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The Contemporary Art Society of NSW and the Theory and Production of Contemporary Abstraction in Australia

1947-1961

by

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Summary

This study investigates the construction of the cultural meaning and value of abstract art in Australia during the postwar years of 1947-1961. Its aim is to challenge the conventional historical view that Australian postwar abstract painting was, in the manner of provincial art, derivative of overseas ideas which arrived late, and in the fragmented form of magazine and postcard reproductions. It argues that firstly, Australian postwar abstract painting emerged from a distinctive practice of abstraction that had its origins in Sydney and that secondly, it was the product of a specific combination of artistic, political and social circumstances which influenced the nature of Australian culture during this period.

The study focuses on Sydney as the centre of abstract painting. It explores the distinctive nature of Sydney's artistic ideology and arts infrastructure, and the manner in which they provided the vital impetus and polemics for the production of abstraction. It looks, in particular, at the New South Wales Contemporary Art Society, and its establishment of a promotional infrastructure and a theoretical discourse, which educated the art world and the public to an appreciation of abstract art as the advanced stream of modernism. The meaning and value of abstract art became an issue of intense debate during the 1950s, when the NSW CAS launched an aggressive campaign against the establishment's assertion that art should serve society's interests. By defining abstract painting as an autonomous discipline, dedicated to the disruption of social and cultural order, the NSW CAS and Sydney's abstract painters helped to stimulate a national debate about the role of art and its relation to society, which this study contends was instrumental in shaping the specific ideals and character of Australian postwar abstract painting.

Author's Statement

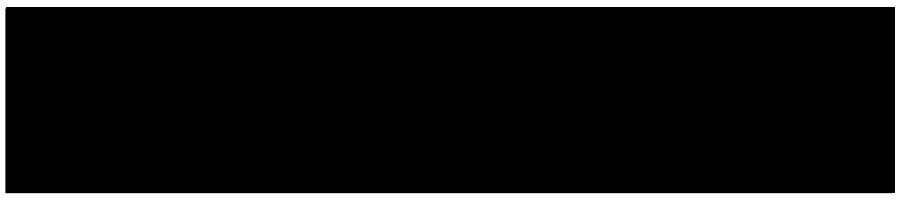
I, Denise Mary Whitehouse, declare the following:

(i) that the thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution,

(ii) that, to the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis; and

(iii) that where the work in the thesis is based on joint research or publications, the relative contributions of the respective authors are disclosed.

signed



Denise Whitehouse, 29/1/99

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Abbreviations

Arts, Music and Performing Arts Collection for Oral History and Alma Collections	AMPA
Bernard Smith Papers	Smith Papers
Carl Plate Papers	Plate Papers
Contemporary Art Society	CAS
Contemporary Art Society of NSW	NSW CAS
Museum of Modern Art New York	MOMA
Museum of Modern Art of Australia	MOMAA
NSW CAS Broadsheet	NSW Broadsheet
NSW CAS Records	NSW Records
SORA	Society of Realist Artists
Sydney Morning Herald	SMH

Within the endnotes, exhibition catalogues are referred to by the names of their curators for ease of reference. However, within the bibliography they are listed by year.

Introduction

This study deals with the place of post-World War II 'contemporary' abstraction in Australian culture during the era of 1947-1961. Postwar abstraction is a largely neglected area of Australian art history. Little has been written about its history and even less has been written about Sydney as the centre of its manifestation and the role of the NSW CAS in its promotion.[1] Rather, the history of 'contemporary' art in Australia has focused on figurative modernism and the achievements of the Melbourne Contemporary Art Society, the 'Angry Penguins' circle and the Antipodean group. The story of Melbourne's creation of a national school of painting from the radical practice of figurative expressionism has been the focus of the many exhibitions and books, which celebrate the 'Rebel and Precursors' years of the Melbourne's CAS as the first Australian manifestation of avant-garde modernism.[2] In contrast, the story of abstraction has been limited to a handful of monographs on individual abstractionists, and a few minor catalogues and essays which, written in the 1980s, explore abstraction in terms of Australia's provincial engagement with 'abstract expressionism' as defined by the American critics Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg and Irving Sandler.[3] This treatment of abstraction suggests that its story does not belong within the history of Australian art which traces the emergence of a national school dedicated to stylistic and thematic expression of the Australian experience.[4] It belongs instead either to stories of individual artists and their search for self-expression, or to the history of international modernism and Australia's struggle with cultural dependency and provincialism.[5] However, the place of abstraction within Australian art and culture was an intensely contested issue during the period covered in this thesis. It was the issue which lay at the heart of the major art controversies of the 1950s and early 1960s, the Antipodean Manifesto and the Blake Prize included, creating bitter divisions not only amongst the artistic community, but also the intelligentsia and general public. The questions which this study poses are why was abstraction so controversial and contested? What was its value and meaning within Australia's postwar discourse of cultural identity? What did it signify within Australia's imaging of itself and why?

Sydney, the city of sun, sea and harbour, occupies a special place in Australia's imagination. This much loved cultural stereotype is so pervasive, that it informs even art criticism and art history, including the only extensive study of Sydney modernism in the 1940s and 1950s, Geoffrey Dutton's The Innovators. Dutton's study celebrates Sydney's fortunate geography and climate as the formative influence on its artists and intellectuals. By weaving romantic evocations of Sydney (the city which lifts 'the spirit as the waves of its surf beaches lift the body') with his discussion of art, Dutton builds a picture of a city whose artistic Muse is nature.[6] Sydney's creative genius, it follows, lies not with ideas or society but as the dazzling beauty of the harbour, bridge and Opera House indicate, in its sometimes almost mystical union of man and nature. Dutton's Sydney is a provincial city, a city 'without ideas'; absorbed by the pleasures of nature its citizens and artists are generally happy to let 'Someone else ... make the running out into the wide world of ideas and bring some of them back, safe to be localised'.[7] When these ideas do arrive, Sydney strips them of their radical nature and, as in the case of the Opera House, offers the public a compromised version of the original; a superficial shell of the idea.

This study argues that the image of Sydney as a city without ideas and innovation dominates our histories of contemporary art and has contributed to the largely negative treatment of postwar abstraction. The pattern for this historical perspective, explained in Chapters 5 & 6, was set largely by Bernard Smith and Robert Hughes, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when they contested the definition of Australian art and the criteria for its evaluation.[8] For Bernard Smith, the creation of a national school of figurative painting by Melbourne's 'Angry Penguins' circle and the Antipodeans was evidence not only of Australian artistic maturity, but also of a colony's ability to create new visions of humanity from the uniqueness of its experience. He asserted that contemporary art practice in Melbourne was distinguished by its radicalism; that is by its commitment to artistic activism and innovation. Its radicals, inspired by socialism, personal rage and the war, had established the Contemporary Art Society in opposition to Robert Menzies' conservative Academy of Australian Art, and had grasped the potential of figurative modernism to create

a national art form which was critical and innovative. In the 1950s, these foundations were developed by Russell Drysdale, Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd, Albert Tucker and the Antipodean group into a distinctive, regional school of painting which won international praise for the fresh, critical edge that it brought to the practice of modernism. Thus Melbourne was the centre of Australian art's critical practice of modernism.

In contrast, Sydney is depicted by Smith and later historians, including Dutton and Richard Haese, as the centre of a romantic and cosmopolitan version of modernism known as 'charm' school art since the late 1950s.[9] They assert that the inspiration for Sydney's contemporary art did not come from the uniqueness of the Australian experience but from a tradition of following the latest art trends from London and Paris. In a similar manner, the founding initiative for the New South Wales Contemporary Art Society did not come from within in Sydney. It came from the Melbourne branch whose politics dominated the CAS during the war years injecting Sydney art with an uncharacteristic element of artistic activism. When the Melbourne CAS lapsed into inactivity during the immediate postwar years, Sydney art lost its critical edge as its contemporary artists, exemplified by the Merioola Group, turned to the production of a poetic and stylish version of modernism. While the NSW CAS continued to function, the conventional view of historians is, that it did so merely as an exhibiting society.[10]

When the NSW CAS did come to life again as an anti-establishment force in the mid-1950s, promoting abstract expressionism as a challenge to Sydney's contemporary art establishment's 'charm' school modernism, its efforts at radicalism, according to Hughes and Smith, were doomed.[11] While Australia's regional isolation offered creative inspiration for Melbourne's contemporary artists, it brought unsurmountable problems for Sydney's artists, who were intent on joining the 'Internationale of modern painting without being able, unless they ... [travelled], to see it'.[12] Isolated from the centres of the abstract expressionist movement, they were reliant on second-hand ideas that arrived late from overseas. Consequently, they lacked the genuine understanding of the movement's ideological intent that was essential for their work to be innovative and challenging. Sydney's abstract

expressionism, therefore, was no more than a pale imitation of the latest stylistic trend to sweep the art world.

The Melbourne-Sydney binary of good and bad provincialism has dominated the historical interpretation of postwar contemporary art, encouraging the perception that Sydney art and its manifestation of abstract expressionism was provincial art, in all the unfortunate connotations of the term. The task here is to challenge this regional model of art history in which Australian participation in international art movements is perceived as inferior, inferior to Australian art and inferior to international art. Drawing inspiration from John Docker's work on the different intellectual and cultural traditions of Sydney and Melbourne, this study argues that art historical claims that Sydney art was lacking ideas and innovation, can no longer be sustained.[13] It proposes that Sydney abstract expressionism was not a provincial version of the American abstract expressionism movement, emerging suddenly when the news of this latest art fashion arrived in Australia in late 1956. It was the product of the Sydney's distinctive artistic ideology and arts infrastructure, which had encouraged artists since the 1930s, to take up the modernist challenge to explore the abstract and spiritual in art. The important issue, therefore, is not Sydney's lack of 'ideas' but the distinctive nature of its arts system and its theories of art and their influence on the production of abstract expressionism.

