed fully in Chapter 6. Duhig recognised that Brisbane's art world had not yet reached a position where the training of young artists was sufficient to retain their talents locally, but the offer of "a group of their own", with its own exhibition, was a supportive inducement for the young artists to stay.<sup>87</sup> Although Olley, Cilento, and Rigby all left Brisbane to pursue their studies elsewhere, they returned as mature artists to support the local art world.

While the RQAS chose to give their young artists more exhibiting opportunities as a way of achieving professional improvement, the HDGA chose education as their vehicle for encouraging youth. In December 1943, the HDGA established the "Half Dozen Group of Artists Junior Art Scholarship", valued at £25.<sup>88</sup> Although it seems a pittance now, the scholarship would provide "one year's tuition with a recognised art teacher" while a further £10 would be added for the purchase of artist's materials.<sup>89</sup> Candidates were required to sit for an examination in freehand drawing, drawing of common objects, memory drawing, and imaginative drawing.<sup>90</sup> The scholarship was won in 1945 by Heather Broadbent with honourable mentions given to Ann Cotton and Joy Roggenkamp.<sup>91</sup> The HDGA scholarship was a very practical solution to assist junior artists by improving their art education, and the idea received strong validation from the respected women's group, the Queensland Wattle League, founded in 1912.<sup>92</sup> When closing down their art scholarship fund in 1944, the league invited the HDGA to administer the remaining funds.<sup>93</sup> The group was delighted to do so, and in 1946 was able to offer a substantial scholarship that became known as the "Half Dozen Group of Artists (Incorporating the Queensland Wattle League) Travelling Scholarship for Landscape".<sup>94</sup> The scholarship was valued at £150, and its aim was to allow the recipient to travel to study art. Each candidate was required to submit three works – a landscape or still life composition, a drawing from nature, and an outdoor sketch in oils or watercolour. The fact that only five artists submitted entries for the competition is not only a

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<sup>85</sup> L. A. Richardson, letter to Jeanette Sheldon dated December 5, 1941.

<sup>86</sup> Jeanette Sheldon, letter to L. A. Richardson, dated December 1, 1945.

<sup>87</sup> RQAS *Annual Report and Financial Statement 1946*.

<sup>88</sup> HDGA Minute Book, December 15, 1943.

<sup>89</sup> HDGA Minute Book, December 15, 1943.

<sup>90</sup> HDGA Minute Book, December 15, 1943.

<sup>91</sup> "Art Scholarship to 16 Year Girl," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), December 14, 1945.

<sup>92</sup> "Wattle Day: Meeting in Brisbane," *Brisbane Courier*, October 5, 1912.

<sup>93</sup> HDGA Minute Book.

<sup>94</sup> Rules of HDGA, 1943.

reflection on the small size of Brisbane's art world, but also on the number of painters who would consider art as a possible career.

Margaret Cilento, the winner in 1946, used the scholarship to study in New York, the modern art capital of the world, while Betty Quelhurst, the winner in 1949, was able to add a further year to her study at the National Gallery Art School in Melbourne. The winners of required to keep the HDGA apprised of their progress throughout their scholarship period. In 1949, Cilento wrote that she "was working with a group of abstract painters [15 in all and she names Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman] for experience and find it very stimulating".<sup>95</sup> Quelhurst outlined her schedule of studies and indicating that her days were spent studying portraiture, while at night she attended life drawing classes, before painting landscapes at the weekend. She also noted that she had been awarded a second, third, and fourth place in examinations.<sup>96</sup> Scholarship holders were also required to submit a work to the annual HDGA exhibition. Cilento sent etchings from New York, with the *Telegraph* noting that her work was an interesting study of new "expressionism".<sup>97</sup> The works were eventually donated to QNAG on behalf of HDGA. Despite their status as students, both Cilento and Quelhurst were invited to join the HDGA before finishing their studies.<sup>98</sup>

Through the scholarship, the HDGA showed its recognition of education as an important investment in improving the Brisbane art environment. The scholarship was short lived, but its positive effects were highlighted when Cilento returned to the city, bringing with her a new approach to art education that became part of the alternative art experience of the St Mary's groups of the 1950s, to be discussed in Chapter 7. These simple innovations laid the foundations of an art landscape that was able to support a much more diverse range of art activities than had previously been possible.

## Conclusion

After laying the foundations of Brisbane's art world, particularly its art market and art gallery, the RQAS had maintained but not expanded the system. Although Brisbane's art scene was limited, the RQAS could always be relied upon to provide a spectacularly large exhibition of original works for the enjoyment of the art-loving public as they had done since 1888 when the society held its first exhibition. By 1940, the RQAS enjoyed considerable prestige within the community as Queensland's leading authority on art matters.

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<sup>95</sup> Margaret Cilento, letter to E. Lilian Pedersen dated April 12, 1949.

<sup>96</sup> Betty Quelhurst, letter to E. Lilian Pedersen dated July 16, 1949.

<sup>97</sup> "Virile Art on Display," *Telegraph* clipping hand dated 1948.

<sup>98</sup> HDGA Minute Book, April 9, 1946.

The formation of the HDGA in 1941 did not challenge the authority of the RQAS but it did increase the cultural thickness of Brisbane's art world by providing another exhibiting artists' group in the city. However, two artists' groups did not mean double the number of artists, as many members of the HDGA also maintained their membership of the RQAS. It did mean however, that the incentive to create new works was doubled as exhibition rules for both groups excluded works previously exhibited in Brisbane. There is no evidence to suggest that the general quality of the works exhibited improved as a result of this increased demand for art-works but sales figures suggest that RQAS sales were not diminished by the competition. Equally, the HDGA appeared to be satisfied with their sales level. The assumption that Brisbane was large enough to support two artists' groups was vindicated.

While Brisbane may have been large enough to support two groups, the RQAS and HDGA complemented each other's activities rather than acting as rivals. This is not unusual in that in a small cultural reservoir such as Brisbane, there exists, as Granovetter has suggested, a strong probability that participants will share congruent ideas, prejudices and values<sup>99</sup> One of the crucial ideas both groups shared was the need to encourage youth involvement in art if Brisbane's art world was to progress. To this end, the RQAS, through its role of encouraging many in order to find the few, provided reduced membership fees for young artists before consolidating the idea as the Younger Artists' Group in 1945. The HDGA directed its efforts in encouraging youth toward the provision of scholarships such as the "Half Dozen Group of Artists (Incorporating the Queensland Wattle League) Travelling Scholarship for Landscape" to assist talented young Brisbane artists to study at some of the best art schools in the world.

The influence of community groups such as the RQAS and the HDGA is not constant, but waxes and wanes according to the needs of the community. In the 1940s, the need for both groups was strong, in order to counter weaknesses such as the underdeveloped art market, and the outdated art education system. The increasing cultural thickness of Brisbane's art world in the 1950s, through the development of small, independent commercial galleries such as the Moreton and Johnstone, combined with the formation of special interest groups such as the Art Gallery Society (1951) and the Queensland Branch of the Arts Council (1957), saw the dominance of these two artists' groups wane during the 1950s and 1960s, as commercial support facilities for professional artists increased.

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<sup>99</sup> Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 78 no. 6 (May 1973): 1375.

## Chapter 6

### Dancing Around the Rules: YAG and the Miya Studio

Tomorrow belongs to youth  
and youth intends to have their  
say in what sort of tomorrow  
it will be.<sup>1</sup>

In the paternalistic culture that characterised life in Brisbane in the 1940s, shaping a city where youth was expected to take direction from elders, establishment groups, such as the RQAS and HDGA, expected to make decisions on behalf of the “youngsters”.<sup>2</sup> To this end, in 1945, the RQAS made the decision to form the Younger Artists’ Group (YAG) and allowed the youngsters to stage their own exhibition.<sup>3</sup> However, controversy erupted at the opening of this exhibition and, as a result, a rebellious group of young artists emerged from within the ranks of the YAG to form their own independent artists’ group, Miya Studio.

This chapter examines the formation, structure, and contribution made by YAG and Miya Studio as part of the broadening support base for the visual arts that was becoming evident in Brisbane in the 1940s. While both groups effectively “danced around the rules” governing art in Brisbane, they also epitomised the wider schism in Australian art that produced the conservative/traditionalist and modernist/contemporary dichotomy.<sup>4</sup> YAG was positioned, through its allegiance to the RQAS, among the traditionalists who believed that the full realisation of an artist rested on a solid grounding in the painter’s craft and choice of a worthy subject, preferably following the dictum of James Stuart MacDonald, the conservative Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales who expressed a desire to see “a maximum of flocks and the minimum of factories” represented in Australian art.<sup>5</sup> Miya Studio, on the other hand, espoused a form of modernism that sought subjects from life in the cities that worked to symbolise the meaning of the modern world to them. Just six weeks after the original YAG exhibition, Miya Studio staged its own exhibition, striking a discordant note and introducing an element of tension into the closely allied Brisbane art world.

<sup>1</sup> “Eureka,” frontispiece in *Barjai* 8, 1943 and cited in Michele Anderson, “Barjai, Miya, Studio and Young Brisbane Artists of the 1940s: Towards a Radical Practice,” (Honours’ thesis, University of Queensland, 1987): 21.

<sup>2</sup> Jeanette Sheldon, letter to L.A. Richardson, secretary RQAS dated December 1, 1945.

<sup>3</sup> RQAS Minute Book.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Haese, *Rebels and Precursors: the Revolutionary Years in Australian Art* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1988), 11.

<sup>5</sup> J. S. MacDonald, cited in Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 10.

Tension had never been a hallmark of artistic life in Brisbane, and William Hatherell has suggested that “in such a small cultural pool as Brisbane’s, individuals apparently ideologically poles apart could often quite happily coexist”, citing the friendship between the “conservative Catholic poet Martin Haley and the dogmatic communist John Manifold” as an example.<sup>6</sup> Bernard Smith proposed that tension, of the kind introduced by Miya Studio, “is suited to the education of artists; young artists argue more about art than old ones, for they are involved in finding a meaning for their art and their lifestyle as an artist”.<sup>7</sup> As artists secure their economic position in the art landscape, argument and dissent become increasingly irrelevant in the production of their art.<sup>8</sup> Until the formation of YAG, Brisbane’s art students, as exemplified by their questioning of the standards of art education at the CTC in 1941, had no platform from which to speak.

Tension was part of other art worlds. Speaking to the Contemporary Group, a coherent group of young modernist artists based in Melbourne in 1932, Adrian Lawlor, an Australian artist, critic, writer, and member of the group, suggested that every venture in art relied on a constant set of irreconcilable tensions, and cited the tensions resonating between the establishment Paris *Salon* and the avant-garde *Impressionists* as a force for change, propelling French art forward in a meaningful way in the late nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> His point, according to Richard Haese, was that tensions have been always been necessary throughout art history to increase the strength and effectiveness of emerging artistic cycles.<sup>10</sup>

While subjects such as the ubiquitous gum tree may have been acceptable for older artists in Brisbane, the exciting new city that emerged following the arrival of United States troops in 1942 introduced a fresh world for younger artists to explore. Laurence Collinson, as leader of both YAG and Miya Studio in 1945, challenged Queensland artists to recognise that their art was “sterile”.<sup>11</sup> A weak tie himself, Collinson’s negative characterisation of Queensland’s art acted as a catalyst for change that introduced an alternative network, and encouraged the formation of more “weak ties”, allowing Brisbane’s art world to follow a trajectory that led to the production of an acceptable form of contemporary art for both artists and patrons.

### **Laurence Collinson**

Who was Laurence Collinson, and what caused his views on the need for contemporary forms of artistic expression in Queensland to coalesce so radically late in 1945? A young Brisbane

<sup>6</sup> William Hatherell, *The Third Metropolis: Imagining Brisbane Through Art and Literature 1940-1970* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2007), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Smith, “Two Art Systems,” in *The Sydney-Melbourne Book*, ed. Jim Davidson (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986), 174.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, “Two Art Systems,” 174.

<sup>9</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 34.

<sup>10</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 34.

<sup>11</sup> “Queensland Art Sterile,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 29, 1945.



intellectual, Collinson first came to prominence in his final year at Brisbane State High School in 1943, when, with Barrett Reid and Cecel Knopke, he became a co-founder of the youth magazine *Barjai* (1943-1947).<sup>12</sup> According to William Hatherell, *Barjai* developed from a crudely produced, type-written school magazine into a sophisticated national cultural outlet for the literary expressions of “youth”.<sup>13</sup> *Barjai* was well connected to other modernist literary publications in Australia in the 1940s, including *Angry Penguins* and *Meanjin* and Collinson and Reid had poems published in early editions of both of these publications.<sup>14</sup>

Collinson aspired to be a painter, and on leaving school, he enrolled at the Central Technical College Art Branch (CTC) before joining the RQAS as a junior member in 1944.<sup>15</sup> Collinson introduced other young art students from the CTC including Pamela Seeman, Laurence Hope, and Cecel Knopke to the RQAS in 1945, and it was the air of confidence and enthusiasm that exuded from these young artists that prompted the council of the RQAS to formally recognise the juniors as an autonomous group. Collinson was elected as the first Chairman of YAG, with Joy Roggenkamp as the vice-Chairman, and Pamela Seeman as Secretary/Treasurer.<sup>16</sup>

Collinson was contemptuous of Brisbane’s conservative cultural establishment, and his decision to confront Brisbane’s art world with its inadequacies in 1945 may be linked to the *Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art* that opened in Brisbane on Victory in the Pacific Day on August 15, 1945. This influential exhibition had been shown in Adelaide, Melbourne, and Sydney in 1939, but war-time concerns delayed its Brisbane showing. Although Brisbane hosted a cut-down version of the original exhibition with only 52 of the 215 works in the original exhibition on show, included were the works by Picasso, Modigliani, Dufy, Cezanne, Braque, Gauguin, Utrillo, Bonnard, Matisse, Sickert, and Epstein. The *Herald Exhibition* is celebrated as having had a seminal impact on Australian art, and having “changed the direction of art throughout the continent and ‘established a basis for the development of an entire generation’”.<sup>17</sup> Eileen Chanin and Steven Miller in their book *Degenerates and Perverts*, citing the effects of the 1913 *Armory Show* on art in America, suggest that important exhibitions such as the *Herald Exhibition* had the ability to alter public taste and perception of modern art by triggering debate and challenging the attitudes of artists and patrons alike. The works contained something for everybody that viewed them, from Utrillo’s gentle post-impressionist landscapes, Modigliani’s modern stylised

<sup>12</sup> Michele Anderson, “Barjai, Miya, Studio and Young Brisbane Artists of the 1940s: Towards a Radical Practice,” (Honours’ thesis, University of Queensland, 1987): 13-46.

<sup>12</sup> RQAS Minute Book.

<sup>13</sup> William Hatherell, “The Brisbane Years of Laurence Collinson.” *Queensland Review* 13, no. 2 (2006): 2.

<sup>14</sup> Hatherell, “The Brisbane Years of Laurence Collinson,” 3.

<sup>15</sup> RQAS Archive.

<sup>16</sup> *Younger Artists’ Group First Exhibition Catalogue*, Jim Crawford Papers.

<sup>17</sup> Allan McCullough, cited in Eileen Chanin and Steven Miller, *Degenerates and Perverts: The 1939 Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press 2005), 17.

portraiture, Picasso's experiments in synthetic cubism, and the highly coloured works of Roualt and Gauguin. Although many of the descriptors employed by the newspaper art critics in reviews of the exhibition, such as "grotesque [...] and a complete distortion" (Modigliani); "extravagant and over-coloured" (Gauguin and Utrillo) do not convey any enthusiasm for the show, Brisbane artists and audiences flocked to see it, with 23,500 people attending the exhibition before it finally closed on October 14, 1945.<sup>18</sup> This was, at the time, a record attendance for any art exhibition in Brisbane.<sup>19</sup>

The effects of the *Herald Exhibition* on the younger artists of Brisbane were witnessed in the first exhibition of YAG just two weeks after the *Herald* show closed. Pamela Seeman moved from the conventional by showing a painting that included a "purple horse", while a non-representational work by Laurence Collinson was deemed by the unnamed reviewer for the *Telegraph* to resemble nothing more than "twisted skipping ropes".<sup>20</sup> From this it can be inferred that the exhibition had exerted some influence on a small group of younger artists looking for a directional change in Brisbane art but the question remained as to whether the change could be sustained within Brisbane's conservative cultural establishment.