Accordingly, this study focuses on Sydney as the centre of abstract expressionism and, more specifically, on the role of the NSW CAS and its theorist Elwyn Lynn in the production of abstract expressionism as an avant-garde enterprise. As Chapter I argues, the NSW CAS was different from the Melbourne CAS. It had a deep distrust of any form of social order or artistic dogma which might restrict individual creativity in any way, be it critical nationalism or social radicalism, and this affected the nature of its membership and ideological discourse. From the branch's inception in 1940, the NSW CAS's founding members, inspired by the theories of Herbert Read amongst others, promoted abstraction as a revolutionary art form. They positioned the NSW CAS as an oppositional artists' group dedicated to the production of experimental art which, in its unfamiliarity and originality,

attacked the values of the establishment and its mainstream artists' groups such as the Society of Artists. The interest there, however, is not with this first generation of CAS abstractionists, other than to argue that they set the stage for later developments by establishing a promotional infrastructure and a critical discourse, that educated the art world and the public to value and meaning of abstraction as an anti-establishment practice.

The concern in this context is with the postwar generation of painters which took over the NSW CAS committee in 1954-5, re-activating the branch as an avant-garde force. Chapters 2 and 3 argue they launched an aggressive assault on Sydney's new contemporary art establishment, promoting abstract expressionism as the advanced stream of modernism. Furthermore, under the leadership of the group which included Nancy Borlase, John Coburn, Peter Dodd, Max Feuerring, Tom Gleghorn, Elwyn Lynn, Henry Salkauskas and Tony Tuckson, the NSW CAS played a crucial role in setting the ideological and theoretical premise for Sydney's production of abstract expressionism. With Elwyn Lynn as their polemicist and theorist, they ran a series of campaigns in the NSW Broadsheet, attacking the cultural order of the establishment, including its critics and its commercialisation of art. It is argued throughout this study, and specifically in Chapter 3, that Lynn was pivotally important as editor of the NSW Broadsheet in defining both the principles of avant-garde practice and the subversive nature of abstract art. With his important essays 'Abstract and Kitsch' and 'The Motif in Painting', he introduced aesthetic theory and art history to define abstract expressionism as an autonomous, critical discipline dedicated to the disruption of the conventions of social and cultural order. He also provided a broad ideological context for the practice of abstraction, by relating Sydney developments to those occurring nationally, and most importantly, internationally. The NSW Broadsheet's promotion of formalist art practice and criticism, Chapters 4 and 5 argue, provided artists with the ideological and theoretical grounds to attack Sydney's critics, and in particular the influential Paul Haefliger, for their promotion of the romantic ideal of modernism which earned Sydney its 'charm' school reputation. The key arguments of this study, therefore, are that the debate of ideas was central to Sydney's production of

abstract expressionism, and that NSW CAS was instrumental in promoting the critical debate of art, and in introducing a new level of intellectualism to the Australian contemporary art discourse.

Further, this study proposes that the reason for the controversial nature of abstract expressionism was that its prominence during the 1950s brought Sydney ideas about art to the fore, at a time when the debate about the role of art in the production of Australian culture was intense. The late 1940s and 1950s was a period of considerable cultural change, when the aftermath of the World War II saw relations with Britain weakened and Australia's international status change, as the country sought to position itself as an independent nation in the Asia Pacific region. The historians, John Docker, Brian Head and Tim Rowse have established that Australia's changing political circumstances, together with postwar industrialisation and urbanisation and other forces of social change, engendered a major reassessment of Australian culture and its relationship to overseas cultures.[14] The debate that ensued, was driven by a conflict between the ideologies of nationalism and internationalism as intellectuals struggled to define Australia as an independent nation with its own distinctive culture, while also defining its membership of the international family of Western nations. Abstract expressionism, the final chapters argue, was drawn into this heated debate, as intellectuals and cultural commentators, including James McAuley, Bernard Smith and Robert Hughes, linked the discussion of the relative merits of abstraction and figuration with the wider, politically-based debate about Australia's future international status.

As it will be shown, the artists were drawn into this cultural debate by a combination of circumstances. The 1950s were a period when artists were under constant pressure to serve the national agenda. A postwar expansion of tertiary education combined with a vast number of corporate, media and institution-sponsored art prizes and competitions, encouraged greater public involvement in the arts and expectation of artists as intellectuals and opinion makers. At the same time, Cold War politics intruded into cultural production as anti-communist drives threatened intellectual freedom, and forced artists to redefine

cultural activism, distancing art from all political agendas. For Sydney abstractionists, these growing demands that art serve the interests of society constituted an infringement on the principle of artistic autonomy. They turned to the Blake Prize for Religious Art, using it a public forum in which to contest both the validity of abstraction and the principles of creative and intellectual freedom. The themes of Blake Prize controversies, together with the debate over the relation of art to the production of culture, underlie several chapters of this study, culminating with the Antipodean affair and the 1961 'Recent Australian Painting' exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in London.

The aim of this study is to give a reading of Australia's production of abstract expressionism that addresses the specificity of Australian art, and its response to and involvement in international art movements. Accordingly, the strategy has not been to impose established art historical definitions and categories onto the material, or to shape it into conventional interpretations of the 'abstract expressionist' movement. The term 'abstract expressionism' is used for convenience, as a generic term to describe the expressive and informel phase of abstract art, which commenced in Australia around 1954. This phase, Chapter 2 argues, emerged in a Cold War-inspired climate when intellectuals and artists, fearful of a third world war, asserted that art should reject the material world and address the spiritual crisis, that had been facing Western society since World War II and the advance of communism. These concerns fostered an interest in expressionism and its potential to fuse with abstraction, to create a humanist mode of expression which was truly international. 'International abstraction', therefore, is used to refer to the wider dimensions of the abstract expressionist movement, which had manifestations in most major Western cities and encompassed a large range of avant-garde splinter groups including Art Brut, Cobra, tachism, action painting, and American abstract expressionism. The term 'contemporary abstraction' is used when referring to the origins of the contemporary abstract movement in the early days of the CAS, when avant-garde theorists including Herbert Read and Meyer Schapiro promoted abstraction as the advanced stream

of modernism. 'Geometric abstraction' is used to describe the work of the first generation of NSW CAS abstractionists, who drew their inspiration from surrealism and constructivism.

This study seeks to avoid the tendency of art historical writing to level out variation and difference by presenting an image of cohesive and homogeneous art movement. Instead, the aim is to draw attention to difference, by investigating how abstract expressionism as an international movement was debated and theorised, promoted and consumed according to Australia's specific cultural requirements. The concern of this study is not the identification of abstract expressionism as a stylistic movement, nor is it the iconographic interpretation of art works. Its focus is on the production of the meaning and value of abstract expressionism, which Pierre Bourdieu has identified as the symbolic production of art.[15]

Abstract expressionism, therefore, within this study is viewed from within the critical and popular discourse of the day, as it was reviewed and debated in newspapers and journals and the expanding world of art historical and theoretical publications. The NSW Broadsheet, which is the most significant and cohesive body of information pertaining to Sydney's avant-garde production of abstract expressionism, forms the core of the disparate body of material which informs this study. The NSW Broadsheet is particularly significant, not only because of the informed nature of its contents, but also because there were no specialist publications for Australian contemporary art during the 1950s. Accordingly, the NSW Broadsheet played a crucial role in disseminating information and creating debate. Art was largely reviewed and debated within cultural arena provided by intellectual journals such as Meanjin and Quadrant, and more topical magazines such as Voice and Observer. These sources are combined with previously unpublished art world ephemera; records, correspondence, interviews and oral histories, exhibition catalogues, press reviews and articles, to generate a sense of the debate and the competition of ideas central to production of abstract expressionism in Australia.

The artist Elwyn Lynn, Australia's first formalist critic and theorist of international modernism, was a key figure behind the revitalisation of the NSW CAS in the mid-1950s and its promotion of abstract expressionism. He was a pioneer of formalist criticism who worked tirelessly to develop a critical language to describe non-representational art in objective rather than subjective terms, and to establish the ideal of art as a critical discipline in its own right. An outstanding feature of Lynn's writing is the skilful manner in which he contextualised Australian art practice into the international practice of modernism. A fiery polemicist, Lynn is a neglected figure in Australian art history and this study conducts the first detailed analysis of his critical ideas and theories as presented in the NSW Broadsheets, and of his role in the promotion of abstraction as the movement of the international avant-garde.

The contention of this study, therefore, is that ideas about art were central to Sydney's production of abstract expressionism. Not only was Sydney's production of abstraction informed by international art theory it also was informed by an intense debate about the nature of Australian art and its relation to society.

1 G. Dutton, The Innovators: The Sydney Alternatives in the Rise of Modern Art, Literature and Ideas, South Melbourne, Macmillan, 1986, is the only book to deal with this period of Sydney art.

2 Beside Bernard Smith's work, which is listed below, there is an extensive range of publications covering the early years of the Melbourne CAS, the 'Angry Penguins' circle, the Antipodeans and the contemporary figurative art, stretching from: J. Gooday, Rebels and Precursors: Aspects of Painting in Melbourne 1937-1947, Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, 1962; to Richard Haese, Rebels and Precursors: The Revolutionary Years of Australian Art, Ringwood, Allen Lane, 1981; C. Dixon, & T. Smith, Aspects of Figurative Painting 1942-1962: Dreams, Fears and Desires, Sydney, Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1984; and C. Merewether, Art and Social Commitment: An End to a City of Dreams 1931-1948, Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1984; and C. Heathcote, A Quiet Revolution: The Rise of Australian Art 1946-1968, Melbourne, Text Publishing Company, 1995.