### **Moving Forward: A Group of our Own**

Collinson may have despised Brisbane's conservative cultural establishment, but he joined the RQAS in 1944. As an aspiring artist, he was following the traditional path toward recognition as an artist in Brisbane: study at the CTC, followed by membership of the RQAS to enable the artist to exhibit their work to the public and attract patrons. No alternatives existed in Brisbane for a young aspiring artist. It has already been seen in the previous chapter that an attempt was made by the RQAS to keep a group of talented younger artists, including Margaret Olley, Margaret Cilento, and John Rigby, working in Brisbane through the introduction of junior memberships.<sup>21</sup> In 1945, another precociously talented group of young artists, including Collinson, Joy Roggenkamp, Laurence Hope, Peter Abraham, Peter Neylan, and Pamela Seeman emerged, and this time the RQAS offered them a group of their own.

The formation of a group specifically for Brisbane's younger artists came from an idea submitted by the well-respected local artist/teacher and long-time RQAS member, Percy Stanhope-Hobday, and was supported by the chairman of the RQAS, Dr J.V. Duhig. At a Special Council Meeting on September 17, 1945, the senior executive of the RQAS decided that YAG would become a wholly autonomous organisation within the RQAS with its own executive, council, and finances, but its members must remain subject to the same rules and conditions that governed the

<sup>18</sup> "23,500 View Art Display," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 13, 1945.

<sup>19</sup> "23,500 View Art Display,"

<sup>20</sup> "Fine Landscapes At Art Show," *Telegraph*, (Brisbane) October 29, 1945.

<sup>21</sup> RQAS Minute Book.

parent body.<sup>22</sup> Junior membership rates would remain and be available for members up to the age of twenty. Because one of the main reasons for creating the YAG was to give the younger artists greater opportunities to exhibit their work by no longer having to compete against senior artists for their place, it was also decided that members of the RQAS, up to the age of 25, could exhibit at either the senior show or the YAG show, but not at both.<sup>23</sup>

YAG management structure was modelled on the RQAS with an executive consisting of Chairman, vice-Chairman, and Secretary/Treasurer. In addition, there was an elected Council of three. Collinson was elected as the first Chairman, Joy Roggenkamp became vice-Chairman and Pamela Seeman took the roles of Secretary/Treasurer and was appointed to act as a liaison between YAG and the senior group.<sup>24</sup> The first Council consisted of Marcia Manson, Laurence Hope, and Peter Neylan.<sup>25</sup> Collinson was well suited to his new role as leader of YAG. Hatherell suggests that Collinson's credibility as a leader and cultural organiser came from his versatility as an aspiring painter, poet, playwright, and as co-editor of *Barjai*.<sup>26</sup> Barbara Blackman, also a member of *Barjai*, described Collinson as the "epitome of exotic avant-garde subversion, with his pale, consumptive looks, his Jewish background, his homosexuality, and his embracing of Communism".<sup>27</sup> With the establishment of YAG, Collinson took the opportunity to freely engage with his notions of change in the visual art world, as he had done previously in Brisbane's literary world with *Barjai*.

The first exhibition of YAG was held at the Canberra Hotel Banqueting Hall and ran from October 29 to November 1, 1945. The RQAS had accommodated the junior artists by apportioning four days at the end of their annual exhibition for the YAG exhibition.<sup>28</sup> The newly elected executive of YAG set about preparing and producing their own catalogue (printing costs were paid by the RQAS), as well as organising an opening function for the exhibition with an address by Dr Gertrude Langer, and the reading of original poems by exhibiting artist and member of the *Barjai* literary group, Cecel Knopke.<sup>29</sup> Lead time into the exhibition was short, as was the duration of the show, but 26 young artists presented 104 works in watercolour, oils, chalk and pastel, pencil, and pen and ink.<sup>30</sup> Acclaimed by Duhig, as being "unique in Australia", the show garnered largely indulgent reviews, with the work being labelled "largely experimental" and showing "a laudable desire to get away from the conventional".<sup>31</sup> The visitor's book was signed by 416 people, and the

<sup>22</sup> RQAS Minute Book, Special Council Meeting, September 17, 1945.

<sup>23</sup> RQAS Minute Book, September 17, 1945.

<sup>24</sup> RQAS Minute Book, General Meeting, September 11, 1945.

<sup>25</sup> *First Younger Artists' Group Exhibition Catalogue 1945*.

<sup>26</sup> Hatherell, "The Brisbane Years of Laurence Collinson," 3.

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Blackman, *Glass after Glass: Autobiographical Reflections* (Ringwood, Vic.: Viking, 1997), 108.

<sup>28</sup> RQAS *Annual Report and Financial Statement 1946*.

<sup>29</sup> "Younger Artists Group to Stage Display," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 24, 1945.

<sup>30</sup> *First Younger Artists' Group Exhibition Catalogue, 1945*.

<sup>31</sup> "Unusual Art Exhibition by Young Group," *Courier-Mail* (October 30, 1945, 6).

sale of 24 of the works on offer realised a total of £96/12/-, heralding the success of the show.<sup>32</sup> The success of the experiment, for experiment it was, was overshadowed by the controversy surrounding Collinson's catalogue essay.<sup>33</sup>

The usually self-congratulatory catalogue essay had been co-opted by Collinson to explicitly challenge the standards of art in Queensland, while implicitly challenging the standards of the RQAS. As Chairman of the new group, Collinson roundly criticised Queensland art because "year after year [...] pretty still-lifes [...] pretty landscapes [...] pretty figure studies [were] disgorged in hundreds" at the annual exhibitions by local artists who were, he said, "working with their eyes [and minds] closed".<sup>34</sup> Seeing no connection between this work and life in modern Brisbane, Collinson, dismissed Queensland art as "practically sterile".<sup>35</sup> His statements introduced a short-lived atmosphere of tension into Brisbane's placid art world, not for his criticisms of the standards of Queensland art, but for the "gross ingratitude" of the young artists' in their implied criticism of the RQAS.<sup>36</sup> June Vogarty, as president of the Art Student's Guild at the CTC, took exception to the "unwarranted remarks" made by Collinson and noted with some surprise that YAG had sought "exhibits from a training institution which exercises such a 'harmful influence' on several members of its society".<sup>37</sup> No public comment was made by the RQAS about the remarks but following discussion at the November Council Meeting of the RQAS, Duhig was instructed to censure the young artists. In a letter dated November 27, 1945, Duhig suggests that their actions were "in extremely bad taste" before going on to imply some sympathy for the young artists when he added "irrespective of whether or not it was true".<sup>38</sup> Collinson and Seeman, as leaders of the group, saw that the freedom the group assumed it had been given by the RQAS was a mirage, as ultimately, the group was bound by the same strict rules prohibiting any form of criticism of the society that governed all members of the Society.<sup>39</sup> After tabling their report on the exhibition at the Council meeting of the RQAS in December 1945, Collinson and Seeman left the RQAS.<sup>40</sup>

While it may have been the defined intention of the RQAS to support the new generation of artists through the creation of YAG, the Society could not have foreseen the events that unfolded in the wake of their resolution to form the junior group. The RQAS was justifiably proud of its initiative in supporting its artists of the future but it became clear after the first YAG exhibition that what the RQAS offered the group was not going to provide anything new for young artists in

<sup>32</sup> Pamela Seeman, draft report to RQAS on YAG First Exhibition.

<sup>33</sup> Appendix 1.

<sup>34</sup> Laurence Collinson, foreword in *First Younger Artists Group Exhibition Catalogue*.

<sup>35</sup> Collinson.

<sup>36</sup> Alice Bott, "Critic Criticised," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane) November 1, 1945.

<sup>37</sup> June Vogarty, "Critic Criticised," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane) October 31, 1945.

<sup>38</sup> Duhig, letter to Pamela Seeman, November 27, 1945.

<sup>39</sup> RQAS Minutes Council Meeting November 11, 1946.

<sup>40</sup> Pamela Seeman, draft report on First YAG Exhibition.

Brisbane. In order to quell any tendency to rebellion on the part of the younger artists, the RQAS Council acted quickly to curtail YAG autonomy, and at the RQAS meeting on November 6, 1945, it was unanimously decided that the RQAS would, in future, appoint the Chairman and vice-Chairman of YAG to avoid the risk of a recurrence of the infamous “Foreword” incident.<sup>41</sup> In 1946, Vera Leichney and the young Patricia Prentice were given the task of reining in the juniors, while trying not to curb the young artists’ enthusiasm for a group of their own.

The RQAS was intractable in its position, but as Judith Pugh suggests “it is sometimes helpful to think of it [the RQAS as the establishment] as having a set of formal rules around which the rebels [Collinson, Seeman, and Laurence Hope] needed to dance”.<sup>42</sup> While Collinson and Seeman dutifully returned to the RQAS Council to deliver their report on the 1945 YAG show, they never again sought membership of the RQAS, and even before discharging their duties to the RQAS in regard to the YAG show, this radical element had set up their own art group that complemented their thoughts and aspirations for art in a modern world. Finally, a voice of dissension broke the monotony of an art world that had been virtually held in suspended animation since 1915. With the formation of Miya Studio, Brisbane’s art world, by the end of 1945, was supporting four artists’ groups, each of which provided differing institutional support for the needs of a variety of artistic interests.

### **Miya Studio: Refugees from Brisbane Culture**

In a gesture of defiance, Collinson, Seeman and Hope, refused to dance to the rules of the RQAS and broke away to form Brisbane’s first truly oppositional group as the Miya Studio. Utilising knowledge gained from organising the first YAG exhibition, the first Miya Studio Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings was presented in December 1945, just six weeks after breaking with YAG. The venue was the basement of the South Brisbane School of Arts.

Oppositional artists’ groups are defined by Raymond Williams as “exhibiting attitudes and practices that are in active opposition to those existing institutions”.<sup>43</sup> The young artists who established Miya Studio were actively opposed to what Collinson described as the virtually “mass-produced” paintings exhibited and disseminated by established artists through the art market of the RQAS and HDGA in Brisbane.<sup>44</sup> Collinson described such works as conforming to a “formula, which requires little creative effort” and that did not reflect a modern post-war Brisbane.<sup>45</sup> The

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<sup>41</sup> RQAS Minute Book, Council Meeting, November 6, 1945.

<sup>42</sup> Judith Pugh, “What colour Blue?” in *Degenerates and Perverts: the 1939 Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art*, by Eileen Chanin, and Steven Miller (Melbourne: Miegunyah, 2005), 10.

<sup>43</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), 70.

<sup>44</sup> *Younger Artists’ Group First Exhibition Catalogue*.

<sup>45</sup> *Miya Studio Third Exhibition Catalogue*.

Miya Studio encouraged its artists not only to participate fully in the life of the community, but also to reflect that life in their paintings.

The *Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art* may have acted as a catalyst for the formation of Miya Studio, but the groundwork had been laid down a few years earlier through the art appreciation lectures conducted by Gertrude Langer from 1941. As I have shown in Chapter 4, Langer introduced her audience, including future members of Miya Studio, to ideas of contemporary art systems that existed in Europe, and to stories of artists' groups such as *Die Brücke*, a German Expressionist group. *Die Brücke* was formed by a group of young architecture students who set up an independent artist's studio in Dresden in 1905 because they were dissatisfied with the state of German art early in the twentieth century.<sup>46</sup> The catalogue essay for the second Miya Studio exhibition suggests that without the knowledge of such groups given to them by Gertrude Langer, the young artists may have accepted the *status quo* and their "dissatisfaction may have dissipated in idle fuming", and led to nothing.<sup>47</sup> However, recognising the similarities in their own dissatisfaction with the anachronistic art perpetuated annually by the RQAS and the HDGA with that of the earlier German group, Collinson, Seeman, and Hope established Miya Studio as Brisbane's first independent, modernist artists' studio.<sup>48</sup> Forty years after the artists of *Die Brücke* went "searching for a new mode of expression that would respond honestly to the zeitgeist ('spirit of the time') and would convey their personal experience of the modern world – an exciting and vital place of advancing technology, expanding cities, and increasing pace" in Germany,<sup>49</sup> the Brisbane artists, equally frustrated with their local art product, "deliberately abandoned the undisturbing gum tree and the staid bowl of flowers" in order to "express their own thoughts and feelings" in their paintings.<sup>50</sup>

Although William Hatherell points out that Miya Studio was a "distinctively local movement",<sup>51</sup> it nevertheless manifests many facets of *Die Brücke*. The Miya Studio, followed patterns set in Brisbane in the early 1940s by literary magazines such as *Meanjin* (the finger of land on which Brisbane city is situated), and *Barjai* (meeting place) in choosing an Aboriginal word for its name. However, just as *Die Brücke* chose their name to reference their perceived position as a bridge between the Germanic past and the modern European present, Miya was chosen for its meaning of "today", referencing the goal of the young artists to create works that were as modern as today and therefore a worthy reflection of modern, post-war Brisbane.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Selz, *German Expressionist Painting* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 78.

<sup>47</sup> "The Beginnings," *Miya Studio Second Exhibition Catalogue*, 1946.

<sup>48</sup> Michele Anderson, "Barjai, Miya Studios and Young Brisbane Artists of the 1940s: Towards a Radical Practice", Volume 1, (Honours' thesis, University of Queensland, 1987), 11.

<sup>49</sup> Nina Miall, "Kirchner: Expressionism and the City Dresden and Berlin 1905-1918," *Royal Academy of Arts*, 2. Accessed March 21, 2013, <http://static.royalacademy.org.uk/files/kirchner-student-guide-13.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> *Miya Studio Second Exhibition Catalogue*, 1946.

<sup>51</sup> Hatherell, "The Brisbane Years", 8.

The first Miya Studio Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings was staged to raise money to equip a working studio for the young artists.<sup>52</sup> The exhibition ran for two weeks and presented the work of six artists, Laurence Collinson, Pamela Seeman, Laurence Hope, Cecel Knopke, Ray Glass, a young American serviceman, Dr Karl Langer, artist, architect, and Gertrude Langer's husband. Karl Langer donated three of his paintings, with the proceeds going to the group.<sup>53</sup> Because the Miya exhibition followed closely on the controversy surrounding the first YAG exhibition, it was well supported by the press. Positive reviews appeared in both the *Courier-Mail* and the *Telegraph*, and highlighted the work of Seeman, Collinson, and Hope, the main protagonists in the YAG affair just weeks earlier, as well as the work of Knopke and Glass.<sup>54</sup> The forty works that made up the exhibition were described as ranging from orthodox to experimental.<sup>55</sup> It is unknown how many works were sold, but Seeman recorded on her invitation that someone called "Jim Mitchell bought six pictures" on the opening night and Dr J. V. Duhig bought a further three.<sup>56</sup> Duhig's support, in light of the RQAS Council backlash over the YAG comments, is indicative of his tireless efforts to support the fine arts in Brisbane throughout the 1940s.