3 While the painters in the 'Angry Penguins' circle and the Antipodean group are well covered in monographs, the abstractionists involved in the 'Direction 1' and 'Sydney Nine' exhibitions are not; John Olsen and John Passmore are the exceptions. In general there are few publications on Sydney and Melbourne abstract expressionists. There are, for instance, no substantial publications on the winner of the controversial 1961 Blake Prize, Stanislaus Rapotec, or on the leading Sydney abstractionists Carl Plate, Nancy Borlase, Elwyn Lynn and Leonard Hessing.

For the American definition of 'abstract expressionism' see: C. Greenberg, Art and Culture, London, Thames and Hudson, 1973; also his Partisan Review articles as listed in the bibliography, particularly, ' "American-Type" Painting', Partisan Review, vol. XXII, no. 2, 1955, pp. 179-196; also H. Rosenberg, 'The American Action Painters', in The Tradition of the New, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1965; and I. Sandler, The Triumph of American Painting: The History of Abstract Expressionism, New York, Praeger, 1970.

4 Bernard Smith has been largely responsible for shaping the history of Australian contemporary art and abstraction: see Place, Taste and Tradition, Sydney, Ure Smith, 1945; and Australian Painting 1788-1960, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1962.

R. Hughes, The Art of Australia, Ringwood, Penguin 1966; K. Bonython, (ed.) Modern Australian Painting and Sculpture, A Survey of Australian Art from 1950-1960, Adelaide, Griffin Press, 1960; and J.D. Pringle, Australian Painting Today, London, Thames and Hudson, 1963, also helped to popularise the theme of the rise to nationhood as the accepted model for the history of Australian art.

5 A few minor publications exist on Australian abstract expressionism, the most substantial of which are; J. Coleman, 'Towards Abstract Expressionism: The Avant-Garde in Sydney 1950-1961', Art

Gallery of NSW Annual, vol. 1, 1974-5, pp. 10-15; T. Green, 'Abstract Expressionism in Australia - American Parallels and Influences', Art and Australia, vol. 23, no. 4, Winter 1986, pp. 485-491; B. Pearce, 'Direction 1', Art and Australia, vol. 24, no. 4, 1987, pp. 497-504; P. Pinson, Abstract Expressionism in Sydney, 1956-64, Sydney, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, 1980; J. Zimmer, (ed.) Abstract Art in Australia, RMIT Gallery Aust. 1983: A Selection from the Past Thirty Years and Essays on Abstract Art, Melbourne, RMIT, 1983.

6 Dutton, The Innovators, p. 1.

7 ibid., p. x.

8 See B. Smith, Australian Painting Today: The John Murtagh Macrossan Lectures, 1961, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1962; and Australian Painting; also Hughes, The Art of Australia; and B. Robertson, K. Clark and R. Hughes, Recent Australian Painting 1961, Whitechapel Gallery, London, June-July 1961.

9 Dutton, The Innovators, pp. 98-99; Haese, Rebels and Precursors, pp. 256-257; Smith, Australian Painting, pp. 271-276.

10 Heathcote, A Quiet Revolution, is the most recent example of the unquestioning acceptance that Sydney art was without innovation and ideas. When discussing the fate of the CAS in the postwar years, Heathcote described Sydney art as being totally dominated by the 'charm' school who were - 'a herd of talented artists ... and assorted commercial designers', p. 3. On p. 7, he perpetuates the myth of Melbourne as the centre of critical thought stating: 'While Adelaide succumbed to inertia, and Sydney eased towards complacent charm, the dynamic spirit of reconstruction was finding a visible outlet on the Melbourne scene.'

11 Smith, Australian Painting, pp. 302-321, passim; Hughes, The Art of Australia, pp 251-306, passim.

12 Hughes, The Art of Australia, p. 251, Ringwood, Penguin 1966.

13 J. Docker, Australian Cultural Elites: Intellectual Traditions in Sydney and Melbourne, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1974; also In a Critical Condition: Reading Australian Literature, Ringwood, Penguin, 1984.

14 Docker, Australian Cultural Elites'; B. Head, & W. James, (eds.), Intellectual Movements and Australian Society, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988; T. Rowse, Australian Liberalism and National Character, Malmsbury Victoria, Kibble Books, 1978.

15 P. Bourdieu, 'But Who Created the "Creators"?' in Sociology in Question, (trans.) R. Nice, London, Sage, pp. 139-148; also P. Bourdieu, The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature, (ed.) R. Johnson, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1993.

Chapter 1

The Contemporary Art Society of NSW: Abstraction as the Advanced Stream of Modernism

This chapter introduces the Contemporary Art Society of New South Wales within the context of the origins of the Contemporary Art Society of Australia and the Sydney art establishment in order to challenge the conventional view that abstract expressionism arrived in Australia overnight from America in late 1956. Australia's production of abstract expressionism, it is argued here, had it roots in Sydney's distinctive artistic ideology and arts infrastructure which had encouraged its innovative artists to take up the modernist challenge to explore the abstract and the spiritual in art since the 1930s. The contention is that the NSW CAS differed from its Melbourne and South Australian counterparts in its interpretation and production of contemporary art by actively promoting abstract art as the advanced stream of modernism. The task of this chapter is to investigate the ideological character of the NSW CAS and explore how the specific nature of Sydney art affected the Society's production of abstract art.

Part I focuses on the ideological orientation of the NSW CAS beginning with the origins of the CAS during the pre World War II years when avant-garde theory was at a peak as artists and intellectuals declared the necessity for art to be politically free but critical. While all stressed the importance of intellectual and creative freedom some, including the Sydney philosopher John Anderson, asserted that abstract art held the key to artistic autonomy and cultural anarchy. The NSW CAS therefore, it is argued, was concerned with social and cultural reform from the outset. This principle was a driving premise of its production of abstract art throughout the 1940s and 1950s. However, the point is also made that the NSW CAS's interpretation of critical practice was fundamentally different from the Melbourne CAS, having been shaped by the specifics of Sydney's cultural traditions and arts infrastructure.

The ideological direction of the NSW CAS was, for example, influenced by Sydney's radical abstractionists who were a strong driving force in its formation and continuing conduct.

Inspired by Sydney's artistic traditions, avant-garde theorists and surrealism, they promoted the exploration of abstraction and the non-visible realm of the imagination as the means for aesthetic anarchy. They accordingly, positioned the NSW CAS in opposition to Sydney's traditional artists' societies, by strategically promoting the society as a venue for new and innovative art which rejected representation, in order to experiment with abstraction and thus disturb the establishment's social and cultural order. Most importantly, they also established a supporting critical discourse which created an awareness amongst the art world and the public, of the ideological conflict between contemporary art and the establishment. Thus, Part I proposes, the NSW CAS was instrumental from its very beginnings, in laying the foundations for Sydney's leadership of Australia's avant-garde production of abstract expressionism.

In Part II the focus shifts to the contemporary art establishment which emerged in Sydney during the immediate postwar years, and to the question of why the abstract expressionists moved to revitalise the NSW CAS as an anti-establishment force in 1954-55. It argues that the future of the NSW CAS and the radical practice of modernism came under challenge, during this period as Sydney's art infrastructure adjusted to incorporate contemporary art into its mainstream. Sydney's contemporary art was now largely under the influence of the artist and Sydney Morning Herald critic, Paul Haefliger who, it is argued, encouraged the production of the fashionable modernism that earned Sydney its 'charm' school label and reputation for art for art's sake, aestheticism and social elitism. Time is taken to investigate Haefliger's romantic ideal of art which, it is suggested, was derived from an amalgam of sources, the most significant being Sydney's tradition of neo-platonic and Nietzschean thought and the work of the French critic Elie Faure. As the major power broker, Haefliger set the dynamics for Sydney's art politics by endorsing its establishment's ideal that true art was about the individual and intuitive expression of the finer realm of feelings and aesthetic sensibilities. While popular with Sydney's social elite, this ideal was an anathema to those interested in artistic activism and thus provided impetus for retaliatory action with the young

Bernard Smith being amongst the first to attack Haefliger's romantic criticism for placing the future development of '*avante-garde*' painting in Sydney at risk.[1]

Part I

The Contemporary Art Society of NSW: The Matter of Difference

The term 'Contemporary' took on particular currency in Australia's cultural discourse as a notion signifying opposition and change. The advent of World War II stimulated both politicians and intellectuals a heightened awareness of the importance of culture in shaping the ideology of a nation. As the world's leaders used the defence of Western culture as a justification for sending men to war, dissenting intellectuals worked to position writers, artists and poets as the protectors of society from the manipulative powers of governments. It was within this climate that the Contemporary Art Society of Australia was instigated in 1938 as a challenge to the established order and its use of art as nationalist propaganda. The origins of the CAS as an oppositional body to Robert Menzies' conservative Australian Academy of Art have been well documented by studies such as Richard Haese's Rebels and Precursors and Christine Dixon's & Dinah Dysart's Counter Claims.[2] The story of the Society's turbulent early years when the Melbourne branch led by John Reed and the 'Angry Penguins' circle became a pioneering force of radical modernism, has become a cornerstone in the history of Australian contemporary art. Radical contemporary art practice has become associated with the figurative nationalist school which emerged out of the achievements of the heroic war years when Melbourne controlled the ideological direction of the CAS.[3]

Little attention has been paid to the role that the CAS played in educating Australians towards the appreciation of contemporary abstraction, and promoting the importance of abstract art and internationalism to the development of Australian culture in the postwar years. The Charter of the CAS makes it clear that the Society was anti-establishment. It stood against the established governments and institutions of the day and believed that

Australian culture was in need of reform. Its first objective, therefore, was 'To encourage and foster the development, appreciation and recognition of Contemporary Art and Thought throughout the Commonwealth of Australia'.[4] The charter also explained that contemporary art was any visual form that was 'original, creative or aesthetic in character' and gave 'expression to progressive contemporary thought and life'. The implication here is that contemporary art was intrinsically linked with a certain life-style and set of social and cultural attitudes. Many of the other objectives stated in the Charter involved reforming the attitudes of the establishment. Special emphasis was placed on the relationships of the artist and authority, and the artist and society, with a call being made for 'the necessity of creative freedom to the individual artist as a condition to the cultural growth of the Community in general.' Other motions stressed reforming sentiments by emphasising the necessity 'for a full and comprehensive Art education in all schools and places of instruction' and 'for the establishment of exhibitions, public education programs and collections of contemporary art'. The CAS was clearly concerned with more than artistic or stylistic reform. It believed that artists should be actively involved in the reform of the Australian culture assisting in the creation of a new set of social attitudes; that is of a democratic way of life in which creative and intellectual freedom were most highly prized. When promoting the 'Contemporary' the CAS was wary of any tendency to be prescriptive or dogmatic or to compromise the ideal of artistic freedom of expression. True contemporary art was undefinable beyond the premise that it could not be imitative.[5]

Cultural parallels to the CAS existed in a range of manifestations both in Australia and overseas, which indicates that the broader notion of 'Contemporary' was part of a wide cultural discourse as the CAS's intertwining of art practice with progressive contemporary 'life' and 'thought' suggested. The Australian literary journal Meanjin, 1940, for instance, was also founded in the unrest and uncertainty of the war years and it similarly called on artists and writers to campaign for social and cultural reform. In a manner similar to the CAS, Meanjin, which described itself as 'a magazine for ideas, built around literature and art', did not restrict its activities to the promotion of literature. Its stated objective was

political; art and society were interwoven and the artist's responsibility was not to governments but to society in general. It was the responsibility of the artist – painter, poet, writer, musician – to shape the consciousness of society, and, in particular, a new social consciousness for Australia. Meanjin's articles which were written by international and Australian radicals called for a new democratic and humanist world order, the ideals and values of which were not to be defined by politicians and economists but by the poet and artist. More significantly, Meanjin campaigned for the creation of a new cultural and national identity for Australia – one that spoke of the realities of its time and place – and positioned the nation to be a leader in the new world which would emerge after the war.[6]

In Europe and North America, the mid to late 1930s were also years of intense cultural debate, with artists forming themselves into oppositional bodies with varying degrees of avant-gardism. In Montreal, Canada, John Lyman founded the Contemporary Arts Society in 1938 challenging the 'self-conscious regionalism' that was sanctioned by the establishment. Like the Australian CAS, the Montreal group was opposed to academic art and 'the only condition for membership was that one *not* be a member of the RCA (Royal Canadian Academy of Arts).[7] The platform of the Canadian CAS was 'to advance the cause of living modern art', which for many of the group was exemplified by the School of Paris. It concerns were openness, youth and individualism, the education of the public, and the creation of an 'art of the day'.[8] In London, Herbert Read, with the help of Peggy Guggenheim, was seeking to establish an Institute of Contemporary Arts, the platform of which was to be the anarchist ideology of surrealism. Its intention was to promote the creation of new art forms and to offer a co-operative, experimental, creative and educational program of contemporary arts for the benefit of the community. Its aim, similar to the Australian CAS, was to support young and unknown artists in the creation of new forms of art that would challenge the establishment.[9]

Read was one of a body of dissenting intellectuals who spent the pre-war and immediate postwar years evolving a new philosophy of art which positioned certain streams of modern art as forces of revolution. In Read's case it was superrealism and abstraction which, in

their anarchism and rejection of 'the bourgeois ideals of capitalist culture', formed the contemporary revolutionary art movement. In his books and essays, including Art and Society and 'What is Revolutionary Art?', Read extolled the persuasive theory that abstract art had the power and potential to be the most revolutionary art of all.[10] Read declared that the abstract artist's independence and refusal to toe the line or become an emotional propagandist placed him in a position of political and critical power. Abstract art involved psychological freedom which in turn meant intellectual freedom. In its rejection of imitation, and its experimentation with new forms to express universal values, abstract art offered the world the opportunity to create a new social reality, an anti-capitalist civilisation that aspired to the great humanist ideals of equality and classlessness.[11]

In Australia, the philosopher John Anderson was representative of those intellectuals like Herbert Read who, in the face of Stalinism and the collapse of European culture, struggled with the dilemma of how to be political without being affiliated to any particular political party or totalitarian regime. Or to phrase it differently, how to retain intellectual and creative freedom and maintain a commitment to the socialist notion of art as a revolutionary force. With his Society of Freethought, Anderson led an intense debate at Sydney University about issues pertaining to aesthetics, art and morality, and criticism.[12] The influence of this debate and Anderson's critical method was felt amongst producers of culture such as the poet James McAuley, the artist and critic Elwyn Lynn, and the journalists Donald Horne and Peter Coleman, well into the 1960s. In his lectures and essays, 'Art and Morality', 1941, and 'The Servile State', 1942, Anderson argued for the autonomy of the art object, rejecting representational and imitative art as bourgeois illusionism and a vulgarisation of art for the masses.[13] The artist's role was to be oppositional; he was not to cater to the consumptive or servile mentality but to engage courageously in the pursuit of inquiry and push his discoveries as hard as he could 'against the inertia of custom and the "protection" of privilege'. Anderson rejected nationalism as solidarism and totalitarianism asserting that the artist should be independent of the state, and of doctrines and dogmas. Artistic and political independence was to be found in the fact that the value and purpose of art was not

in its social, psychological or historical content, but the character and quality of art, Anderson posited, in a formalist manner, was to be found within 'the thing' itself, in the art object's structure, order and theme. The artist's struggle to create structure and order from the theme and formal elements constituted a social and moral good in that it offered an objective metaphor for the struggle, conflict and complexity that form the essence of life.[14]

In America, the direction of art and culture was under reappraisal as well. In 1937 the American Abstract Artists formed to advance the cause of an art that was international and transcended nationalism and regionalism, while the influential leftist cultural magazine Partisan Review, resumed publication and the Marxist Quarterly was established. The Moscow Trials of 1936-38 and the signing of the Hitler-Stalin pact in August 1939 had a huge impact on Western intellectuals and artists who had been attracted to communism's platform of revolutionary art. In America a climate of pessimism ensued, in which the potential destruction of Western culture was attributed to the decadence of the bourgeoisie. The artist, as the protector of Western culture, was seen to be in an impasse of political compromise wherever he turned. Leftist artists and intellectuals engaged in intense debate and political reassessment seeking to reformulate their positions and redefine the relationship of art and politics and the role of the artist in society. Articles in Marxist Quarterly and Partisan Review, including Meyer Schapiro's 'Nature of Abstract Art', 1937, Trotsky's 'Art and Politics', 1938, André Breton and Diego Rivera's 'Towards a Free Revolutionary Art', 1938, and Clement Greenberg's 'Avant Garde and Kitsch', 1939, sought to offer a way out of the artists' impasse by advocating the creation of a new art form that was critical, abstract and avant-garde. Art, these theorists agreed, had to be politically free yet critical, and to be so it had to operate according to its own rules. Trotsky proclaimed 'Art can become a strong ally of revolution in so far as it remains faithful to itself', while Schapiro, not unlike Herbert Read, argues that abstraction was not without a social consciousness. In arguing that abstraction, like all art, was rooted in the conditions in which it was produced, Schapiro challenged the communists' and formalists' belief that

abstraction was detached from social concerns, and suggested it had the potential to be used as an expression of social radicalness.[15]

Serge Guilbaut has argued that the American debate led to a reappraisal of abstract art and its adoption as a critical art form, which in turn contributed to the emergence of the American abstract expressionism movement. The contention of this study is that the pre-war discourse that has just been outlined sowed the seeds for Australia's abstract expressionism movement. The roots of Australian abstract expressionist reach back to the early years of the NSW CAS when it first promoted abstract art as the advanced stream of modernism thus differentiating its production of contemporary art from that of its Melbourne and South Australian CAS counterparts. The issue of interest here is why Sydney specifically became the centre of Australia's avant-garde practice of abstract expressionism in the mid 1950s. Before this question can be answered some understanding of the nature of Sydney art and the ideological origins of the NSW CAS and its practice of abstraction as an oppositional force is required.

The Contemporary Art Society of Australia

The CAS of Australia was never federally constituted and the autonomous branches in Victoria, NSW and South Australia shaped their own character and priorities. The CAS was bound somewhat tenuously into an Australia-wide body by its broadly defined constitution and by its annual interstate exhibitions. It was a loosely structured affair and efforts by the Melbourne CAS to create a federal council in the mid 1940s and in 1950s never reached implementation stage as the other states resisted the formalisation of Melbourne's proprietorial claims to leadership.[16] The states operated independently, driven by the interests of their members, the nature of their local art system and a natural degree of state chauvinism. Overall the Society was remarkably free of conflict, and the little there was usually centred on the annual exhibition and problems with transport, selection and hanging procedures. Otherwise there was a high degree of co-operation and support for each other's autonomous identity, although the states frequently played up their differences

in friendly rivalry. United under the banner of contemporary art, that which is 'creative, original, and non imitative', they had their own ideologies and artistic platforms which histories of Australian contemporary art have glossed over or dismissed in their efforts to present the CAS as avant-garde movement.[17]

It is generally agreed that the dynamic that earnt the CAS its avant-garde reputation emanated from the Melbourne CAS and its radical practice of figurative modernism during the war years.[18] The war years were a period of concentrated activity, with the establishment years of the CAS and the publication of the Angry Penguins and Art in Australia stimulating a degree of critical debate unprecedented in Australian art. In Melbourne the practice of social radicalism was most intense, providing the impetus for the CAS's avant-garde activity. There the communist faction of Noel Counihan, Vic O'Connor and Yosl Berger and the 'Angry Penguins' circle of John and Sunday Reed, Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd, Joy Hester and Albert Tucker, formed the driving nucleus of the CAS, bringing a new criticalness based in leftist politics to Australia's practice of modernism. These 'radicals' rejected the academic and bland post-impressionist traditions of mainstream art and called for an art that dealt with the harsh social realities of the day, or revisited Australian history as a theme of man's heroic struggle. Inspired by the avant-garde streams of modernism, expressionism and surrealism, they experimented with the theories of the unconscious and non-conventional art such as child and primitive art searching for a style that assaulted the establishment's order. Politically they were deeply committed to the plight of the common man and worked to create an anti-establishment figurative art form which, uncompromisingly raw and confronting in style and content, spoke directly of Australia's experience of alienation and psychic despair during the horrific war years. In exploiting the potential of figurative modernism to create a national school of painting which was critical and innovative, Melbourne's CAS artists thus produced Australia's first genuine manifestation of avant-garde art.