The group had made a strong beginning and by September 1946, Miya Studio boasted fifteen members aged between nineteen and thirty-three. Accommodation for the group remained an ongoing issue to be dealt with through the life of the group. Their studio in the attic of the Alexandra Building was shared with *Barjai* and rented from the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) whose Queensland President was also J.V. Duhig.<sup>57</sup> This studio offered the group the freedom of access they desired with artists being able "to enter the studio at any hour of the day or night",<sup>58</sup> but by March 1947, the group had moved into the attic studio of the School of Arts in Ann Street.<sup>59</sup> This would remain their home until December 1948.<sup>60</sup>

No constitution was ever established for Miya Studio, but a media release to the *Courier-Mail* suggested that their objectives were to "provide a well-equipped studio in which artists may work in co-operation," as well as to develop "in Queensland an art that deals with the hopes, fears, desires, and tragedies of the contemporary world [...] an art that considers man to be more important than gum trees and flowerpots".<sup>61</sup> A steering committee of Collinson, Seeman, and Hope led the group, but although there was a formal annual membership fee of £1, Miya Studio ultimately

<sup>52</sup> "Exhibition by Young Artists," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), December 13, 1945.

<sup>53</sup> Pamela Crawford (Seeman) notes.

<sup>54</sup> "Exhibition by Young Artists," *Telegraph* (Brisbane), undated clipping, Jim Crawford Papers.

<sup>55</sup> "Exhibition by Young Artists".

<sup>56</sup> Pamela Seeman, personal note on exhibition catalogue.

<sup>57</sup> Anderson, "Barjai/Miya," 121.

<sup>58</sup> Sue Catling, "They Paint in the Attic; But no Starving," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane) September 18, 1946.

<sup>59</sup> Anderson, "Barjai/Miya," 127.

<sup>60</sup> Anderson, "Barjai/Miya," 127.

<sup>61</sup> Miya Studio Media Release circa June 26, 1948.

remained a loose-knit association of artists. Michele Anderson gives the initial membership arrangements as:

To become a member of Miya Studio £1 per year will be charged, this is to help buy easels, drawing boards, Art Materials & Art Books. Members will be entitled to the use of the Studio & all its furniture, Library & Art Materials. Members will have the right to exhibit in the annual exhibition of Miya Studio & free entry to same. On Friday Night all persons will be charged 1/- to cover the model's fee, this Life Class will be open to all artists or Art Students interested.<sup>62</sup>

Unlike the Contemporary Art Groups of Sydney and Melbourne, where traditional work had been banned from exhibition, Miya Studio exhibitions continued to feature orthodox works as well as modern experimental works that investigated “a connection made between two worlds, between things seen and things felt”.<sup>63</sup>

While Miya Studio appeared initially to have been more united in what they opposed than what they stood for, they cultivated an individualistic, loosely expressionistic style that was remarkably advanced and captured a vision of a more modern Brisbane.<sup>64</sup> This style is exemplified by Pamela Seeman's painting *Shadow Partners*: through the use of expressive brushwork and strongly contrasting colours, Seeman created a vibrant image of the young girl “jitterbugging” on the dance floor. Artist Donald Friend, who was stationed in Brisbane during the war, captured a word-picture of a similar scene in his diary:

I remember how Queensland danced a little while ago; waltzes, twosteps, the Pride of Erin and all those Victorian affairs. Now they jitterbug at a terrific speed...that huge hall crowded with Yankees and the infant harlots gyrating, kicking, wriggling, belly-wobbling, bum-popping, tapping, whirling insanely like people possessed of a devil [...] the girls' faces were expressionless, mesmerised, their shallow eyes glazed...<sup>65</sup>

Seeman's painting embodied this frenzy through the brushstrokes used and the subject's grotesque “shadow partner” echoes the violence of her dance. The picture is evocative of the new experiences that swept Brisbane during the war, such as the Coconut Grove Dance Hall in Adelaide Street,<sup>66</sup> Cloudland Ballroom in Bowen Hills, the Blue Moon Skating Rink, and numerous hotels and brothels in Stanley Street in South Brisbane.<sup>67</sup>

Many of Brisbane's young artists became members of the group but, although they were all committed to creating good art, not all were fired by the same revolutionary zeal as its founders, and they used the group as simply another avenue for exhibition of their work. For example, Joy

<sup>62</sup> Anderson, “Barjai/Miya Studio,” 121.

<sup>63</sup> Barrett Reid cited in *A Quiet Revolution* by Christopher Heathcote, 27.

<sup>64</sup> Hatherell, “The Brisbane Years”, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Donald Friend, *Donald Friend Diaries*, Volume 1, ed. Anne Gray, (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2001): 444.

<sup>66</sup> “Dance Hall will be Art Gallery,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), January 20, 1946.

<sup>67</sup> Hatherell, *The Third Metropolis*, 80.



Roggenkamp, while retaining her membership ties with YAG, joined the group because it offered another exhibiting opportunity.<sup>68</sup> Collinson, Seeman, Hope, and Knopke chose to exhibit solely with Miya Studio as a way of maintaining the purity of their modern experimental vision. This small group of artists was committed to creating an art they believed would replace that of the amateur painters of the gum tree school in Brisbane art circles.

Sue Catling, writing for the *Courier-Mail*, visited the Miya Studio in the Alexandra Building on Wickham Terrace shortly before their second exhibition, and noted the bohemian tendencies of the young artists in their dress and attitudes and alluded to the fact that the studio was “surprisingly free from busts and casts”, props hitherto considered essential in the training of artists.<sup>69</sup> Collinson, Seeman, and Hope had been inspired by Langer’s lectures to imagine an “as if” culture, a fantasy of living as artists in a European context, and like *Die Brücke*, the Miya Studio created a working studio that resembled “that of a real bohemian, full of paintings lying all over the place, drawings, books and artist’s materials — much more like an artist’s romantic lodgings” than the structured teaching spaces of the CTC.<sup>70</sup> Catling’s article was written to provide a curious public with some details of the lifestyle and strange work habits of this group of artists who worked and learned independently of the CTC, but not all were so welcoming. While Elizabeth Webb disparagingly referred to the group in the *Courier-Mail* as “Brisbane’s Little Chelsea, peddling its brave imitations of Picasso, Matisse”, the presence of the Studio in Brisbane’s art scene provided unprecedented local interest in the way artists lived and worked.<sup>71</sup>

New ideas about art were introduced into Brisbane’s art world as Miya Studio became a magnet for young aspiring artists from other states. While Collinson can be regarded as a weak tie in Brisbane’s art world because of his youth and lack of allegiance to establishment artists’ groups, other weak ties in the time of the Miya Studio included emerging southern artists of the calibre of Sidney Nolan and Charles Blackman who travelled to Queensland looking for fresh ideas for their art and worked at the Miya Studio in 1948 and 1949 respectively. Sidney Nolan exhibited with the group in 1948, but his work attracted no more attention than that of local artists, especially Seeman’s “bold portraits”, Hope’s “dim, dark horrors” and Collinson’s propaganda pieces such as “How to Grow Cabbages—Buchenwald Style”.<sup>72</sup> However, in return, Brisbane artists experienced the “mingling of personalities and talk” that, according to Geoffrey Dutton, “can be more important sometimes than the more considered influence of technique or style”.<sup>73</sup> Although Joy Roggenkamp

<sup>68</sup> Pamela Crawford, personal note.

<sup>69</sup> Catling, “They Paint in the Attic.”

<sup>70</sup> Catling, “They Paint in the Attic”.

<sup>71</sup> E.C.W., “Art and Pseudo-Art in Two New Shows: Little Chelsea,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 24, 1947.

<sup>72</sup> W.L. “New Trends in Art Show,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 24, 1948.

<sup>73</sup> Geoffrey Dutton, *The Innovators: The Sydney Alternatives in the Rise of Modern Art, Literature, and Ideals* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1986), 218.

spoke of Nolan as important in the development of her style,<sup>74</sup> and Laurence Hope and Charles Blackman also established a strong working relationship, these experiences, because of their isolated nature, did not translate into any permanent change in the production of art in Brisbane. A critical mass of artists desiring change was not achieved.

Cracks began to appear in the group's facade after their fourth show, as the strong group identity, fostered especially by Seeman, started to break down. From 1947, the Communist newspaper, the *Queensland Guardian*, became increasingly interested in the group with "The Arts" columnist, Irene Fletcher, joining the group in 1948, and suggesting that the "Miya Studio exhibition emphasised the usefulness of such associations to the community."<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Jim Crawford's *Guardian* review of the 1949 Miya exhibition highlights the "usefulness" of artists to the Communist cause when he criticises Ken Roggenkamp's landscape (unnamed) of an eroded gully with a broken down fence as having no social purpose.<sup>76</sup> Stating that there was "no hint [in the picture] of the social realities which result" in such scenes, Crawford, while suggesting that the artistic techniques employed in the painting were effective, dismissed it as not being a "socially useful picture".<sup>77</sup> Richard Haese says that it was not unusual for the extreme left to impress its values on cultural bodies at this time, as it had on "radical-minded individuals and groups in most western nations".<sup>78</sup> Seeman would later marry Crawford. The external influence of the Communist Party led to the internal conflict that saw the demise of Miya Studio, with the bohemian and radical artists going their separate ways.

In March 1949, Laurence Hope held his first solo show at the Art Reference Library in George Street, signalling the beginning of the end of the group. Warwick Lawrence, reviewing the show for the *Courier-Mail* suggests:

Many people will consider them grotesque, even ugly. If this is so, it is because the subject matter is ugly [...] The artist has painted life as he feels it and sees it with an imagination that is both strong and candid. The result is a series of haunting and highly-sensitive commentaries on present-day social conditions.<sup>79</sup>

In June, Collinson and Seeman held a joint show at the Albert Art Gallery in Ann Street before the group united for their fifth and final annual exhibition that also took place at the Albert Gallery in 1949. At this final exhibition, tensions between factions representing "bohemian" elements and "radical" elements<sup>80</sup> within the group erupted as Hope threatened legal action if "all paintings and

<sup>74</sup> Glenn R. Cooke, "Joy Roggenkamp," *Design and Art Australia Online*. <http://www.daaao.org.au/bio/joy-roggenkamp/biography/>

<sup>75</sup> Irene Fletcher "The Arts," *Queensland Guardian*, undated clipping.

<sup>76</sup> Jim Crawford, "The Arts," *Queensland Guardian*, November 9, 1949.

<sup>77</sup> Crawford, "The Arts."

<sup>78</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 64.

<sup>79</sup> W.L. "Sensitive Commentary by Painter," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), March 14, 1949.

<sup>80</sup> Hatherell, *The Third Metropolis*, 12.

sketches you cannot show receipts for” were not immediately removed from the 1949 show and handed to Barrett Reid.<sup>81</sup> Reid and Hope, while feeling a broad sympathy with the ideals of the political left, saw themselves as members of what Haese refers to as “an intellectual salon”<sup>82</sup> rather than as hard-core Party members. Collinson and Seeman, on the other hand, felt their commitment to Communist ideals deeply.

Following the fifth exhibition, Hope and Reid went to Melbourne where they became an integral part of the Melbourne art scene; first as members of the Heide coterie, and then, with the help of John Reed, and Charles and Barbara Blackman, they worked to reinstate the Melbourne branch of the Contemporary Art Society as part of the newer group that formed around Georges and Mirka Mora in their flat in Collins Street.<sup>83</sup> Collinson and Seeman went on to form the artists’ group of the New Theatre Club in Brisbane, whose activities, like those of the “artist’s branch” of the Communist Party in Melbourne, included conducting art classes, painting banners and producing sets for productions at the theatre<sup>84</sup>

Oppositional groups such as Miya are characterised by their limited life span, as the energy level required in maintaining a “radical” studio and exhibition group is generally intense.<sup>85</sup> The fact that Miya Studio presented five annual exhibitions is testament to the commitment of the artists involved. Thereafter Miya Studio faded quietly from the scene and its remaining members were absorbed into the artists’ group of the New Theatre Club. The Miya Studio introduced a set of new ideas to Brisbane’s art world based on the social significance of art within a community, but it also introduced the concept of an artistic enclave where ideas of production could be freely discussed in relation to works in progress, and paved the way for the advances made by new artists’ groups in the next decade to broaden Brisbane’s cultural landscape. For the first time, young local art students began to visualise a career for themselves as artists in Brisbane instead of having to move to Sydney or to Melbourne to gain recognition.

### **The YAG Agenda**

After the furore caused by the YAG first catalogue essay died down, YAG went on to develop a vibrant character of its own. Collinson was not ostracised by either the RQAS or YAG as the result of his criticisms in October 1945 as a circular to members of YAG advising nominations for positions on the 1946 YAG Council and dated September/October 1946, noted that “Mr Collinson has not accepted his nomination” as Chairman of YAG for 1946.<sup>86</sup> In a bid to avoid a recurrence of

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<sup>81</sup> Laurence Hope, telegram dated September 26, 1949.

<sup>82</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 65.

<sup>83</sup> Heathcote, *Quiet Revolution*, 29.

<sup>84</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 65.

<sup>85</sup> Williams, *Culture*, 71.

<sup>86</sup> RQAS Archive, Memo.

the controversy of the previous year, nominations for all positions on the YAG Council were made by the RQAS. Brian O'Malley was elected Chairman, Peter Abraham as vice-Chairman, and Joan Mercer as Secretary/Treasurer, while the Council consisted of Joy Roggenkamp, Ray Mann, and Peter Neylan.

In an oblique reference to the events of 1945, the 1946 YAG exhibition dispensed with the catalogue essay choosing instead to adopt the epigraph, "we rest silent in our work" from British sculptor Jacob Epstein.<sup>87</sup> The statement distanced the group from the events of the previous year and adjured the young artists to commit themselves to producing "good" art. Their work, on inspection, would speak for itself. There were 56 exhibits on show, and although the work of Peter Abraham and Joy Roggenkamp was selected as "outstanding" by the unnamed critic for the *Courier-Mail*, the work, dominated by landscapes, was studiously traditional with "careful draughtsmanship" and a feeling of being "well balanced and based on a sense of actuality with sureness of vision and hand".<sup>88</sup> While the 1946 exhibition was not a financial success, the RQAS was delighted with the show and promptly removed restrictions on the running of the group.<sup>89</sup> After regaining their "independence", an enthusiastic YAG settled down to provide Brisbane's younger artists with a variety of exhibiting opportunities from ensemble exhibitions to pavement shows. The YAG may not have been the answer some in the Brisbane art world were seeking, proving as it did to offer simply more of what was already provided, but in 1950, it developed a scholarship plan that would complement that already in place with the HDGA.

Support for young artists to reach their full potential was not well developed in Brisbane in the 1940s, and even in 1950, "the whole trend for artists to go to Melbourne and Sydney, where art instruction has reached a higher standard than in Brisbane" remained a problem facing Brisbane's art world.<sup>90</sup> Government assistance for further art study was not available in Queensland, and although the RQAS had approached the Minister for Public Instruction in 1946 regarding the establishment of a travelling art scholarship for Queensland art students, they had neither heard from, nor pressed the matter with, the government any further.<sup>91</sup> With the loss of Miya Studio to Brisbane's art world after 1949, a group of non-revolutionary art students in YAG surfaced as the potential leaders of the next generation of artists, by deciding to offer their own travelling art scholarship.

Betty Cameron was nineteen years old and determined to leave Brisbane to fulfil her dreams of a career in art when she emerged as a strong leader of YAG in 1950. Saying "there is so little

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<sup>87</sup> RQAS MinuteBook, October 8, 1946.

<sup>88</sup> "Progress in Junior Art," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), November 5, 1946.

<sup>89</sup> *RQAS Annual Report and Financial Statement 1946*.

<sup>90</sup> Hugh Bingham, "Young Artists Plan £300 Scholarship," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), June 13, 1950.

<sup>91</sup> RQAS Memo.

opportunity here for young artists, and there are no adequate State scholarships to help us to study in the south”, Cameron, and fellow executive member of YAG Karen Hocking, despaired of a future tied to Brisbane’s existing art scene.<sup>92</sup> Cameron’s socio-economic background was such that her aspirations would have remained an impossible dream had she not been able to use the group as a means for negotiating change and creating opportunity. Cameron’s art career had already successfully negotiated its way around her father, who did not believe in educating girls beyond the age of fifteen.<sup>93</sup> Following intervention from the headmistress of Somerville House, Cameron was able to complete her Senior years at high school as a “pupil teacher” of art at the school in 1947 and 1948.<sup>94</sup> She joined YAG in 1948 and became president of the group in 1950.<sup>95</sup> It was through her successes in YAG exhibitions in 1948 and 1949 that Cameron became recognised in Brisbane’s art world as another of the talented junior Brisbane artists of the 1940s.

The idea of creating a YAG travelling scholarship for members was casually touted as an idea in June 1950 by Cameron and her vice-president, Karen Hocking in a conversation with Hugh Bingham, a journalist working for the *Courier-Mail*, who presented the idea of the scholarship, supported by the RQAS, as a *fait accompli* in the article “Young Artists Plan £300 Scholarship,” which appeared in the *Courier-Mail* on June 13, 1950.<sup>96</sup> Cameron and Hocking were “dancing around the rules”, and were censured by the RQAS for not going through the proper channels to authorise such an undertaking, but the RQAS honoured the commitment by pledging support in matching the money raised by the young artists up to a total of £150.<sup>97</sup> To instigate its own travelling art scholarship was an ambitious scheme for any artists’ group, let alone a group of junior artists.

The original idea of the YAG Travelling Scholarship was to provide sufficient funds (£300) for an artist, without other means of support [family], to receive one year’s tuition at the respected Art Gallery School in Melbourne.<sup>98</sup> The enthusiasm of Cameron and Hocking for the cause ensured its success, and fundraising began in earnest with YAG broadening the cultural experiences of Brisbane by not only mounting their annual exhibition, but also staging bi-monthly exhibitions throughout the year, often as open-air pavement shows, to raise further capital.<sup>99</sup> Pavement art shows were the pop-up shops of the mid-twentieth century and were set up in various locations

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<sup>92</sup> Bingham, “Young Artists Plan £300 Scholarship.”

<sup>93</sup> Betty Churcher, interview with Robin Hughes, Betty Churcher interviewed by Robin Hughes for the *Australian Biography Project*. 2002. [Transcript of sound recording].  
<http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/churcher/intertext4.html>

<sup>94</sup> Betty Churcher, interview with Robin Hughes.

<sup>95</sup> Keith Bradbury and Glenn R. Cooke, *Thorns and Petals: 100 Years of the Royal Queensland Art Society* (Brisbane: Royal Queensland Art Society, 1888), 160.

<sup>96</sup> Bingham, “Young Artists Plan £300 Scholarship.”

<sup>97</sup> RQAS Circular to members dated October 1950.

<sup>98</sup> Bingham, “Young Artists Plan £300 Scholarship.”

<sup>99</sup> “Hot Work in a Good Cause,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), November 17, 1951.

around the city, such as outside the Brisbane General Post Office in Queen Street.<sup>100</sup> These shows consisted of unframed watercolours works and drawings, generally for one pound or less.<sup>101</sup> The YAG Travelling Scholarship finally became a reality in 1951 as ten junior artists entered paintings in the scholarship competition judged by Vida Lahey, Robert Haines, and Gertrude Langer. At a special exhibition of the paintings, held at the Royal Geographical Society's Rooms in Ann Street beginning on September 19, 1951, Betty Cameron was declared the winner.<sup>102</sup>

Cameron decided to use the scholarship money to travel to Britain rather than to go to Melbourne. As a result of her year at the Walthamstow Art School in London, she was awarded the prestigious, but poorly funded (£15), "Princess of Wales Scholarship [1953] as the best female art student in the country," and offered a place at the much esteemed Royal College of Art.<sup>103</sup> Cameron felt unable to accept the offer because of a lack of funds, but in recognition of her significance to Brisbane's art world, the RQAS used its strong social integrity to initiate a publicly subscribed support fund in conjunction with the *Courier-Mail*.<sup>104</sup> The target for the fund was set at £500, and in a matter of weeks the appeal was generously oversubscribed.<sup>105</sup> It had taken YAG members a year of hard work to raise £150 for the initial scholarship, but through judicious use of the media, with stories demonstrating Cameron's willingness to undertake menial jobs to support herself in her quest to gain the best art education possible, Brisbane's newspaper reading public rallied to assist Brisbane's art world.<sup>106</sup> Because of opportunities opened to her through the YAG Travelling Scholarship, Betty Cameron went on to become one of the most respected figures in the Australian art world; not as an artist, as she originally planned, but as Betty Churcher; author, and Director of the Australian National Gallery in Canberra and the Art Gallery of Western Australia.

In the early 1950s, YAG was fulfilling an important role in Brisbane's art world by supporting the aspirations of young local artists to pursue their artistic careers. The drive and determination of the members of the 1950/1951 YAG Council pushed Brisbane art into the public spotlight through their work in bringing a travelling scholarship to fruition. The YAG Council continued to present exhibitions in support of the next scholarship, which was announced on October 11, 1954.<sup>107</sup> Controversy surrounded the second scholarship as the declared winner, Alexa Tabke, was found to have contravened the scholarship rules by copying and she was disqualified.<sup>108</sup> No further attempts to facilitate a scholarship were attempted and enthusiasm for the group began to

<sup>100</sup> "Hot Work in a Good Cause."

<sup>101</sup> "Elizabeth Marks," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), March 15, 1952.

<sup>102</sup> Warwick Lawrence, "Young Artists Show Promise," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 19, 1951.

<sup>103</sup> "Girl in a Thousand: At 22 She Needs Our Help," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), July 11, 1953.

<sup>104</sup> RQAS Minutes Book, 28 April 1953; "Betty," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), May 25, 1953. "Girl in a Thousand: At 22 She Needs Our Help," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), July 11, 1953.

<sup>105</sup> "Girl in a Thousand".

<sup>106</sup> "Girl in a Thousand".

<sup>107</sup> "Young Artists Show Today," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), October 11, 1954.

<sup>108</sup> RQAS Minute Book.

wane. In 1958, insufficient members of the group attended the Annual General Meeting to elect a committee, and YAG was in danger of being disbanded.<sup>109</sup> It survived, but the decreased interest in participation in artists' groups, such as YAG, may be linked to the rise of the alternative artists' groups that appeared at St Mary's Studio in Kangaroo Point: a phenomenon that had been growing in importance since 1951. The group continued to operate in a limited way through a life class and an annual exhibition of members works until 1963.

## Conclusion

This chapter examined the consequences for the Brisbane art world of a decision taken by the Council of the RQAS, to form the affiliated group YAG to cater specifically for Brisbane's young artists. While the RQAS saw their gesture simply as alleviating the necessity for the juniors to compete against older artists to have their work shown in the annual group exhibition, the leaders of the first junior group of artists saw it as an opportunity to break with tradition and improve their art in accordance with modernist principles of individual expression. Gertrude Langer had awakened the art sensibilities of young Brisbane artists through her stories of pre-war European art worlds, and this, combined with the timing of the *Herald Exhibition* in Brisbane in 1945, was crucial in effecting change. Some who attended Langer's lectures, including Laurence Collinson, Pamela Seeman, and Laurence Hope chose the path of rebellion, dancing around the rules of the status quo, as a result.

Nancy Underhill notes that the cultural maturity of an art world may be measured by the presence of an avant-garde that can lead the art world forward.<sup>110</sup> Brisbane's art world had been slowly maturing throughout the 1940s, and the formation of the Miya Studio, although unexpected, represented another goal reached as the young artists of the studio formed an avant-garde because they represented a unique cluster of modernism in Australian art. The studio established a community of artists that was centred on the production of art and yet, because of the values they held, was set apart from the rest of Brisbane's art world as it pursued a vision of a contemporary world. Unsurprisingly, the public response to such works was rarely encouraging and Brisbane art critics dismissed it as a sensation-seeking repudiation of academic standards that ultimately revealed a lack of skill and knowledge on the part of the artists. While YAG remained the darlings of the press and public with their annual exhibitions consistently garnering generous praise as they showed sincerity and respect for the traditions of art, the artists of the Miya Studio were seen as troubling because they chose to invest imagery of contemporary life with disturbing meanings.

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<sup>109</sup> RQAS *Annual Report and Financial Statement 1958*.

<sup>110</sup> Nancy D. H. Underhill, *Making Australian Art 1916-49: Sydney Ure Smith Patron and Publisher* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991), 8.

While Miya Studio welcomed new ideas through various weak ties with other art worlds, YAG made significant contributions to creating a greater cultural density in Brisbane's art world through their many pavement shows that brought art to the streets of Brisbane. Through the instigation of a Travelling Art Scholarship to further the artistic ambitions of local artists, YAG reinforced the RQAS commitment of encouraging the participation of many. Miya Studio, on the other hand, represented a change in Brisbane's artistic culture and although their artists left no enduring legacy of style – indeed, most had not yet formulated their own individual style before the group disbanded – they did leave a legacy of an idea that it was possible in Brisbane to flourish as artists, free of older established institutions.



## Chapter 7

### Hundreds of Dabblers: St Mary's Studio and the Contemporary Art Society

We live in totally novel times, that contemporary history is the source of our significance, that we are derivatives not of the past but of the surrounding and enfolding environment or scenario, that modernity is a new consciousness, a fresh condition of the human mind.<sup>1</sup>

In December 1949, the *Courier-Mail* reported that as part of a worldwide upsurge of interest in art as a hobby, “hundreds of amateur artists have doubled the demand for art requisites in the last 12 months” in Brisbane.<sup>2</sup> Central to the creation of this phenomenon were the American naive artist, Grandma Moses, and England’s war-time Prime Minister, Winston Churchill.<sup>3</sup> Grandma Moses was an untutored artist whose paintings of farm scenes had captured the imagination of art dealers in America in the 1940s and a 1948 article by Ross Campbell in the *Queensland Times* reported art dealers from 57<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, were discussing the finer “points of a Grandma Moses as earnestly as those of a Picasso or a Van Gogh”.<sup>4</sup> Winston Churchill (under a pseudonym) had fuelled interest in art when he entered two small landscapes in the Royal Academy exhibition of 1947.<sup>5</sup> In Brisbane, John Cooper from the Moreton Galleries stated that he had been asked to evaluate the work of “at least 30 or 40 amateur artists recently” in what was described by the *Courier-Mail* as an “art boom”.<sup>6</sup> As Brisbane joined the “art enthusiasm” sweeping the world, Cooper suggested that with “such a popular art wave, gifted artists were sure to be found for the State”.<sup>7</sup> Although Michele Anderson suggests that something of a “cultural brown-out” occurred in Brisbane in 1949 as members of Miya Studio devolved to other interests,<sup>8</sup> Cooper’s words proved to be prophetic. While the artists cited by Anderson, such as Collinson, Hope, Knopke, and Blackman, left Brisbane for Melbourne; by 1950 another group of young artists were just beginning their study of art. These art students included Bronwyn Yeates, Pam MacFarlane, John Aland, Andrew Sibley, Irene Amos, and Gordon Shepherdson – all of whom would eventually become

<sup>1</sup> Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, eds., *Modernism* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1976), 22.

<sup>2</sup> “Hundreds of Dabblers: City Art Boom,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), December 19, 1949.

<sup>3</sup> “Winston Starts Craze,” *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), December 18, 1949.

<sup>4</sup> Ross Campbell, “Grandma Moses is an Untaught Genius,” *Queensland Times* (Ipswich), January 28, 1948.

<sup>5</sup> “Winnie’s Day as a Painter,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), May 13, 1947.

<sup>6</sup> “Hundreds of Dabblers.”

<sup>7</sup> “Hundreds of Dabblers.”

<sup>8</sup> Michele Anderson, “Barjai, Miya Studios and Young Brisbane Artists of the 1940s: Towards a Radical Practice.” Volume 2 (Honours’ thesis, University of Queensland, 1987), 190.

highly regarded artists and art teachers in the Brisbane art scene. The boom in amateur art, with the support of artists' groups, would provide further impetus for Brisbane's art world to develop its professional maturity.

This chapter examines the historical development and influence, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, of a group of artists, students and intellectuals who developed an alternative artistic culture in Brisbane based at St Mary's Studio at Kangaroo Point. The greatly increased interest and participation in art activities by both serious art students and dabblers in art provided the momentum for the immediate success of the Studio. These students sought a freer, less academic approach to the production of art than that which currently existed in Brisbane. While academic art classes continued at the Central Technical College Art Branch (CTC), the studio at St Mary's became the focal point of an alternative form of art education in Brisbane that was centred on groups of students and six artist/mentors: Richard Rodier-Rivron (1951-1952); Margaret Cilento (1952-1953); John Rigby (1954-1955); Jon Molvig (1956-1958); Roy Churcher (1958-1962); and Mervyn Moriarty (1963-1966). It will be seen that three distinct, but not discrete, groups formed around these mentors who were able to modernise production of art in Brisbane.

While the 1950s was heralded by an influx of amateur artists, the 1960s saw Brisbane become home to an increasing number of young intellectuals associated with the expanding University of Queensland. Overseas academics, such as Bernard Schaffer, Graham de Gruchy, Dennis Pryor and Nancy Underhill, found on arrival in Brisbane, a total absence of any theoretical discussion about painting outside of art classes and organised lectures. The Contemporary Art Society Queensland Branch (CAS) was set up through St Mary's Studio, not only as an artists' exhibiting group for the promotion of contemporary art in Brisbane, but also for the dissemination of knowledge about contemporary art "for the public at large".<sup>9</sup> In organisational form, the CAS largely resembled the RQAS, but it was the spirit of discovery imbued in participants of the contemporary group that created the difference between the two groups. This chapter will argue that the CAS was important in further developing the cultural thickness of Brisbane's art world by consistently exploring the many new forms the visual arts were taking and presenting them to the Brisbane public.

### **St. Mary's Studio, Kangaroo Point**

Art Classes now being held, modern methods and techniques, beginners and advanced students, still life, figure, landscape, outdoor sketching. Enquiries Rodier-Rivron (side entrance) 71 Moray Street, New Farm.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Roy Churcher, cited in Helen Fridemanis *Artists and Aspects of the Contemporary Art Society Queensland Branch* (Brisbane: Boolarong, 1991), 40.

<sup>10</sup> "Classes and Tuition," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 5, 1950.

This small advertisement in the “Classes and Tuition” column of the *Courier-Mail* on August 5, 1950, announced the beginning of a new era in the development of Brisbane’s art world.

Advertisements for other art classes, advertised by Evangelina Hume, Emma Birbeck, and Margaret McNeil in the years 1949 and 1950, were quite standardised in offering tuition in showcard and ticket writing (basic commercial art skills), watercolour, drawing, and figure sketching. By advertising teaching using “modern methods and techniques”, Rodier-Rivron’s advertisement held promise for those in Brisbane seeking to produce art in the modern manner. Rodier-Rivron had announced his intention to form an art class in Brisbane at an exhibition of his work at the Moreton Galleries in June 1950.<sup>11</sup> With the establishment of this class, Rodier-Rivron joined the growing list of outsiders, and therefore weak ties (Jenner, Friström, Rivers, Pedersen, and Collinson), who had been influential in creating change in Brisbane’s art world.

Artist Muriel Shaw, in her unpublished essay, “Kangaroo Point Mentors and the Paint Tree: a Short History of a Brisbane Studio at Kangaroo Point in the ‘50s and ‘60s as Remembered by Some of the Students”, suggests the presence in post-war Brisbane of what she describes as “forward looking students” who were looking for a less inhibited approach to art, where less stress was placed on mimesis.<sup>12</sup> Rodier-Rivron’s advertisement attracted the attention of such students seeking an alternative to the restrictive art education practices of the CTC, and the timing of his arrival in Brisbane was opportune, as Miya Studio, the only alternative to the establishment art world in Brisbane, had disbanded at the end of 1949. The class that resulted from this advertisement eventually evolved into a successful alternative teaching studio beneath the church hall at St Mary’s Anglican Church, Kangaroo Point, and proved to be a viable option to the CTC.