The radical period of the CAS is deemed to have come to a close with the end of the war and the diaspora of the 'Angry Penguins' circle. The battle against totalitarianism had been

won and the CAS had achieved its goal to defeat academicism and establish the free development of contemporary art.[19] As the lifting of wartime travel restrictions in 1947 saw many of Melbourne's leading radicals depart overseas, the Melbourne CAS found it difficult to survive, lapsing into non-activity by the late 1940s.[20] The South Australian branch was similarly affected and the leadership of the CAS fell to NSW.

Numerically the strongest of the three, the Sydney branch was different from its state counterparts displaying a facility to adjust and revitalise in the face of conflicts, changing membership and interest groups. It was not racked by the vehement political and power conflicts that gave Melbourne its dynamic energy but at times threatened its existence. Rather it tended to discourage partisan politics and the pursuit of social platforms, as its dismissal of Peter Bellew in May 1946, and the speedy defeat of the communist push for executive power in 1945/6, evidenced.[21] The NSW CAS in fact had a deep distrust of any form of social order or artistic dogma that might restrict individual creativity in any way, be it nationalism or social radicalism. Rather than pursuing nationalist themes and overt social criticism, NSW CAS members took a pluralist approach turning their focus outwards and in several directions. Margo Lewers, Frank and Margel Hinder turned to the developments in constructivist and abstraction being promoted in England by Naum Gabo and Herbert Read. James Gleeson and Carl Plate explored surrealism, the unconscious and the idea that art could, as Plate phrased it, 'be anything'. Others, including Jean Bellette and Desiderius Orban, looked to the grand tradition of European art with its celebration of man's artistic skill and genius. Thus, within the NSW CAS a liberalist approach dominated, with many different modes of contemporary art, abstract and figurative and social realist, being pursued in an ambience of tolerance and experimentation. This stance was not without ideological grounds for, in contrast to the Melbourne CAS, the uniting ideal of the NSW CAS was not the plight of the common man but freedom of the artist, the individual pursuit of the inner journey and the discovery of universal truths.

The conventional historical representation of Sydney contemporary art is that, dedicated to art for art's sake aestheticism and fashionable decorative modernism, it lacked the

innovative ideas and social radicalism that distinguished the Melbourne CAS. The apologists for Melbourne have liked to believe that the Sydney and Adelaide CAS branches owed their origins and their political energy to their parent body, and in particular to Melbourne CAS's representatives in Sydney and Adelaide, Peter Bellew and Max Harris.[22] Consequently the collapse of the Melbourne CAS and the departure of Bellew from Sydney to UNESCO in Paris in 1946, together with the establishment of the Society of Realists Artists in Sydney in 1945, is seen to have drained the NSW CAS of whatever talent and politic it might have had.[23] As the Melbourne branch lapsed into inactivity during the postwar years the CAS is deemed to have lost its ideological direction becoming little more than an exhibiting society under the leadership of the NSW CAS.[24]

Inherent in this interpretation of events is the binary construct of Australia's competing major cities; Melbourne - nationalist, figurative, serious and politically committed art; Sydney - internationalist, abstract, non-serious, hedonistic, fashionable art for art's sake. This construct, which dominates the histories of Australian contemporary art, privileges Melbourne as the genuine centre of Australian cultural practice and is underpinned by the tensions of right and left politics. The emphasis of historical writings on the Melbourne Sydney binary has done little to foster an understanding of the factors that contributed to the complexities of voices that constituted Australia's cultural discourse, as John Docker's important study Australian Cultural Elites has highlighted.

Docker's study of the different literary traditions of Sydney and Melbourne punctured the historicist notion of a homogeneous Australian culture by suggesting that real cultural differences existed between Australian cities and that the reasons for these differences were not geographic or climatic but different philosophical and intellectual attitudes. From his comparison of the literary traditions of Melbourne and Sydney, Docker deduced that Melbourne's intellectual tradition was grounded in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's idea that 'cultural values should be embodied in a "clerisy", that is a central educated group, which stands as an ideal for the rest of society'. Poets, writers, and intellectuals, therefore, were the prophets or spokesperso: ` for the finer values and tendencies of their society, as

defined by the community'.[25] According to Docker, Melbourne intellectuals characteristically felt, that, given their responsibility to Australian society, they were, or should be, at the centre of Australian society; what was good for Melbourne intellectuals was good for Australia. Consequently Melbourne intellectuals were drawn to the ideal of society as organic and unified around certain central values.

In Sydney, Docker argued, two traditions, one literary and one philosophical, formed the foundation of cultural practice. There, the guiding traditions of free-thought and libertarianism fostered the belief that social and political involvement was useless. In Sydney's view, society was utilitarian and philistine, it crushed intellectual activity, and thus had to be either avoided or opposed. What was good for Australia was not good for Sydney intellectuals. They were pluralist, believing society should be composed of groups or subcultures which pursued separate activities. They were also elitist because they thought their values superior to the values of the society around them. Docker concluded that Sydney's literary and philosophic traditions were posited in terms of universal laws and, in contrast to Melbourne, drew on those aspects of European romanticism which emphasised the individual's detachment from society and politics, and symbolic connections with the metaphysical realms of nature or natural feeling.[26]

As Docker himself has admitted, Cultural Elites is a flawed work. It uses a binary construct stressing differences while glossing over similarities and convergences.[27] Nevertheless it offers valuable insights into the peculiarities of Sydney and Melbourne culture. Many of his observations hold true for the art world and help explain the artistic biases of the two cities. In contrast to Geoffrey Dutton's apology for Sydney culture, The Innovators, Docker's study challenges the stereotypes and establishes that Sydney's cultural practice, with its roots in Norman Lindsay, Kenneth Slessor, A.D. Hope, Christopher Brennan, John Anderson and Patrick White, was definitely not but devoid of innovation and ideas. Docker's work and subsequent studies of Australia's tradition of cultural liberalism raise two important points that demand consideration.[28] Firstly, the possibility that artistic activism was differently constituted in Sydney according to its distinctive artistic ideology; that is, according to

Sydney's perception of art and the role of the artist and his relationship to society. Secondly, that Sydney had a distinctive art system which shaped its interpretation and production of contemporary art and influenced factions within the NSW CAS to adopt abstract art as a critical mode of artistic expression.

The Sydney modernist art establishment

The NSW CAS was born, in part, out of reaction against a Sydney art establishment which had been long dominated by Sydney Ure Smith, Julian Ashton and the legacy of the Lindsays together with the Bulletin's tradition of radical nationalism.[29] Much of the founding energy of the NSW CAS came from the members of Sydney's landmark first abstract art exhibition, 'Exhibition 1'. Frank Hinder recalled that several of the 'Exhibition 1' group, who were considered to be the most contemporary in Sydney (Grace Crowley, Eleonore Lange, Rah Fizelle and Frank Hinder), were invited to dinner at the H.V. Evatts, with John and Sunday Reed: 'That's where it started.' – the CAS.' Trixie Gore, the CAS secretary for 15 years, remembered the vitality of the early years with fights and people being thrown down the stairs:

> They argued about which paintings would be hung in the exhibitions. There were two exhibitions a year and so many paintings. They always quarrelled about which ones to throw out. No traditional ones were permitted. ... They were exciting days. This group had the meat, the spirit; the others, the Royal Art Society, had the polish.[30]

The NSW CAS was established as an 'open house' for artists who were unable to show with Sydney's conventional artists' groups. In this manner it built on the oppositional agenda of 'Exhibition 1' which had used abstract art to attack Julian Ashton, Sydney Ure Smith and their Society of Artists' control of the Sydney art scene.[31]

As Sydney's leading art educator and the founder of the Society of Artists, Julian Ashton was a dominant and powerful figure even into his extreme old age in the late 1930s. Ure Smith, the publisher of Art in Australia, The Home, and Australia, National Journal, and president of the Society of Artists, was an equally powerful art broker and tastemaker.

Besides providing commercial employment for Sydney artists Ure Smith worked tirelessly to stimulate patronage for the Society of Artists' stable. His taste and patronage of the arts, Nancy Underhill has revealed, were complex, and their implications for Sydney art practice are yet to be understood. His attitude to fine art was formed by his Julian Ashton School art training and the influences of Norman Lindsay and the British fine art tradition. It was essentially conservative, although, as his support of Sydney's modernists, including Margaret Preston, Thea Proctor and Russell Drysdale, indicates, it was progressively so. The Society of Artists was, after all, established to be more 'progressive' than the Royal Art Society.