Reverend A. Stevenson, rector of St Mary’s Church, joined Rodier-Rivron’s life drawing class in 1950, and eventually suggested that the twenty students would be more comfortable in the basement studio under the parish hall of his church. Kangaroo Point was across the river but was easily accessible by tram, or car. The studio was the result of a project from the Depression of the 1930s and was first used as a creative centre to give unemployed boys a place to learn practical carpentry skills.<sup>13</sup> The studio space was later utilised as an artists’ studio by the Australian Army during World War Two, and artist Donald Friend dubbed it the “gas chamber” when he and Lindsay Churchland worked there in 1944.<sup>14</sup> Betty Churcher remembers it as a “lovely space” high on the

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<sup>11</sup> Paul Grano, “Versatile Art Show,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), June 20, 1950.

<sup>12</sup> Muriel Shaw, “Kangaroo Point Mentors and the Paint Tree: a Short History of a Brisbane Studio at Kangaroo Point in the ‘50s and ‘60s as Remembered by Some of the Students,” unpublished essay.

<sup>13</sup> Shaw.

<sup>14</sup> Donald Friend, *The Diaries of Donald Friend*, Volume 2, ed. Paul Hetherington (Canberra: National Library Australia, 2003), 99.

cliffs of Kangaroo Point, “with a lovely patio overlooking the Brisbane River”.<sup>15</sup> To Wendy Allen, it was a “totally unsophisticated room that could hold some twenty or so artists at work, while light streamed in through the windows and the French Doors that looked out across the Brisbane River and that ‘other world’ outside”.<sup>16</sup> While Alison Coaldrake describes it as:

A very old building. I loved the French doors. They seemed so old. They were all that kept the elements out. The handles rattled. There were cobwebs everywhere. The palettes were old and curved, and the sink was repulsive. Sometimes it would be blocked, but we’d boil the water and make coffee. We’d stop work for lunch and eat and chat. There was not even a path to the door. But just like painting in oils on paper, which we did, you felt free because the atmosphere encouraged you to be free. You weren’t worried about spilling things. It was a good atmosphere.<sup>17</sup>

Reverend Stevenson could not have foreseen that he was initiating a tradition for use of the studio by Brisbane artists that would endure until 2010, when modern health and safety regulations finally forced its closure.<sup>18</sup>

### **Becoming a Group at St Mary’s Studio**

Precisely when the students made the transition from “class” to “artists’ group” is open to conjecture because the boundaries of some artists’ groups are, as Raymond Williams explains, defined only by a “*conscious association or group identification* [original italics], either informally or occasionally manifested, or at times limited to immediate working [...] relations”.<sup>19</sup> As members of an informal and unstructured fee-paying class, with not even a syllabus to define how they should act or what they could expect to learn, Rodier-Rivron’s class of 1951 cannot be defined as an artists’ group. The students who enrolled in the class in 1950 did so as individuals who were interested in art, but at some point, the students discerned that they were no longer a group of individuals, but a highly individual group. Although no definite time can be substantiated, it is clear that when Rodier-Rivron, who was revered by his students as a good teacher as well as being their mentor, decided to move his studio (and therefore the class) to suburban Albion in 1952, most of his students chose to remain at St Mary’s as a student group rather than to follow him to the new location.<sup>20</sup> As Shaw observes:

As students need mentors, they also need each other and this “staying together”, which could not be offered by the individual artist/teachers in their own studio was a valuable contribution to their [the student’s] development.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Betty Churcher and Robin Hughes, Betty Churcher interviewed by Robin Hughes for *Australian Biography Project*, 2002. [Transcript of sound recording]. <http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/churcher/intertext4.html>

<sup>16</sup> Wendy Allen, email to the author, August 18, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Coaldrake conversation with author, January 21, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> Wendy Allen, conversation with the author, December 5, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture*, (Glasgow: Fontana, 1981), 68.

<sup>20</sup> Shaw, “Kangaroo Point Mentors”, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Shaw, “Kangaroo Point Mentors”, 5.

The groups that formed at St Mary's were loose-knit associations offering familiarity, safety, and intimacy for the students that belonged, and who were motivated by a desire to work and learn together. With no formal membership arrangements, Shaw suggests that St Mary's Studio was successful because the students identified as "the group from St Mary's" and "felt modern", rather than simply following the traditional path of an artist in Brisbane, the contours of which led from the CTC to membership of the RQAS.<sup>22</sup> Staying together represented a "conscious association" of the students with each other as like-minded individuals and marks the student's evolution into an artists' group. In the end, it was not the respect they felt for their mentor that bound them together as a group, but their need for each other that created the group ethos at St Mary's.

Many of the artists' groups formed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries did so as exhibiting groups. Their main purpose was focused firmly on providing an annual exhibition of members' works. For St Mary's Studio, it was the education of artists that remained the focal point and the studio rarely exhibited as a group. Jon Molvig did organise an exhibition of his students' work at the Johnstone Gallery in 1957, and Roy and Betty Churcher organised occasional "in studio" exhibitions.<sup>23</sup> Because the focus of St Mary's was on education, the groups from St Mary's may be regarded as "alternative" as in the case of providing alternative facilities for the education of artists.<sup>24</sup> Alternative groups form when it is seen that existing facilities do not provide for, or exclude, the production of certain kinds of work. While the CTC concentrated on providing a technical education in art, it was the individual expression of ideas, thoughts, and feelings in the fine arts that became the hallmark of the teaching at St Mary's. From Rodier-Rivron to Mervyn Moriarty, St Mary's Studio was bound together by the informal bonds of commitment of the students, one to another, and required no formal memberships, constitution, or annual exhibition of work to mould its identity.

At this point, I would like to clarify the term "groups from St Mary's". The first group formed around Rodier-Rivron and was dominated by student dabblers but included serious art students such as Bronwyn Yeates, Don Ross, and Betty Churcher. A second group formed around Jon Molvig and, although it contained members of Rodier-Rivron's original students such as Bronwyn Yeates, it was dominated by the presence of emerging artists such as Andrew Sibley, John Aland, Gordon Shepherdson, and Joy Roggenkamp. The third group formed around the artist/teacher Roy Churcher and comprised a group of young intelligent housewives, including Alison Coaldrake, Joy Hutton, and Shirley Miller, with time on their hands because social

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<sup>22</sup> Shaw, "Kangaroo Point Mentors," 7.

<sup>23</sup> Gertrude Langer, "Some Students Show Talent," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), November 28, 1957; Alison Coaldrake conversation with the author, January 21, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Williams, *Culture*, 70.

conventions decreed that they should not work.<sup>25</sup> There was always an overlap of students between the groups, and that was an important factor in maintaining the continuity of the studio. A core group of students was always available to form a class for a new mentor. The studio contributed to the development of a network of individual artists that had spread throughout Brisbane by the early 1960s. To sustain this network and the momentum of contemporary art in Brisbane, a specialist group that would look after the interests of artists working in the modern idiom was required and the CAS was formed in 1961 from the activities of the studio.

As the students at St Mary's formed into a welcoming loose-knit group, the loyalty they displayed to each other by remaining with the studio, rather than moving when the mentor moved on, had another beneficial effect in that they formed a ready-made class for the next teacher. The ready-made class made St Mary's an attractive prospect for artists looking to supplement the art income by teaching; the hard work of building up a class was already done, and the students provided continuity for ideas and attitudes, but more importantly, maintained a critical mass of adopters, allowing the momentum of contemporary ideas to be sustained.

### **The Mentors**

Rodier-Rivron's classes provided a very different form of art education to that offered at the CTC, where art was taught as a technical skill rather than as a creative form of expression. As discussed in Chapter 1, the CTC followed the prescriptive example of British art schools where it was common for the teacher to impress his ideas or style onto his students, with the result that the work of artists often developed identifiable features associated with a particular school or teacher. In contrast, Rodier-Rivron offered a modern European style of art education where students made independent studies, experimented with style and technique, and were then offered criticism of their work by the teacher.<sup>26</sup> Rather than assuming the pedagogical role of a teacher, however, Rodier-Rivron offered himself as a model of creative commitment to art to his students. Rodier-Rivron did not seek to impose his personal style on his students, but by acting as a guide as they sought to follow their own ideas, he became their mentor.<sup>27</sup> This style of teaching was followed by each of the other mentors of St Mary's Studio.

The mentor was of great importance to the success of St Mary's Studio, not only in creating a stimulating atmosphere conducive to creative work, but also acting in the role of opinion leader in the adoption of new ideas. Everett Rogers suggests that the success or failure of new ideas to take hold rests, in part at least, on the role of opinion leaders and their relationship with the agents of

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<sup>25</sup> Coaldrake conversation.

<sup>26</sup> Eileen Chanin, and Steven Miller. *Degenerates and Perverts: the 1939 Herald Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art* (Melbourne: Miegunyah, 2005), 100.

<sup>27</sup> Shaw, "Kangaroo Point Mentors", 2.

change.<sup>28</sup> Unlike the earlier Miya Studio, where opinions about what art needed to be were many, but no opinion leaders existed to direct the art produced, the mentors of St Mary's, through their own work and personal authority in the world of art, provided the leadership and encouragement to consolidate and progress the student's own ideas. Shaw suggests that Rodier-Rivron created a "light-hearted and amusing" bohemian atmosphere by introducing art books into the studio for reference, and initiating discussions often with the accompaniment of wine and cheese, about the work of his favourite artists.<sup>29</sup> Although I have described the initial grouping around Rodier-Rivron as "dabblers", it also included artist Judy Cuppaidge, and Bronwyn Yeates (later an artist and art teacher), who were inspired by Rodier-Rivron's commitment to art in producing his own works.<sup>30</sup> As homage to the mentor, the students began a tradition of scraping their palettes clean on an upright support inside the studio at the end of a painting session, as "a symbol that they had, that day, kept to the ideals of their mentor and created an individual expression of their own ideas, thoughts, and feelings".<sup>31</sup> The "Paint Tree", as it became known, became a physical symbol of the respect the students had for their mentor and the tradition, and its significance, endured until the studio closed in 2010.<sup>32</sup>

Little is known of Rodier-Rivron's life prior to his arrival in Brisbane in 1950, but Paul Grano's review of his 1950 show at the Moreton Galleries indicates that he was London-born and trained.<sup>33</sup> Glenn R. Cooke, previously from the Queensland Art Gallery, notes that in 1947 Rodier-Rivron was working in Sydney and in that year and 1949, he had works selected in the Wynne Prize, a prestigious annual Australian art competition for landscape.<sup>34</sup> Rodier-Rivron settled in New Farm where he established his first art class in Brisbane.<sup>35</sup> Although a wholly representational artist, and therefore readily acceptable to less adventurous dabblers, he was obviously interested in exploring many techniques in his work, as is illustrated by Paul Grano's review of the show for the *Courier-Mail*:

His work has peculiar interest because of the variety of techniques employed and its variation in approach.

This versatility also makes it more difficult to find a satisfactory answer to "what is the artist's strength?"

Is this to be found in the technique and approach of "Street Scene" or in "Old Buildings, Belle Vue Hill" adequately done in an English Style that takes me back many years?

<sup>28</sup> Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, (New York: Free, 1995), 89.

<sup>29</sup> Shaw, "Kangaroo Point Mentors," 4.

<sup>30</sup> Don Ross, conversation with the author, April 3, 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Irene Amos cited in Shaw, "Kangaroo Point Mentors," 3.

<sup>32</sup> After the Studio closed in 2010, the layers of paint on the Paint Tree were carefully removed and conserved as a relic of the long history of the studio. It is now in the custodianship of the HDGA. *HDGA Newsletter February 2011*.

<sup>33</sup> Grano, "Versatile Art Show".

<sup>34</sup> Glenn R. Cooke, "Richard Rivron," *Design and Art Australia Online* <http://www.daa.org.au/bio/richard-rivron/biography/> Accessed December 18, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> "Classes and Tuition".

Or is it in the strongly contrasting “Deserted Farm,” a palette knife job from a generous palette, or the quietly competent and convincing “Snow, Effingham Common”?  
Or is it in “Storm Over Warriewood” with its interesting mixture of mediums?<sup>36</sup>

When informed by Rodier-Rivron that he proposed to start a class in Brisbane, Grano intimated that the show was a perfect advertisement for his intended classes saying that his paintings seemed to have “something for everyone regarding painting approaches and techniques”.<sup>37</sup>

Muriel Shaw recalled that Rodier-Rivron was readily accepted into Brisbane’s nascent art world because he had cachet as a “real overseas artist”, while Don Ross, one of his early students, suggests that he was a very friendly, likeable person.<sup>38</sup> Betty Cameron was another of his early students.<sup>39</sup> She attended his classes to improve her technique in oils to increase her chances of winning the inaugural Younger Artists’ Group Travelling Scholarship in 1951.<sup>40</sup> Rodier-Rivron’s modern methods included encouraging his students to work directly in colour using oil paint while emphasising the importance of both composition in painting and the individuality of the student’s ideas.

Ross was a dentist who had been attending life classes in Brisbane since 1937 (with Caroline Barker), and although he later became well-recognised as an artist in Brisbane, at this stage he represents one of the talented dabblers in art. He was first introduced to painting by William Bustard in Townsville during the war, and later joined Bustard and Charles Lancaster on weekend painting trips around Brisbane.<sup>41</sup> With the encouragement of Bustard and Lancaster, Ross joined the RQAS, and later the HDGA. However, he noted that neither group was really interested in pursuing contemporary ideas. Ross credits James Wieneke of the HDGA with pushing him toward the group at St Mary’s and later the Contemporary Art Society.<sup>42</sup> Ross remembers Rodier-Rivron:

He was a good teacher actually. He taught me contour drawing and light and shade. He could really paint. Some of his night scenes were beautiful. He used to go around painting those pie carts they used to have around about in Edward Street—like Harry’s Pie ‘d’ Wheels. He’d pick a rainy night and paint that and the reflections on the road. It would be beautiful.<sup>43</sup>

Ross considers Rodier-Rivron’s teaching of contour drawing as one of the most important aspects of the life class. Of particular benefit was the use of the method presented in Kimon Nicolaïdes’ popular book, *The Natural Way to Draw*, (as discussed in depth in Chapter One). Nicolaïdes’

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<sup>36</sup> Grano, “Versatile Art Show.”

<sup>37</sup> Grano, “Versatile Art Show.”

<sup>38</sup> Shaw, “Kangaroo Point Mentors”, 3. Ross, conversation.

<sup>39</sup> Ross, conversation.; Cooke, “Richard Rivron”.

<sup>40</sup> “Scholarship Paintings,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 29, 1951.

<sup>41</sup> Ross, conversation.

<sup>42</sup> Ross, conversation.

<sup>43</sup> Ross, conversation.



method induced spontaneity in drawing by requiring the student to produce at least 25 drawings in a 30 minute session. It was the freedom that this brought to his work that impressed Ross, as it encouraged artists toward individual expression while, at the same time, removing any pretensions toward mimesis. Rodier-Rivron left St Mary's Studio in 1952 when he moved his studio practice to Albion. As has been seen, the students decided to remain at St Mary's, and Margaret Cilento was offered the class.

Margaret Cilento became the second mentor of St Mary's and was able to take over a fully formed class that included emerging artists Bronwyn Yeates, Judy Cuppaidge, and Elaine Perrott.<sup>44</sup> Cilento was one of the original junior members of the RQAS, along with her friend Margaret Olley. Like Olley, Cilento's initial art training came from the artist Caroline Barker, the art mistress at Somerville House.<sup>45</sup> After beating Olley in the inaugural Half Dozen Group of Artists Travelling Art Scholarship in 1946, Cilento travelled to New York to study printmaking at Atelier 17 in 1947. Cilento enjoyed critical recognition as an etcher in America, and sent examples of her work including *Bathers* and *Persephone* to the 1948 and 1949 HDGA annual exhibitions.<sup>46</sup> They didn't sell, but the HDGA later gifted them to QNAG. In America, Cilento also found herself joining in workshop and discussion sessions with many of the emerging figures of the burgeoning American Expressionist style at the Subjects of the Artists school, founded at 35 East Eighth Street.<sup>47</sup> Here, she worked alongside artists such as Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, and Robert Motherwell.

On her return from her studies in New York and Europe, Cilento set about supporting the art world that had nurtured her, by conducting private art classes at venues around Brisbane.<sup>48</sup> It is not clear how Cilento came to take over the St Mary's Studio, but by 1953 she had set up a regime of classes including a daytime abstract class, two evening life drawing classes, and a children's art class on Saturday mornings.<sup>49</sup> In addition to these designated class times, Cilento conducted open studio sessions on Saturday afternoons and Sundays for those who wanted to work or to just discuss art.<sup>50</sup> Cilento had much to offer the art students of Brisbane, and although she set up a printing press at St Mary's Studio<sup>51</sup> so she could teach the printmaking she favoured as a medium, her students did not share her enthusiasm.<sup>52</sup> Her students were still discovering the possibilities of painting with oils, which, for them, represented the supreme medium for artistic expression.<sup>53</sup> A lack of appreciation

<sup>44</sup> Shaw, "Kangaroo Point Mentors", 6.

<sup>45</sup> Helen Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects of the Contemporary Art Society*, (Brisbane: Boolarong, 1991), 26.

<sup>46</sup> "Brisbane Artist 'Back from Mars,'" *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), August 14, 1951. (HDGA Exhibition Catalogues, HDGA Archive).

<sup>47</sup> Margaret Cilento, letter to E. Lilian Pedersen dated April 12, 1949.

<sup>48</sup> "They Paint (mostly for fun) in Clayfield Garage," *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), September 14, 1953.

<sup>49</sup> Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 26.

<sup>50</sup> Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 29.

<sup>51</sup> Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 26.

<sup>52</sup> Shaw, "Kangaroo Point Mentors," 3.

<sup>53</sup> Betty Churcher interview.

for printmaking and abstract art in Brisbane meant Cilento was unable to significantly develop her art interests, and Helen Fridemanis suggests that the restrictive lifestyle of “organising models for classes and teaching while attempting to rebuild one’s own style” proved difficult for her.<sup>54</sup> After a year at the Studio, she left to pursue further study in London in 1954, and was replaced by her friend, the up and coming Brisbane artist, John Rigby.

John Rigby had been, with Margaret Cilento, a junior member of the RQAS in the 1940s, and it was his friendship with her that saw him take over the classes at St Mary’s. Rigby began his artistic training in commercial art at the Central Technical College with F. Martyn Roberts in 1937 at the age of fourteen.<sup>55</sup> He joined the RQAS as a junior member in 1941 and then spent the war years in the army where, although he wasn’t a war artist, he continued to draw and paint when possible. As a result of his war service, Rigby was eligible to participate in the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (CRTS) that provided educational and vocational training for returned servicemen.<sup>56</sup> He attended the East Sydney Technical College to study for a Diploma of Art from 1948-1951, but because the Darlinghurst site of the East Sydney Technical College was too small to cope with the large number of ex-servicemen who applied to study art on these Australian Government scholarships, Rigby’s group, which included Jon Molvig, were moved to an alternate site in Strathfield.<sup>57</sup> There Rigby joined and exhibited with the Strath Art Group, a painting and exhibiting group associated with the school, and whose members included fellow students Molvig, John Coburn, and John Olsen amongst others.<sup>58</sup>

Rigby returned to Brisbane and set himself up as a freelance commercial artist associated with the company National Advertising, work which was supplemented by the production of one cartoon a week for the *Sunday Mail*.<sup>59</sup> By the time he took over classes at St Mary’s in 1954, Rigby was married and supporting a young family.<sup>60</sup> While Rodier-Rivron and Cilento had required the classes at St Mary’s to augment their earnings from art, Rigby, with a secure income from his job as a commercial artist, had no financial reason to commit to the student group at St Mary’s, but he believed it was important to “build on” what had already been achieved there and to maintain an alternative to the CTC in Brisbane.<sup>61</sup> With the limited time at his disposal between his commercial work, his own painting, and his family, Rigby did what he could to keep the classes going, but, during this period, classes at the Studio were restricted to a Saturday afternoon painting class and a

<sup>54</sup> Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 26.

<sup>55</sup> John Rigby and Barbara Blackman, John Rigby interviewed by Barbara Blackman, 1985, accessed May 30, 2012. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.oh-vn2089791>.

<sup>56</sup> Rigby interview; Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme – Fact Sheet 178. <http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs178.aspx>

<sup>57</sup> Rigby interview.

<sup>58</sup> Rigby interview.

<sup>59</sup> Rigby interview.

<sup>60</sup> Rigby interview.

<sup>61</sup> Rigby interview.

Thursday evening life drawing class.<sup>62</sup> Rigby continued to paint privately, and when he won the Italian Government Travelling Art Scholarship in 1955, a national competition, he offered the studio and classes to his friend Jon Molvig, who had arrived unexpectedly in Brisbane a few months before, and was working in a tannery rather than working as an artist.<sup>63</sup>

Molvig took over the studio in 1956 and encouraged a similar convivial environment to that begun with Rodier-Rivron, and reintroduced the *soirée* popular with Margaret Cilento.<sup>64</sup> Molvig represented everything that Rigby was not. Rigby was a hard-working, responsible family man, while Betty Churcher describes Molvig as “the king of the kids in a James Dean way”.<sup>65</sup> John Rigby’s son Mark described Molvig as having “a certain contrariness”, and as someone who enjoyed being “an outsider, a maverick, and a committed bohemian”.<sup>66</sup> It would be some years before Molvig reached his full potential as an artist, and yet a distinctly new group began to form around him when he taught at St Mary’s. Many of the original group remained, including Bronwyn Yeates, Judy Cuppaidge, Ann Thompson, Irene Amos, and Pam MacFarlane, but Muriel Shaw suggests that “artists attract artists” and many emerging Brisbane artists were keen to work with Molvig.<sup>67</sup> Young and emerging Brisbane artists such as Andrew Sibley, Margaret Olley, Joy Roggenkamp, Gordon Shepherdson, John Aland, and Mervyn Moriarty joined the evening life classes at the studio, with journalist Phyllis Woolcock noting that at the conclusion of the class, the atmosphere changed to become a social gathering where art was discussed long into the night.<sup>68</sup>

As with the other mentors, and in the modern traditions of art teaching at that time, students were left alone to work and experiment before Molvig came to discuss their work and offer constructive criticism. As part of his mentoring process, Molvig inspired experimentation in the group through personal example. John Rigby remembered Molvig experimenting with “blowtorch paintings”, where the surface texture of a painting was altered to become like solidified foam after a blowtorch was applied to the picture surface. Molvig’s contrariness was his motivation in works such as these, as he sought to “show those bastards [art dealers] in Sydney something” different coming from Brisbane, but his attitude also brought out the best in students like Nevil Matthews who began to experiment away from traditional media for painting by using materials such as epoxy resin.<sup>69</sup> Students felt stimulated by Molvig’s authority as an artist.

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<sup>62</sup> Shaw, “Kangaroo Point Mentors,” 6.

<sup>63</sup> Rigby interview.

<sup>64</sup> Shaw, “Kangaroo Point Mentors,” 7.

<sup>65</sup> Betty Churcher interview

<sup>66</sup> John Millington, research by Mark Rigby, *John Rigby: Art and Life* (Caringbah, NSW: Playwright Publishing, 2003), 37-38.

<sup>67</sup> Shaw, “Kangaroo Point Mentors”, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Phyllis Woolcock, “Brisbane’s Boom,” *Bulletin* (Sydney), April 4, 1964.; Shaw, “Kangaroo Point Mentors”, 3.

<sup>69</sup> Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 50.

The Molvig era at St Mary's ended when he left on an extended painting trip to Central Australia in 1958.<sup>70</sup> With his departure came the end of what I identify as the first phase of modernisation in the production of art in Brisbane. From 1951, Rodier-Rivron, Cilento, Rigby, and Molvig had seamlessly provided a continuous program of artist mentoring at the St Mary's studio, and the result was a deepening of the cultural institutional thickness of Brisbane's art world. By 1958 for example, Bronwyn Yeates, one of Rodier-Rivron's original students, had established a teaching studio in Spring Hill; and Andrew Sibley and John Aland, who had joined Molvig's students at St Mary's, set up adjoining teaching studios at Terrace House in Petrie Terrace.<sup>71</sup> A contemporary presence in Brisbane's art world was now self-perpetuating as the young professional artists created a network of artistic activity in Brisbane based around Spring Hill and Petrie Terrace. When Molvig left Brisbane in 1958, there was no obvious successor as a mentor, but Roy and Betty Churcher, who had established their own "art school" in the attic studio of the School of Arts with a new group of willing students, took over the lease.<sup>72</sup>

Betty Churcher, the former Betty Cameron, had returned home to Brisbane from her studies in England at the Royal College of Art in London with her young husband, Slade School-trained English artist Roy Churcher in 1957. Betty was hoping for a quick visit and a return to England, but Roy was captivated by the light, sights, and smells of Brisbane, and the couple stayed. Betty Churcher described them as doing a "roaring business" at the School of Arts because they, as did St. Mary's Studio, offered an "exotic and different alternative" to that of the CTC.<sup>73</sup> Roy Churcher retained the common thread that characterised the teaching at St. Mary's by encouraging all students to achieve their potential.<sup>74</sup> While young emerging (often male) artists had been attracted to classes at the studio with Molvig, a different demographic gathered around Churcher. Young, intellectual, married women, such as Alison Coaldrake who was married to a CSIRO scientist, formed the nucleus of the new group.<sup>75</sup> Such a demographic may not seem conducive to the formation of a serious group of artists, but Churcher never seems to have doubted their commitment to their art. Coaldrake suggests that the class size was "perhaps nine or ten" in 1958 when she began to attend classes with Churcher.<sup>76</sup> Churcher offered a Saturday morning painting class, which as Coaldrake remembers was the housewives' favourite as their husbands fulfilled "baby-sitting duties" at home; a portraiture class, and a life drawing class. He continued the studio tradition of encouraging self-expression and interpretation, and evaluating the success of the student using

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<sup>70</sup> Glenn R. Cooke, "Molvig, Helge Jon (1923–1970)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/molvig-helge-jon-11145/text19851>, 2000, accessed online 17 August 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Shaw, "Kangaroo Point Mentors", 8.

<sup>72</sup> Betty Churcher interview.

<sup>73</sup> Betty Churcher interview.

<sup>74</sup> Betty Churcher interview.

<sup>75</sup> Coaldrake; Val Waring, conversation with author, 2010; Rhyl Hinwood, conversation with author, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Coaldrake conversation.

discussion and the technique of “balanced and constructive criticism”.<sup>77</sup> Alison Coaldrake, remembers that he never offered a solution to a problem encountered by a student, but encouraged experimentation as the way to “fix it”.<sup>78</sup>

Churcher’s classes continued at the studio until the end of 1962 when he was appointed to conduct “hobby classes” in painting at the CTC.<sup>79</sup> While the CTC was at last trying to broaden and update their syllabus, Churcher was unimpressed by what he encountered there and considered that students at “the revered temple of outmoded values [CTC]” still produced “second-hand ideas indifferently rehashed in acres of acrylic”.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, the position as a tutor ensured financial security for Churcher and his growing family. Many of Churcher’s students supported his move to the CTC by enrolling in his new art course, but Alison Coaldrake, Joy Hutton, Shirley Miller, and Conty Robinson also continued to use the studio for untutored painting sessions. These women, who had met through Roy Churcher’s classes, were joined by Dorothy Akers, Deidre Bennett, Beverley Budgen, Rona Van Erp, Joyce Hyam, and Irene Amos, who were students from Churcher’s CTC hobby class. The group became known as the Wednesday Group, and met once a week to paint, and to critique each other’s work. Churcher often joined the Wednesday Group painting sessions because he missed the camaraderie the studio provided.<sup>81</sup> The Wednesday Group would go on to become stalwarts of the CAS exhibitions in the 1960s. St. Mary's Studio was still not ready to consign its place in the Brisbane art world to history.

After the departure of Churcher at the end of 1962, the studio was sub-let to Mervyn Moriarty. Moriarty was a young student when he first appeared at the studio in the time of Molvig, and now, at the age of 25, he became the last of the mentors at St Mary’s as he carried on the tradition of stressing the importance of self-expression and interpretation of a subject. Moriarty developed his own colour theories and applied these to his teaching methods. Moriarty left the studio in 1966 to found an art school that was unique in Australia. The Flying Art School was based in Brisbane but, rather than servicing the needs of the city, brought a contemporary art school to the isolated communities throughout Queensland. Moriarty later went on to establish Eastaus (for Eastern Australia) as a private art school in Brisbane in 1971,<sup>82</sup> adding another layer of cultural support for art education in Brisbane.

By the end of the 1950s, through the work of the loose-knit artists’ groups that had formed at St Mary's Studio, Brisbane had developed a self-sustaining network of artists producing semi-

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<sup>77</sup> Coaldrake conversation.

<sup>78</sup> Coaldrake conversation.

<sup>79</sup> Coaldrake conversation.

<sup>80</sup> Roy Churcher, “Review CTC Art Students Show,” *CAS (QLD) Newsletter*, (September, 1968).

<sup>81</sup> Coaldrake conversation.

<sup>82</sup> Marilyn England, *From River Banks to Shearing Sheds: Thirty Years with Flying Arts* (Milton : Suzanne Wickenden Smartype Design Studio, 2009), 8.

abstract contemporary art. The “hundreds of dabblers” had provided the numbers so that a critical mass of those interested in the modernisation of art production in Brisbane was finally achieved, and the numbers of artists and teachers produced as a result, created an art network that spread throughout Brisbane. However, by the late 1950s, the many dabblers had devolved to new interests, if the size of Roy Churcher’s class is taken as a guide. As has been noted, Rodier-Rivron’s class comprised twenty students when he first occupied St Mary’s Studio, but in 1958/1959 Alison Coaldrake places the size of Churcher’s class at “usually around nine or ten”: a considerable reduction in numbers from the early 1950’s boom period.<sup>83</sup> While the dabblers may have moved on, Brisbane’s art world had been enriched by their presence and Brisbane had a strong network of both artist/teachers and practising contemporary artists.

It was now that the third phase of activity that developed from St Mary’s Studio began with the formation of the Contemporary Art Society, Queensland Branch (CAS) in 1961. The CAS was designed to support artists in their practice of contemporary art, to disseminate artists work, and to encourage the acceptance of contemporary styles of art as part of the overall fabric of Brisbane’s art world.

### **The Contemporary Art Society**

With its network of artists, the centre of creative artistic activity in Brisbane was no longer confined to the inner city and Kangaroo Point, as Spring Hill and nearby Petrie Terrace, with their cheap rents and dilapidated houses, developed a bohemian presence with a number of individual teaching studios. Molvig was conducting life classes at Corroboree House, in Hartley Street, Spring Hill, John Aland and Andrew Sibley had teaching studios in Petrie Terrace, and Bronwyn Yeates taught at Sedgebrook Street, Spring Hill. These teaching studios, working in conjunction with St Mary’s Studio, expanded the art network that had been created in Brisbane. Aland, Sibley, and Yeates were now extending the network of production of contemporary art well beyond the old french doors of St Mary’s Studio.