In Art in Australia Ure Smith promoted the Lindsayian high culture stance that fine art should be elitist, figurative, illustrative and firmly grounded in the tradition of Greco-Roman culture, which was the only true art. According to Norman Lindsay the artist belonged to a higher order than the masses, and his task was not to save or reform society but to pursue higher thoughts and deeds and a finer order of existence. Art, 'the creative effort', was the one most enduring element in man's life and comprised the individual genius's never ending quest to discover his universality; to discover the universal Ideas necessary for a full and vital life. The history of art consisted of the great individuals who, reaching back to ancient Greece, created the genius of Western art. Modern art was not 'art' but a manifestation of the destructiveness and degeneracy of mankind and the disease of the age of the masses.[32] While Ure Smith's views at times varied with Lindsay's, the essence of Lindsay's ideal of high culture and its relationship to modernism nevertheless dominated Sydney art under Ure Smith and Ashton's leadership.

Both Ure Smith and Ashton also fostered and encouraged the commercial art practice of Sydney artists and designers and it was in this area that Ure Smith promotion of modernism was focused. The Ashton School trained artists in both fine and commercial art while the Society of Artists shows included special sections for commercial and decorative arts.[33] In contrast to the conservativeness of his fine art patronage, Ure Smith's patronage of commercial art was progressive. Through his publications and his advertising agency,

Smith and Julius, he encouraged modernist graphic design, photography and interior design, fostering the talents of Frank Hinder, Max Dupain and Douglas Annand who produced commercial art of outstanding quality and innovation. Many modernist artists, including Thea Proctor and John Passmore, derived a livelihood from working for Ure Smith's commercial enterprises where, as a strategy for marketing, even the more radical manifestations of modernism were experimented with freely, unfettered by the aesthetic and social restraints that accompanied its reception in the fine art world.[34] Within this system modern art and design were promoted in The Home rather than in Art in Australia, and new movements, such as abstraction and surrealism, appeared as the latest in fashion and advertising.[35]

The nature of Ure Smith's promotion of modern art and design suggests it was linked to a patronage system which involved Sydney's major retail and newspaper magnates, in particular to Charles Lloyd Jones of the David Jones empire and the Fairfax family of the Sydney Morning Herald, who were friends and supporters of Ure Smith, at different times financing his publications, including Art in Australia. The department stores of David Jones, Anthony Hordern's and Farmer's all actively promoted art and design in their galleries where Sydney's leading contemporary art exhibitions were frequently held, including those of the CAS.[36]

Sydney art practice had a firm economic base in the growing wealth of Sydney's middle classes located in the eastern and northern suburbs, as Bernard Smith has shown.[37] Ure Smith was instrumental in fostering this social establishment's practice and consumption of modern art and was supported in his efforts albeit briefly by Peter Bellew, who became part of the Fairfax set when he moved to Sydney to launch the CAS and become editor of Art in Australia.[38] The connections between Sydney art and Sydney society were encouraged to some extent by the city's art education system. In contrast to Melbourne, which had an institutionalised system with the National Gallery School and several technical college art courses, Sydney had the private art schools of Julian Ashton and Dattilo Rubbio which dominated the scene until after the establishment of the East Sydney Technical course in

1921.[39] These commercial art schools educated not only fine artists, commercial artists and designers, but also a wealth of enthusiastic amateurs, including Charles Lloyd Jones and Mary Evatt, and appear to have acted as cultural finishing schools for Sydney's elite. Designer-artists like Thea Proctor, Helen Blaxland and Margaret Preston were frequently society women for whom the decorative arts constituted a respectable career and who often had personal and professional connections with the major department stores.[40] Ure Smith has been described as a social climber by the historian Jean Campbell and his patronage of Margaret Preston, the wife of a director of Anthony Hordern's, has been interpreted in the light of this.[41] This is a shortsighted view of Ure Smith's connections with Sydney's society which were crucial to his support of artists and the creation of a market for their art. Rather, the problem lies with how this patronage system intruded into Sydney's art practice as the Ure Smith promoted events such as the Society of Artists' annual show, became highlights of Sydney's society calendar, influencing artistic careers and the direction of Sydney art with its high sales.

The Ure Smith/Ashton combination of art promotion and education, created a distinctive patronage system for Sydney, blurring the lines between fine art and commercial art and providing artists with a stable and healthy marketplace. The issue that deserves scrutiny is how this art system affected the formation of the NSW CAS and its production of contemporary art. Bernard Smith has argued that Sydney's cultural practice was characteristically different in its professionalism, the strength of which lay 'not in its educational but in its promotion and marketing components.' It was for this reason, Smith asserted, that Sydney attracted artists, journalists and writers with the nature of its art system being established by J.F. Archibald, Julian Ashton, Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts, Norman Lindsay and Ure Smith; all migrants from the southern capital. In contrast to Melbourne the function of Sydney's art system was not 'civic polity, for the promotion of morals, taste and manners', but the quest, even in terms of education, 'to create an effective economic apparatus by means of which Australian artists could exist.' Whether these attitudes created a milieu that encouraged artists to avoid controversy for fear of

disturbing the market and fostered an art that continually 'reverts to a condition of decor, an embellishment of the artist's personality or the collector's residence', as Bernard Smith asserts, needs to be questioned.[42] While Smith's claim that Sydney artists avoided controversy because it disturbed the market is damming and seemingly typical of the trivialising nature of the Sydney Melbourne binary, it does offer a valuable suggestion to the possible positioning of the NSW CAS within Sydney's art's infrastructure. It is possible that the NSW CAS adopted an oppositional stance to this mainstream system by providing an infrastructure and ideological basis for critical debate and practice in Sydney.

The NSW CAS

The NSW CAS was the largest and most organised body of the three CAS branches and in 1945 it posed such a challenge to Melbourne's CAS that Albert Tucker expressed concern that its influence was threatening to swamp the Society.[43] Interest in the CAS was considerable in NSW, and in 1945 it established its own annual state exhibition to accommodate the numbers. Together with the branch's monthly public lecture programs and broadsheet, the NSW CAS's exhibition program gave it a strong public profile and ideological character of its own.[44] While the Melbourne and Adelaide branches lapsed in and out of activity throughout the late 1940s and 1950s, NSW continued, effectively re-inventing itself to accommodate change when necessary. Whether it continued simply as an exhibiting society as history asserts, remains to be established.

From its inception in 1940, the NSW CAS was different from the Melbourne CAS in that it cultivated 'a general public' by encouraging an open membership which included artists, craftspeople, designers, architects, educators and amateurs of all persuasions from the entire state.[45] This broad membership contributed to the longevity and strength of the Sydney branch, and helped create an audience for contemporary art, however, it also left the NSW CAS vulnerable to criticism especially at exhibition times. The NSW CAS exhibitions were controversial because the branch held firmly to the CAS's charter ideal of an open exhibition policy and non-hierarchical hanging. In practice the ideals produced

shows which were notorious for the variable quality and aesthetic direction of the works on display.[46] Some idea of the range of the stylistic diversity involved is evident in the names of the more talented who exhibited with the group between 1943-47; Tom Bass, Jean Bellette, James Cant, William Constable, Joy Ewart, Rah Fizelle, Cedric Flower, Roy Dalgarno, George Duncan, James Cook, William Dobell, James Gleeson, Donald Friend, Sali Herman, Frank Hinder, Margel Hinder, Margo Lewers, Gerry Lewers, Francis Lymburner, Hal Missingham, Desiderius Orban, Carl Plate, Wallace Thornton, Ann Weinholt, Douglas Annand, Margaret Olley, David Strachan, Paul Haefliger, Ralph Balson, Sidney Nolan, Harry Seidler, Michael Kmit, Robert Klippel, Charles Doutney, Gordon Andrews and Peter Bellew. That the work of these artists should be hung alongside that of a large number of enthusiastic, unimaginative amateur painters was always contentious and the shows accordingly earnt the NSW CAS a reputation for sometimes being amateurist and lacking ideological direction.

Despite constant criticism, the driving core of the NSW CAS held firmly to its ideals through out the 1940s and 1950s. It argued that the open policy was a necessary evil if the CAS was to be genuinely anti-establishment and oppose 'narrowness in all forms' and 'challenge those who considered that they had the right to arbitrarily decide the best artists'. The goal of contemporary art was the creation and promotion of 'the new', which by necessity involved the suspension of critical judgement. 'True original and creative art ' the CAS 1948 exhibition catalogue told the public, was 'hard to recognise', and, therefore, the CAS tried 'to keep an open mind, a tolerant attitude and [include] works that future judges might reject.'[47]

The open membership and exhibition policy was particularly important as a differentiating and oppositional strategy because of Sydney's large number of artists' societies and groups, the most significant during the war years being the Royal Art Society, the Society of Artists and the Australian Watercolour Institute.[48] In an art world that had few commercial galleries, the function of these groups was largely promotional and the platforms of artistic difference between them were slight. Many artists showed with several

of the groups, as in the case of Jean Bellette and Carl Plate who exhibited with the Society of Artists and the Watercolour Institute. These societies, which provided exhibition opportunities and endorsed selected artists as mature and established, were important sites of sale especially since the Art Gallery of NSW spent its budget predominantly on Royal Society, Society of Artists and Watercolour Institute artists.[49]

The NSW CAS was set up in opposition to these establishment groups which, with their selective membership and exhibition policies, controlled Sydney art. As Elwyn Lynn explained in the NSW Broadsheet in the 1960s, the NSW CAS's heritage was that of an oppositional art group because unlike mainstream societies it had always rejected the commercialisation of art in order to promote the new and disturbing.[50] The CAS, he emphasised, belonged to those artist groups which were established to promote 'an artistic programme and/or sought to win recognition for a not understood, misunderstood and unappreciated art form'. This was in contrast to other groups which were 'frequently motivated by less worthy causes, by professionalism or what the group might consider the promotion of excellence.' The problem with groups like the Society of Artists which were dedicated to the promotion of quality was that they:

> too easily become tainted with commercialism, self promotion and self-protection. They turn galleries into sales rooms and not places of adventure. They tend to apply professional tests to the rising generation (which is always tougher and more persistent) and inhibit rather than promote the new.[51]

The CAS, Lynn explained was never intended to support successful and established artists, nor was it intended to define what constituted contemporary art. A professional society for the avant-garde was a contradiction in terms. The function of the CAS was to be a 'vehicle of new movements' and new movements were not to be defined by selection panels and judges. New movements emerged from the work when displayed without privilege or prejudice because:

> new and unusual works are not painted even for the connoisseur; they create their own public by being seen in contrast with other works, not by being shown to a relatively exclusive few.

The NSW CAS's exhibitions, therefore, were for 'the amateur, the experimentalist and those unassociated with the local Establishment', and thus would 'always have a number of beginners, of underdeveloped artists'. This was essential if the CAS was to fulfil its charter and encourage the pioneering of new movements like abstraction.[52]

The first generation abstractionists

Another distinguishing feature of the NSW CAS was its active promotion of abstraction as the advanced stream of modernism. For many of its founding members, like Carl Plate, the abstract painting was an autonomous work which existed in its own right, and so challenged the representational values of the Australia's academic art establishment.[53] It offered the artist a means to artistic freedom and to the ultimate democratic right of the freedom of thought and imagination. Plate, like Margo Lewers, Frank and Margel Hinder and James Gleeson, concentrated his energies throughout the 1940s and early 1950s on absorbing and learning all he could about abstraction from Paul Klee, and from surrealism and constructivism. These early abstractionists were driven by a belief that they were living 'in a revolution of the arts'. Their belief was well expressed by Gleeson when he told his fellow CAS members in May 1953 that 'Art':

> is reaching out for new forms of expression in a world which is undergoing tremendous development and change through the advances of science. We look at many things as we have never done before, re-act differently, plan, think, hope differently from the way we did a few generations ago.
>
> Our Art expression is bound to change its forms, its names, its whole language.[54]

Carl Plate, who was a significant advocate of abstract art, recalled that the first generation of NSW CAS members was driven by an evangelical enthusiasm for being 'modern', but that very few of them, including himself, had 'the faintest idea what modern art was'.[55] World War II had destroyed the old world order, with Hitler and fascism giving new significance to the humanist value of the freedom of thought and imagination and a new importance to artistic creativity as an expression of this freedom. Inspired by vague visions of surrealism, constructivism and Herbert Read's theories of artistic anarchy, this

generation's enthusiasm was for artistic revolution; for the creation of a modern art that expressed the ideals and dilemmas of the new modern world rather than the world of appearances. As this involved the creation of a whole new artistic language, so it demanded experimentation with materials, processes and subject matter, with colour, collage and drawing, and different modes of abstracting. It also demanded a great deal of debate about the definition of modern art and its role in the present day.[56]

Plate remembered there was considerable uncertainty about the definition of modern art which meant that a lot of the work produced was 'junk' and that 'there was no good modern art to be seen'.[57] The achievement of this period, he suggested, was the CAS's establishment of the principles of modern art and provision of a focus for those who wished to work in the modern idiom. It provided a forum in which artists could experiment and challenge 'the then prevalent attitude that was simply appearances'. It also fostered debate, enabling Plate, for one, to give public lectures in which he argued 'that the painting or the object or visual form that you manifested in a plastic or visual form had a right to exist in itself.' Through its public education program, the NSW CAS promoted modernist principles, such as Paul Klee's edict that art should express the non-visible, and surrealism's tenet that art was not about style and appearances but about 'attitude', not only to artists, but also to the interested public.[58]

The CAS charter involved the education of public taste and the cultivation of a community that would support the production of contemporary art: that is, a critical press, a market, an institutional infrastructure and a discerning public. Sydney pursued this with unrivalled dedication through its bi-yearly exhibitions (one state and one interstate), its monthly lecture program, and its lobbying of the press and the establishment about issues such as the Archibald Prize and the quality of press coverage. A key component of its educational platform was the NSW Broadsheet. Launched in 1947 as the Victorian and South Australian branches were winding down, and at a time when media coverage of contemporary art was minimal, the NSW Broadsheet was invaluable for those dedicated to the advance of contemporary art and thought. Widely circulated throughout NSW and

other states it offered a body of information that encouraged the practice and debate of contemporary art and created a community focus for the NSW CAS widely scattered membership. Initially a small publication, no more than a folded roneoed sheet, it provided members with news about forthcoming activities, competitions, successful achievements of members, and, most usefully, information about the lecture and exhibition programs. Occasionally, particularly as it became more expansive in the early 1950s, it included a short educative essay on topics such as 'Isms in Contemporary Art' by Weaver Hawkins, May 1949, or a summary of the monthly talk such as James Gleeson's on 'Criticism'.

The NSW Broadsheet offers an invaluable insight into the activities of the Society and the changing nature of its production of contemporary art and abstraction. It also provides a means of assessing the nature of the Society's discourse before the new generation of postwar abstractionists took over its leadership in 1954-5 re-orienting its focus to the promotion of abstract expressionism. Thus it is worth considering an issue of the earlier years in some detail.

Chatty and informative, the November 1950 NSW Broadsheet, evokes a sense of a lively, supportive, artistic community whose interest and membership reached beyond the confines of Sydney. It carried a lengthy report on the Twelfth Annual Interstate Exhibition that was held at the Education Department Gallery.[59] A large show of 300 works included paintings from the South Australian CAS which unfortunately 'arrived too late to be listed in the catalogue.' The exhibition was a success being given considerable space in the leading papers that described it as 'spirited'. This, the NSW Broadsheet editor commented, was 'helpful and encouraging' before cheerfully describing the exhibition as ranging:

> from one painting scarcely 6 inches square, Cosmic Dance by Charles Salisbury, which quickly found a buyer; to a female colossus in concrete by diminutive sculptress Anita Aarons and which took the combined efforts of 6 strong men to haul it into place.

The list of exhibitors was described as having 'a cosmopolitan flavour' probably in reference to the postwar immigrants who were beginning to form a presence in the Society. Having reported on the exhibition, the NSW Broadsheet took time to promote James

Gleeson's forthcoming lecture on surrealism, and to celebrate Weaver Hawkins' win in the Watercolour Prize at the Albury Art Exhibition, playfully relating:

> News of the awards (Buckmaster of Victoria won the Oil Prize) was broadcast over the National network. It was a much surprised W.H. who a day later wandered into the City from the hills of Mona Vale. His friends greeted him with the news.[60]

The highlight of this issue is a summary of a panel discussion 'What is the Value of Contemporary Art in Our Life today?' The account, while brief, offers valuable insights into the NSW CAS's efforts to stimulate debate as well as public attitudes towards contemporary art. The discussion, which was held in the Education Department Gallery during the exhibition week, 'brought out not only a sharp divergence of opinion among the four selected speakers but also among the audience.' The 'only speaker on the side of true "contemporary" art' was the vice president of the NSW CAS, Weaver Hawkins; a 'serious student of the art of all ages'. He defined contemporary art as being not merely the art being produced today but as the art which synchronises with its epoch. Man's spirit, he said:

> is moving faster today than ever before but he has developed his physical experiences far more than his cultural ones. A stagnant mental attitude makes the bigotry and anger at the thing which is unfamiliar. Contemporary art jolts such a mentality out of its backwater into the stream of life. A civilization without a soul.

In contrast to Hawkins, the other panellists – the artist Hayward Veal, the script writer Richard Aspinall, and the retired Dean of Architecture at Sydney University, Professor Leslie Wilkinson – were hostile to the very notion of contemporary art, expressing bigotry towards the 'unfamiliar'. Veal said that 'looking for any value in contemporary art was like looking for a needle in a Haystack'. However, 'He conceded the therapeutic value of contemporary art which "permits people who know nothing about art to express themselves".' Wilkinson, in a 'jovial mood', 'admitted he had little sympathy with most of the art produced today'. Having said, 'I'd like to go around the gallery and throw out everything which is ugly', he did not define 'ugly' and claimed that Architecture was the true Mistress of the Arts.'[61]

The impression created by the November 1950 NSW Broadsheet, together with other issues, is that the NSW CAS was a society committed to the production of contemporary art in the face of mixed public reception. There is also good evidence of the NSW CAS commitment to educating the artistic community and the public by creating a forum for debate. Two of Hawkins' fellow panellists, Veal and Wilkinson, were respected members of Sydney's art establishment and their inclusion on the panel was clearly intended to create awareness of the CAS's ideological conflict with the establishment's cultural values.[62] There is also an element of good natured combat which suggest strategic efforts were made to create the type of controversy that would attract the public's interest. There can be no dispute, therefore, that the early NSW CAS abstractionists laid the foundations for developments in the 1950s, establishing both a supporting infrastructure and sustaining discourse. The concern of this study, however, is not with the history of the early NSW CAS, rather it is with the postwar abstractionists who took control of the NSW CAS in 1955 and the factors that influenced their promotion of abstract expressionism.

The new abstractionists

The most significant moment of change in the development of contemporary abstraction in Australia began around 1953-54 when artists in Melbourne and Adelaide sought to re-activate their branches of the CAS.[63] In NSW a revitalisation process brought a shift in power as the CAS, reacting to a crisis in falling membership, launched a campaign to 'encourage many developing painters who were moving away from the Society to rejoin as exhibiting members, and so place the branch once again in the forward flow of work and ideas'.[64] The campaign was a success and the new members, who included John Coburn, Elwyn Lynn, Tom Gleghorn, Peter Dodd, Tony Tuckson, Henry Salkauskas, Sheila McDonald, George Olszanski and Max Feuerring, quickly took over the reins of power and brought 'a new slant' to the NSW CAS.[65] This new slant involved the rejection of the geometric abstraction of the NSW CAS's founding members and the promotion of abstract expressionism as the Society's avant-garde enterprise.