While the production of contemporary art was secure and well established in Brisbane by the end of the 1950s, there was no centre available for the dissemination of the product. As has been suggested, artists relied on the RQAS annual exhibition to show their works, or they turned to small commercial venues to promote their work. Alison Coaldrake recalls that it was common for artists to exhibit their works at restaurants, and she held a number of solo exhibitions at Baguette, a restaurant in Ascot run by Francis and Marilyn Dominic.<sup>84</sup> Although the Moreton Galleries and Johnstone Galleries created institutional thickness by catering for the more established artists, the

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<sup>83</sup> Coaldrake conversation.

<sup>84</sup> Coaldrake conversation.

intimate spaces of “upmarket restaurants” such as Baguette also added to the cultural thickness of Brisbane’s art world by supporting emerging artists such as Coaldrake. She describes Baguette as having “good walls” and that after a few shows there, her work produced a following of supporters and she “sold well” so she felt no need to join the establishment artists’ groups such as the RQAS in order to promote her work.<sup>85</sup> The restaurant venues provided outlets for individual artists, but Brisbane needed a united group that would promote and disseminate new ideas in art to the wider public. Individual shows may have gained a following for an artist, but Bronwyn Yeates felt that Brisbane now needed a society such as the New South Wales branch of the Contemporary Art Society to foster the wider acceptance of contemporary art.<sup>86</sup>

The first Australian society to look after the interests and requirements of contemporary artists was formed in 1932, when a group of young modernist painters, including George Bell, William Frater, Arnold Shore, and Adrian Lawlor, came together to form the Contemporary Group.<sup>87</sup> Throughout the 1930s, the spectre of the formation of a dominant, conservatively driven Australian Academy of Art loomed over the art worlds of Sydney and Melbourne. The Academy, supported principally by the politician Robert Menzies, was eventually formed in 1937 and was seen by artists “as a threat to the many [artists] through the acquisition of power by the few” establishment traditionalists.<sup>88</sup> Menzies made it clear that modernism would not, under any circumstances, be accepted by the Academy.<sup>89</sup> Antipathy for the Academy structure was reflected in the growing support for a “society of progressives whose aim was to help promote new ideas in art”, and in Melbourne in 1938, George Bell called for a “society which would unite all artists and laymen ‘in favour of encouraging the growth of a living art’”.<sup>90</sup> On July 13, 1938, a large gathering of 150 attended a meeting at the Victorian Artists’ Society galleries to form the first Contemporary Art Society in Australia and a constitution was formally adopted.<sup>91</sup> Richard Haese suggests that in its original aims, the Contemporary Art Society intended to be an inclusionary society whose fundamental principles and attitudes did not differ greatly from other art societies.<sup>92</sup>

The initial constitution of the Victorian Contemporary Art Society was freely adapted from that of the Victorian Society of Artists. Haese suggests that although the constitution of the various contemporary art societies may have been generic and have reflected the aims of older, more conservative societies, the difference lay in the spirit of the associations rather than in their form.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Coaldrake conversation.

<sup>86</sup> Fridmanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 40.

<sup>87</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 46.

<sup>88</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 46.

<sup>89</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 43.

<sup>90</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 46.

<sup>91</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 47.; “Freedom in Art,” *The Argus* (Melbourne), July 14, 1938.

<sup>92</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 47.

<sup>93</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 47-48.

Although the Victorian Contemporary Art Society began as an inclusionary group (traditional and contemporary works were accepted),<sup>94</sup> its constitution was reshaped so that eventually contemporary art societies were able to discriminate in the selection of works for an exhibition on the grounds of style, being within their rights to refuse to hang any work submitted for exhibition if it was deemed to have “no other aim than imitation”.<sup>95</sup> A Sydney branch of the Contemporary Art Society was formed in 1940, and Adelaide followed in 1942, both using the Victorian constitution as a model for organising the associations.<sup>96</sup> Brisbane, with no tradition of modernist artists to support in the 1940s, bided its time.

The climactic moment for the formation the CAS came in the early 1960s, as Brisbane experienced an influx of young intellectuals to fill positions at the expanding University of Queensland. They found on their arrival in Brisbane that, outside of art classes and organised lectures, there was a complete lack of facilities available in the city for stimulating, theoretical discussion about contemporary painting. Bronwyn Yeates, who had been a member of New South Wales branch of the CAS since the mid-1950s, found a willing ally in Roy Churcher for the formation of a Queensland Branch. Approximately fifty people attended a public meeting held at St Mary's Studio on the 14 September 1961, to gauge local interest in the formation of a local CAS branch.<sup>97</sup> The formation of the CAS with its allied program of exhibitions, newsletter, lectures illustrated by slides, films, and social events, was welcomed by contemporary thinkers from all walks of life, but its primary purpose was as an exhibiting society.<sup>98</sup>

At the first meeting, Bernard Schaffer, a student of Churcher's, agreed to become President in order to get the group started.<sup>99</sup> Schaffer was Senior Lecturer in Public Administration at the University of Queensland and was part of the abovementioned influx of young intellectual “outsiders” from overseas who served as “weak ties” bringing new ideas into Brisbane in the early 1960s. The CAS offered contemporary thinkers, artist or academic, a forum where they could share innovative ideas with like-minded people and in the same way that the appointed chairman of the RQAS had given that group respectability, so Schaffer gave the CAS a “nice credibility”, circumventing bias from laypeople toward the unconventional artists.<sup>100</sup> Artists Roy Churcher and Don Ross became the first vice-Presidents, Ian Still (artist) was Secretary, Dianna Bennett (artist) was Treasurer, and other Committee members were Gertrude Langer (critic), Tony Morphett (ABC

<sup>94</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 47.

<sup>95</sup> Helen Fridemanis, “Contemporary Art Society, Queensland Branch 1961-1973: a Study of the Post-War Emergence and Dissemination of Aesthetic Modernism in Brisbane”. (Masters’ thesis, University of Queensland, 1989), 39. <https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:190032>; Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 70.

<sup>96</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 68-72.

<sup>97</sup> Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 8.

<sup>98</sup> Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 39.

<sup>99</sup> Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 41.

<sup>100</sup> Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 41.



journalist), Bronwyn Yeates, John Rigby, Arthur Gunthorpe, and Andrew Sibley (artists).<sup>101</sup> Shortly after its formation, members of the Queensland Branch were formally invited to exhibit at the Sydney and Melbourne Contemporary Art Society exhibitions, and members of the CAS moved quickly to avail themselves of invitations to show in Sydney from 25 October to 7 November, 1961 and in Melbourne with the Victorian Branch from 6 to 18 November, 1961. Selected for exhibition in Sydney were: Roy Churcher, Judy Cuppaidge, Arthur Gunthorpe, Lillian Gunthorpe, Don Ross, Maryke DeGeus, John Dalton, Dianna Bennett, John Aland, and Andrew Sibley, while those for Melbourne included: Roy Churcher, Richard Werner, John Aland, Christine Berkman, and Andrew Sibley.<sup>102</sup>

In many ways, the CAS resembled the RQAS in its form with its acceptance of non-artists as members, formal membership and constitution. However, a point of difference was that the CAS was set up as a specialising group<sup>103</sup> with the express purpose of promoting and disseminating contemporary work in Brisbane. To this end, its constitution directed its elected selection committee to “impose no limitations and refuse no work, except that which has no aim other than representation”.<sup>104</sup> At the inaugural meeting, it was decided that the group would mount two exhibitions in Brisbane each year. An autumn exhibition would be held in April or May and would be restricted to Queensland members, while the spring exhibition in September/October would encourage interstate artists to join their Queensland counterparts in showing their works.<sup>105</sup> Participation in the event would be decided by a hanging and selection committee of up to six members, and works submitted needed at least two votes to be accepted.<sup>106</sup> The selection committee for the first Brisbane exhibition consisted of Roy Churcher, John Rigby, Bronwyn Yeates, and Margaret Olley.<sup>107</sup>

The first CAS exhibition took place in the Hardy Brothers Gallery, 118 Queen Street in April 1962, and attracted the work of 46 artists. Gertrude Langer’s review is a veritable roll-call of artists who attended the classes at St Mary’s with artists selected for mention including Andrew Sibley, John Aland (“here is someone who will make the grade”), Bronwyn Yeates, Roy Churcher, Lillian Gunthorpe, and Don Ross.<sup>108</sup> Others mentioned included Margaret Olley, who attended life drawing sessions, and Joy Roggenkamp and Milton Moon, who studied with Jon Molvig. In her review, Langer acknowledged the work of “private teachers” in Brisbane who had provided a

<sup>101</sup> *CAS Broadsheet*, November 1961.

<sup>102</sup> *CAS Broadsheet*, November 1961.

<sup>103</sup> Williams, *Culture*, 70.

<sup>104</sup> Haese, *Rebels and Precursors*, 70

<sup>105</sup> Fridmanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 49.

<sup>106</sup> *CAS Broadsheet*, November 1961.

<sup>107</sup> *CAS Broadsheet*, March 1962.

<sup>108</sup> Gertrude Langer, “Contemporary Art Body Puts on its First Show...,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), April 4, 1962.

stimulating influence on the production of art “in recent years”.<sup>109</sup> She praises the “organic abstraction of precisely delineated shapes” by Don Ross, noting an obvious influence of Australian artist Leonard French but suggests that Ross’s work is still limited to decoration rather than the deeper mysticism that underlay French’s work.<sup>110</sup> Langer expresses optimism for Brisbane’s art world, proposing that although Brisbane had been home to some outstanding figures in art, “the refreshing thing is that at last one senses that something is happening in this place, which for too long has been a backwater”.<sup>111</sup> The exhibitions continued to challenge viewers by pushing the boundaries in art with Pop Art first being exhibited at a CAS exhibition by Don Ross in May 1964 with his Richard Hamilton inspired collage *Silence is Like Golden*.<sup>112</sup> By 1967, Langer suggests that the size of works was a major feature of the Interstate exhibition with Pop Art, Op, and Constructivist Art dominating the exhibitions.<sup>113</sup> Leonard Matkevich from New South Wales exhibited a Claes Oldenburg influenced “outsize bikini top” titled *No.1 Fetish*, while Queensland entries in the same show were dominated by the large, “static black and white geometry” of Bryan Banks’s work.<sup>114</sup>

In the self-sustaining contemporary art world that Brisbane had become, another generation of artists was emerging from the many alternative teaching studios that now operated in Brisbane in the 1960s. The CAS recognised this new generation by creating the Young Contemporaries Group, which like its predecessor the Younger Artists’ Group (YAG) of the RQAS, gave recognition to the work of younger artists in the CAS in the form of separate exhibitions. However, unlike YAG, the Young Contemporaries were not a pro-active group, and although their first exhibition took place in 1964, another did not eventuate until July, 1969.<sup>115</sup> Young Contemporaries included Davida Allen (taught by Betty Churcher), Jenny Pugh (Mervyn Moriarty), Robert J. Morris (Moriarty), Ian Smith (Nevil Matthews), Ray Hughes (Roy Churcher), and Paul Memmott (Moriarty).<sup>116</sup> Frederic Rogers, writing for the *Sunday Mail*, suggested that their show in 1969 was:

Sufficiently imaginative to encourage the belief that we have in our community a hard core of bright young men and women rapidly approaching the stage at which they will have something really serious to say in the development of Australian art.<sup>117</sup>

All the artists mentioned went on to have very successful artistic careers, with Davida Allen winning the Archibald Prize in 1986 with the painting *Dr John Shera (My father-in-law watering*

<sup>109</sup> Langer, “Contemporary Art Body”.

<sup>110</sup> Langer, “Contemporary Art Body”.

<sup>111</sup> Langer, “Contemporary Art Body”.

<sup>112</sup> Langer, “Contemporary Art Show,” *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), May 12, 1964.

<sup>113</sup> Gertrude Langer, “Op, Pop, and Fun Art...,” *Courier Mail* (Brisbane), April 19, 1967.

<sup>114</sup> “Yours for \$200,” *Courier Mail* (Brisbane), April 14, 1967; Langer, “Op, Pop, and Fun Art...”.

<sup>115</sup> Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 54.

<sup>116</sup> Fridemanis, *Artists and Aspects*, 38.

<sup>117</sup> Frederic Rogers, *Sunday Mail* (Brisbane), July 13, 1969.

*his garden*), while Ray Hughes found his forte as a formidable gallery director both in Brisbane and Sydney.

## **Conclusion**

The era that had begun with the placement of a small advertisement for an art class in 1950 was drawing to a close. Through the work of the mentors and students of St Mary's Studio, the continued production of contemporary art was assured in Brisbane by the end of the 1950s. Because the groups from St Mary's were concerned with the education of artists, they did not develop a tradition of an annual exhibition to distribute the artists work. While Molvig did organise an exhibition of the students' work at the Johnstone Gallery in 1957, Roy Churcher preferred low-key "in-house" exhibitions at the studio. However, the annual exhibitions of the RQAS remained, for emerging artists, as the best option to publicise their work. Although there was a greatly increased number of artists' working in the field, there was not yet a corresponding network of small commercial galleries through which to disseminate the new work. The formation of the CAS in the self-sustaining contemporary art world that Brisbane had become was important in developing a culture that understood and appreciated the efforts of their local artists.

Many of the young migrant academics who arrived during the late 1950s and early 1960s, and who had been enthusiastic supporters of the exciting young "frontier" society, had moved on by 1967, and many of the artists were studying or travelling overseas. However, these artists, rather than leaving Brisbane because of its lack of facilities, now left as equals with other artists from other art worlds, and were intent only on gathering experiences to further their personal practice. The diaspora included artists Andrew Sibley, and John and Jenny Aland who went to Melbourne; Bronwyn Yeates, who married the gregarious director of QAG Laurie Thomas before moving to Sydney with him; and the intellectual Bernard Schaffer, who returned to England to climb the professional ladder of academia. These young intellectuals formed the backbone of the CAS and, as they moved on, the job of organising intellectually stimulating symposia, gathering information for the newsletter, and even organising the exhibitions fell to fewer and fewer committed members. Roy Churcher continued to be the mainstay of the society, serving on the committee continuously from 1961 to 1973, and as president from 1965 to 1971, but he did so within a diminishing circle of influential artists and intellectuals.

Brisbane was a culturally changed city by 1970, and the arts were slowly becoming recognised as a component of community life in the city. In Brisbane's art world, the paths of the alternative artists' groups and the establishment converged and organisations such as the CAS were losing their relevance on the outdated battleground of ideas about modern art. Roy Churcher felt that the CAS had successfully increased awareness about the arts in the Brisbane community, but in

doing so it had negated the sense of purpose that bound together the CAS into a cohesive group. In November 1974, the CAS Queensland Branch was wound up and members were offered the opportunity to continue their membership with the recently formed Federal branch.<sup>118</sup> The basement hall of St. Mary's Anglican Church provided a sense of milieu for Brisbane's artists, professional and amateur, for twenty years and in that time they not only brought to fruition the dream of a culturally mature Brisbane, but also developed an art that reflected the zeitgeist of the city.

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<sup>118</sup> Fridemanis, "Contemporary Art Society," 171.

## Conclusion

This has not all come from nothing. It has come about through the work and effort of generations of people in Brisbane, or those who have been profoundly influenced by Brisbane.<sup>1</sup>

Non-revolutionary artists' groups are rarely considered in art histories, but as my study has revealed they can play an important role in the birth and development of art worlds. Directly, or indirectly, artists' groups stimulated the growth and ultimate changes that took place in Brisbane's art world between 1940 and 1970. By choosing to study Brisbane's art world from the point of view of artists' groups, I have opened a different perspective in the study of Australian art, and provided new insights into the not always obvious or prominent operations of an art world.

This thesis has mapped the complex interactions of art institutions including the artists' groups that made up Brisbane's art world between 1940 and 1970. In doing so, it differs from the conventional art history model, which views the artist as central to the production of art. Further, as this project progressed, it became more and more apparent that the story of art presented through the lens of a few individual artists as representative of an art world, provides a skewed view of the development of art. The approach in this thesis has been to provide an account of crucial aspects of Brisbane's art world which have hitherto received scant attention.

Artists' groups were particularly important in the formation of Australia's art worlds as they represented an organised force of those interested in progressing the visual arts in an often otherwise disinterested environment. I have argued the arrangement of individual artists into artists' groups was the most effective way of bringing about lasting changes to the Brisbane's art world. In both Brisbane and Sydney, the formation of art societies was the first step in the development of the enduring institutional supports for their art worlds. However, Sydney and Melbourne, because of their larger populations and concentrations of wealth, developed greater institutional thickness more quickly than smaller centres such as Brisbane. Because of a lack of strong individual leadership, Brisbane's early art world developed no clear pattern outside the annual exhibitions of the artists' groups, and it was only with the emergence of artists like Jon Molvig and Roy Churcher, and gallery owner Brian Johnstone that diversity became a part of Brisbane's art world.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Shapcott, foreword to *The Third Millennium*, by William Hatherell (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2007), vi.

Undeniably, Brisbane's art world was culturally thin in 1940. The RQAS maintained a semblance of an art market for local artists through the provision of annual members' exhibitions, while the CTC, the only art educational facility in the city, concentrated on providing a technical art education for industry, but it trained few aspiring artists. The public art collection at QNAG was run by a group of enthusiastic amateurs with no clear sense of purpose for the collection. It was under resourced and located well outside the city area. Writing about art was confined to reviews of the very occasional art shows held in the city. Change was necessary in Brisbane's art environment if it was to become an effective economic apparatus that sustained Brisbane artists in the plurality that characterised the modern art world.

By 1970, however, Brisbane's art world had changed significantly through a number of incremental steps that led to an increased cultural institutional thickness of its art landscape. The annual exhibitions by artists' groups were no longer the highlight of the art calendar, but now formed only a small part of an overall pattern of exhibitions that showed art continuously in the city. This was possible because Brisbane was now home to a number of well-respected commercial galleries that brought to Brisbane the most contemporary forms of art that Australia had to offer. A plethora of independent galleries catered for virtually all tastes in art from conventional traditional or semi-abstract figurative to hard-edge abstraction, and allowed Brisbane's art students the opportunity to keep abreast of the latest trends in art. Instead of being restricted to seeing only art from the past in QAG, students had access to the latest trends in art through the many small, often specialising, private galleries that had been established. QNAG had also changed. While still housed in temporary accommodation at a site well away from the city, the gallery was now professionally managed as a Government body and its financial future was secure. It had been joined on the Brisbane scene by the Darnell Collection. QAG provided Brisbane audiences with an art historical collection from Europe and Australia, while the Darnell Collection added the dimension of a collection of contemporary Queensland art.

The profile of art education in Brisbane had also changed. No longer was fine-art training left to one facility. The success of the alternative art education facility that developed through the groups at St Mary's Studio caused the CTC to modernise its course structures, while artists trained at St Mary's added greater depth to artist education by opening their own teaching studios. Although by 1970, St Mary's Studio no longer existed as a centre for art education, the last of the mentors, Mervyn Moriarty, had established a new private art school known as Eastaus that continued to provide an alternative to the CTC.

In the early 1940s, Brisbane was positioned as a garrison city as the headquarters for the Pacific campaign in World War Two. While over two million Allied service personnel passed through Brisbane between 1942 and 1944, and the city's population soared from 350,000 in 1940 to

nearly 500,000 by 1943, this did not decisively provide the trigger for the changes that took place in Brisbane's art world. Even before the arrival of troops into Brisbane, the city's art revival, after a long period of stagnation, had begun. The presence of the troops was important to fuel the revival of Brisbane's art world as they not only economically enriched the city but they also provided an injection of weak ties and new ideas into the city.

One factor in the sudden reinvigoration of Brisbane's art world is that the RQAS was made aware of a number of talented juniors, such as John Rigby, Margaret Olley, and Margaret Cilento, who were emerging within Brisbane's art scene. While Becker characterises art worlds as being populated by largely "competent but uninspired" artists who nevertheless provide the mass of work that is required to keep an art world functioning,<sup>2</sup> it is from this large population of artists that occasionally a special few emerge. When this happens, the art world needs to have the facilities in place to support them. Because Brisbane's art world had traditionally lacked this depth of facilities, such artists were usually lost to Brisbane as they drifted away to work in art worlds with greater cultural depth. The introduction of the initiative of a junior membership scheme by the RQAS in 1941 in an effort to retain the services of these artists, was an important incremental step in the development of greater cultural density in Brisbane's art community, but it was too little too late in the case of Olley and Cilento, and the war intervened in the case of Rigby. However, from this initial decision, the consideration of junior artists became the prime concern of both the RQAS and the HDGA throughout the 1940s with the RQAS forming YAG as an autonomous group to service the needs of young artists, and the HDGA providing art scholarships for young artists.

The encouragement of youth by the artists' groups throughout the 1940s brought positive consequences, as a core group of artists emerged who, importantly for Brisbane's art world, stayed working in Brisbane. YAG became a successful initiative of the RQAS, but not before it had spawned an oppositional artists' group known as Miya Studio. Although mainstream artists' groups such as the RQAS, HDGA, and YAG maintained their dominance of Brisbane's art world, Miya Studio provided an example of an alternative to the accepted way, and it was through the provision of alternatives that Brisbane's art world began to grow.

Between 1942 and 1946, Brisbane's art calendar was still dominated by the annual exhibitions of the RQAS and the HDGA held in the banqueting hall of the Canberra Hotel. This venue was a considerable improvement on the earlier makeshift venues of the 1930s. Holding exhibitions at the Canberra provided a semblance of stability for Brisbane's art world, and without any clear alternatives to its facilities, it became the venue of choice for virtually all art exhibitions held in Brisbane. Art became a popular memento of time spent in Brisbane during the war and the group exhibitions thrived in what were boom times for Brisbane artists. Alternatives to the annual

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<sup>2</sup> Howard Becker, *Art Worlds* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 232.

group exhibitions emerged after the war as entrepreneurs, sensing the potential of art as a commodity, opened numerous small galleries in Brisbane. Many of these were short-lived, but others like the Moreton Galleries provided Brisbane art audiences with year-round facilities for viewing and buying art locally. The impact of these small galleries was not immediately apparent on the sales at the annual group exhibitions because the artists' groups took advantage of another modern marketing sensation – Finney's department store art gallery. Seemingly, there was room for all in this marketing bonanza.

The presence of an art gallery in a department store did much in Brisbane to position art as part of everyday life. Previously, art had been viewed by the majority of the population as an annual phenomenon with little social or cultural presence outside the duration of the exhibitions. Given its greater prominence in the community, art as a pastime increased in popularity in Brisbane, echoing a trend felt around the world. The increased popularity of art brought the need for more art classes and more art classes meant greater cultural depth. Richard Rodier-Rivron's art classes offered an alternative to the academic or technical art education provided at the CTC, and set Brisbane's art production on the path to modernisation.

The spacious studio under the church hall at St Mary's in Kangaroo Point, allowed an alternative form of art education to flourish. While Miya Studio had tried to change the direction of Brisbane art with few artists committed to change, St Mary's Studio began with a class of around twenty students looking for a modern approach to the production of art. They found it with the artist/mentors who were responsible for tuition at St Mary's. The characteristic style of teaching using experimentation and discussion allowed the group to discuss new ideas presented by a mentor before making decisions about whether or not to adopt them. To help them to clarify their ideas, the students were now able to refer to the best contemporary Australian art on show continuously at the Johnstone Gallery and the Moreton Galleries in the city. Previous generations of artists trained in Brisbane did not have this luxury with those trained in the 1940s considering they were well served by the art books, prints, photographs, and coloured reproductions of art-works supplied at the Art Reference Library.

Of vital importance for Brisbane's art world was that at St Mary's, a critical mass of adopters of a modern, contemporary art style was reached and modern thought in art practice became self-sustaining in Brisbane. As a result, the phenomenon of artist drift to other art centres was curbed and many artists trained at St Mary's including Bronwyn Yeates, Andrew Sibley, and John Aland, chose to remain and opened their own teaching studios. The artist/mentors John Rigby, Jon Molvig, Roy Churcher, and Mervyn Moriarty also chose to remain working and painting in Brisbane. By remaining, they further increased Brisbane's cultural institutional thickness.



The dynamics of Brisbane's art world had been irrevocably changed by the presence of a permanent art market provided by small commercial galleries, and the artist's reliance on the artists' groups' annual exhibitions as the only way to get their work before potential patrons was diminished. The role of artists' groups needed to be renegotiated in Brisbane's changed art world. Artists' groups, such as the RQAS and the HDGA, became the reservoirs of those technically competent, but often uninspired artists referred to by Becker.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the artists' groups remained, and continue to remain, important as the site of production of most of the art work that fuels Brisbane's art system. Set against this trend of movement away from artists' groups was the creation in 1961 of the CAS as an artists' group specifically for those engaged in the production of contemporary art.

The need for the CAS arose because the market facilities in Brisbane, at that stage, still did not cater for the needs of Brisbane's contemporary artists. The Johnstone Gallery, as Brisbane's leading contemporary art gallery, concentrated on showing the leaders of Australian contemporary art, and specialist galleries such as Gallery One-Eleven were still to come. The biannual exhibitions of the CAS provided support for the local exponents of contemporary art until the art market had caught up. By 1969, even the need for the CAS was beginning to fade as Gallery One-Eleven became established as a showcase of local contemporary art.

While the physical changes occurring in Brisbane's art world were obvious, what were less clear were the intellectual changes that were also taking place. Arthur Danto's work in America shows that not understanding the lexicon of modern art was a far reaching problem affecting artists, critics, and audiences throughout the world. Using Danto's work to provide a contemporaneous view of the problem allows and encourages the situating of Brisbane's art world within a range of prevalent Australian and international attitudes toward modern art.

The Governor of Queensland, Sir Leslie Wilson, typified a 1940s Brisbane art audience when he said he liked to look at pictures that showed clearly what they represented. Although he may have typified the general art audience, I have been able to demonstrate that there was a groundswell of interest in developing a greater understanding of art already present in Brisbane. Winifred Moore wrote of nearly 200 people attending one of Gertrude Langer's first public art lectures in Brisbane. Langer, as a private teacher in her own home and public art figure in Brisbane's art world, added to the cultural density of Brisbane's art world, as she helped people with no art training to understand that art was not merely about a representation of reality but a visual reality of an idea transformed through an artist's mind. From 1954, Langer used her position as the art critic for the *Courier-Mail* to educate even more people about what they were seeing when viewing art. Complementing the knowledge that she provided were the greatly increased

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<sup>3</sup> Becker, *Art Worlds*, 232.

opportunities to view art works through the continuous exhibition programs provided by the many small commercial galleries that now dotted Brisbane's art landscape.

The acceptance or otherwise of modernism as a style of art was never important in the progression of art in Brisbane, but this argument has been used to characterise Brisbane's art world as behind the times, and as hopelessly provincial. What was important to the participants in Brisbane's art world was the development of modernity. Students who attended classes at St Mary's identified as modern students at a modern art school. William Hatherell inclines towards the legacy of the earlier Miya Studio lying in their development of a modernist form of figurative expressionism, but this thesis has argued that the legacy of the Miya Studio lay instead in the idea of being modern. The Miya Studio idea of the cooperative studio where ideas were shared became the basis of the alternative art education facility at St Mary's Studio. By encouraging Brisbane artists to experiment with forms of personal expression, Miya studio provided yet another of the incremental steps that Brisbane's art world needed in its quest for modernity.

As Brisbane's art world developed greater cultural thickness in its art landscape, Brisbane artists showed a willingness to join the modern world of art with its multiplicity of styles and the dependence of individual artists on artists' groups to represent them was considerably diminished. Between 1940 and 1970, the work produced by Brisbane artists, and accepted by Brisbane audiences, had moved far beyond the traditional mimetic landscapes of the 1940s to engage with the ideas of critical thought that underpinned hard edge abstraction, and even post object art.

This study has revealed that the study of the art produced in Brisbane is a sadly neglected field for art scholarship. Although an analysis of the art works was outside the frame of reference for this thesis, there appear to be identifiable characteristic elements of style in much of the work produced that are associated with the conditions that are presented in this thesis and, as such, represent a fruitful area for future study. The Queensland Art Gallery is now making an effort to collect what remains of the art produced in this period in Brisbane and serious scholarship is required to understand what may be considered to be an identifiable Brisbane style. I have argued that conservatism in the production and consumption of art is encouraged in conditions of cultural institutional thinness, and it is only with the development of cultural density, through the presence of many avenues of dissemination, education, and patronage, that the artist is granted a degree of autonomy in the work he/she produces. If the art produced in Brisbane is viewed through this lens, rather than through the ideas held in another art world, the value of what local artists produced becomes invaluable.

Coinciding with the period of activity at St Mary's Studio, were the art competitions that formed a major feature of the Australian art landscape in the 1950s and 1960s. Lucrative prizes were offered nationally as incentives to encourage the development of art. Prestigious prizes

included the Flotta Lauro Prize, the Australian Women's Weekly Portrait Prize, the Transfield Prize, the Gold Coast Art Prize, the Brisbane's Warana Art Competition and the Redcliffe Art Contest are some, but there were many others. Major artists including William Dobell participated in these competitions. Interestingly, Brisbane artists also competed for these prizes with considerable success, and provides another area of Brisbane art that requires investigation

By undertaking an analysis of Brisbane's art world as a whole, I have provided a more nuanced understanding of the individual characteristics of Brisbane's art world. In the 1940s, artists' groups such as the RQAS and the HDGA supported Brisbane's art world through their annual exhibitions and encouragement of the production of art. By 1970, the positions were somewhat reversed and the art world that had developed in Brisbane was supporting a number of artists' groups, which included many new specialising groups such as the Sculptors Society of Queensland, the Watercolour Society, and the Queensland Potters' Association. It is worth noting that artists' groups, while they may have lost their aura as arbiters of taste in Brisbane's art world to the directors of commercial galleries, still perform the important task of encouraging many to participate in art activities and still produce the mass of work that keeps Brisbane's art world functioning. By doing so, they, like the art educational facilities, the professional, commercial galleries, the public museums, and art journals such as *Eyeline*, remain one of the enduring institutional supports of Brisbane's art world.

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# Appendix 1

## Foreword

The Younger Artists' Group  
First Exhibition 29 October-1 November 1945

The artist, in two respects at least, is like the scientist. Firstly, he is experimental. Like Cezanné, he may plod away for a whole lifetime attempting to perfect one or two ideas; or like Picasso, he may subject numerous theories to attacks of his brush. Secondly, he is not afraid of tradition—he uses the accumulation of ideas, which is tradition, adapts them to his own purposes, and if he is a great artist, adds to them: but when he finds some of them unsuitable, he casts them aside. At times he may be wrong, but always he is sincere.

Queensland art today is practically sterile. Year after year after year the same pretty still lifes, the same pretty landscapes, the same pretty figure studies are disgorged in their hundreds. Technically pleasing many of these paintings are, but the ability to make a good representation of a natural object on canvas is no proof that the craftsman is also an artist. It would seem that the discoveries and rediscoveries in art over the past fifty years, the wars, the revolutions, the terrible events that have taken place in that time, have made little or no impression on our local painters: they are working with their eyes closed. But our local art lovers are equally at fault; they allow the printed drivel of our local “art-critics” to obscure, with few exceptions, their native judgement; they continue to view without protest, these mass-produced (what other word is there?) and pitiful objects.

Although several of its members are still under the harmful influence of local training institutions—the use of the word “art-school” is unjustifiable—the Younger Artists' Group hopes that by virtue of the few experimentalists it contains and the zest that activates all its members, a new spirit will soon be apparent in Queensland art.

We gratefully acknowledge the kindness and help of the Royal Queensland Art Society in preparing this exhibition.

Laurence Collinson (Chairman).