With the goal of greater professionalism, the new committee reorganised the Society's lecture program and the NSW Broadsheet to provide a critical and theoretical framework for the practice of abstract expressionism that encouraged members to view themselves as part of this international movement. With Elwyn Lynn as its editor, the NSW Broadsheet was reconfigured to offer 'hard hitting' and 'informed' coverage not only of local issues but also of 'the implications within Australia of overseas developments'.[66] It was used to promote discussion and inquiry into current international art theories and movements and thus provide a sense of purpose and ideological cohesiveness. The outcome of these changes was witnessed in late 1956 when Sydney's contemporary artists made the shift into totally non-objective art which, the critic Paul Haefliger pronounced, marked the arrival of abstract expressionism in Australia.[67]

In Melbourne it was John Reed, Barrett Reid, Barbara and Charles Blackman and George Mora who reactivated the branch calling for the CAS and the meaning of contemporary art to be redefined.[68] They launched their broadsheet in September 1954, and its contents indicate that their call for redefinition was accompanied by an attempt to renew previously unsuccessful efforts to institute the CAS as a federal body, with its executive based with 'parent body' in Melbourne. The Melbourne CAS was clearly seeking to position itself as the leader of the CAS and Australia's modernist avant-garde. While it displayed an interest in new abstraction, its focus was on the promotion of Melbourne's heritage of the 'Angry Penguins' circle.[69] Accordingly, considerable space in the Victorian Broadsheet was devoted to articles on the history of the early years of the CAS and defining its function and relationship to society.[70] The group established its focus on history by relaunching the branch with a commemorative exhibition and plans to establish a Gallery of Contemporary Art. All this was in stark contrast to the NSW CAS whose new committee's focus was firmly on the new abstract expressionism and internationalism.

There had been several calls for the CAS to redefine itself since 1945. However, prior to 1954 the calls had remained largely rhetorical which leads one to question why this

moment brought the incentive for genuine change, and why the change involved the NSW CAS and the practice of international abstraction in such a major way. Nancy Borlase has claimed that the pressures of a more discriminating and competitive art market and patronage system precipitated the change in the NSW CAS and its push for a new level of professionalism. Her observations suggest that the nature of Australian contemporary art practice was changing together with the nature of society.

Part II

The Sydney Contemporary Art Establishment: Paul Haefliger and the Romantic Ideal

In the aftermath of the World War II, as Australia entered an era of reconstruction and rehabilitation, the CAS entered a period of transition as its importance to the production of contemporary art appeared to have waned.[71] As there were mixed feelings about the shape and direction the new world should take, the calls for Australian artists to become involved in the establishment of a new cultural order met with differing responses. On one level there was a feeling that the battle for contemporary art had been won and the fruits of victory should be enjoyed. In Sydney the return to commerce and civilian life brought a rejuvenation of the art market with artists expressing their confidence by establishing new groups. In 1945 Paul Haefliger and Mervyn Horton established the Sydney Group, an exhibiting group whose members were selected on the basis that they were 'the very best'.[72] Another exhibiting group formed in 1947 around the young and fashionable artist colony which had gathered at Merioola, Chica Lowe's large house in Woollahra.[73] On the political front, James Cant and small group of fellow communists including Bernard Smith and Hal Missingham, founded the Society of Realist Artists (SORA) in the hope that the new Australia would be formed according to socialist ideals and a humanist commitment to improve the plight of the common man.[74]

The NSW CAS initially felt the impact of these groups on the quality and size of its exhibitions. However, the situation quickly stabilised and the groups seemed to function co-operatively according to the principle of tolerance which, Bernard Smith stressed in an article promoting SORA, was a hallmark of 'contemporaneity'.[75] Advertisements in the NSW Broadsheets for Merioola, SORA, Society of Artists, and Sydney Group exhibitions, together with news of solo shows at the David Jones and Macquarie galleries, indicate that an establishment infrastructure for the exhibition and sale of contemporary art was emerging in the late 1940s and early 1950s.[76] The Sydney art scene was healthy and its opportunities once again attracted artists from interstate, in particular Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale and Jeffrey Smart. Even the NSW CAS took on an air of respectability as the Art Gallery of NSW purchased the work of the CAS artists, commencing in 1946 with Margo Lewers' Composition in Blue.[77] As Hal Missingham recalled, contemporary art and the CAS had won a place in the community.[78] No longer the only venue for contemporary art, the CAS was threatened with redundancy and it had to struggle to survive – which it did – by holding firm to its avant-garde ideal of challenging the established order with new and innovative art. While the contemporary art that dominated Sydney in the postwar years was technically and aesthetically excellent, it was not avant-garde, because 'the *avant-garde* was not only seen to be synonymous with quality, but [as] a fundamental part of ... The promotion of the new', as Nancy Borlase explained.[79]

Dominated by the Merioola group, the Society of Artists and the Sydney Group, Sydney's postwar art scene was characterised by an eclectic mix of stylish neo-romanticism, constructivism and English inspired 'art for art's sake' aestheticism. Built largely on the inheritance of Ure Smith endorsed modernism, and thus concerned with technical excellence and post impressionist formalism, this contemporary art was definitely not radical.[80] Its interpretation of the 'new' was exemplified by the neo-romantic offerings of the Merioola and Sydney Group circles which found an apologist in the painter and art critic Paul Haefliger.

The NSW CAS abstract expressionists would attack this faction of Sydney art as the new academy and promote the term 'charm' school in the NSW Broadsheet to imply the fashionability and stylishness which made this art palatable to the establishment.[81] The term 'charm' school, it must be emphasised, did not refer to a distinctive group of individuals, to Merioola or the Sydney Group, but to a mode of painting, the origins of which were to be found in Sydney's dedication to Cézanne, the School of Paris and English post-impressionism. Robert Hughes is commonly credited with coining the term 'charm' school, however, it was Elwyn Lynn who defined the concept as it applied to Sydney art theoretically in a series of NSW Broadsheet essays beginning in September 1957. According to Lynn's definition, any Sydney artist, even John Passmore, could lapse into 'charm' school painting if not careful. 'Charm' school, he explained, was a dangerous predisposition of Sydney art for the harmonious, lyrical and aesthetically pleasing. It was an establishment modernism that preferred 'decorative planes of light before formal analysis, whimsical contours before the linear process of definition and joyous passages of colour before the creation of pulsating volumes'. For those who were committed to radicalism it was decorative and escapist luxury art; obsessed with aesthetics, style and finish - that is 'excellence' - at the expense of serious ideas. It was the epitome of all that was wrong with Sydney art.

Paul Haefliger

With Haefliger in command of Sydney's new contemporary art establishment, 'charm' school painting found a market with Sydney's fashionable social elite, continuing the art and society nexus established by Ure Smith. Haefliger is credited with having encouraged the fashionable art for art's sake mentality that compromised the integrity of Sydney's art practice. Haefliger, however, is an enigmatic character in Australian art history. While some historians accuse him of fostering the 'charm' school mentality, others credit him with raising the standard of Sydney's art discourse by promoting the enlightened discussion of European art history and fostering a cosmopolitan rather than a nationalist vision of culture.[82]

Haefliger, who was financially supported by his Swiss family, described himself as a 'remittance man'; a black sheep who dedicated his life to art rather than entering business. Something of a dilettante, his artistic taste was premised on nostalgia for the sensibility of European culture's great master tradition.[83] Although European in origin, Haefliger spent his formative years in Sydney and was a product of that city. Like the majority of his Sydney contemporaries he studied with Julian Ashton before going in London during the 1930s. Unlike his wife Jean Bellette and his friends John Passmore, Eric Wilson, Donald Friend and Arthur Murch who studied at the Westminster School of Art, Haefliger studied at the Royal College of the Arts.[84] However, the RCA offered him little stimulus. He was influenced by the Westminster combination of Bernard Meninsky and Mark Gertler who inspired many young Australians with an enthusiasm for humanist learning and art history and most specifically for the 'primitive' in early Renaissance art. Meninsky was fondly remembered by Sydney artists for his great admiration for Cézanne and for encouraging them to draw in terms not of appearance but of form, structure and sensation; to feel and sense the object rather than concentrate on appearances.

In the 1930s it was the norm for Sydney artists, after their initial Sydney education, to study in England, particularly at Westminster School of Art, and this contributed to the character of Sydney contemporary art and definitely to its formalist inclinations. The NSW CAS artists such as Carl Plate recalled that the greatest benefit of their overseas experience was being able to confirm that art should be more than imitation. In the mid 1930s art was in a state of ferment in London and throughout Europe, with the constructivist and surrealist schools promoting the idea that art should be based not on external appearances but on the inner realm of the subconscious, intuition and imagination. In London Naum Gabo and Herbert Read were proposing the concept that 'the reality of the world is constructed by us, by our senses and by our thoughts'. They argued that art was like life itself; sensuous, spontaneous, irrational and factual.[85] It followed therefore that artists should create a new pictorial language that equated with their personal perception of life. The surrealists' experiments with image making, the dream and the subconscious were also creating

excitement at their First International Exhibition (1936-37) which Plate was one of the few Australians to attend.[86] Haefliger and Jean Bellette, however, were not influenced by this reactionary modernism. They responded instead to English developments which used the surrealist concept of the dream and the universal unconscious to foster a neo-romantic nostalgia for 'primitive' pre Renaissance art as a mode of human expression of intense spirituality and poetic beauty. It was this conservative and literary version of modernism and its ideal of a spiritual and cultural renewal in the pre Renaissance that Paul Haefliger and wife sought to promote in Sydney.[87]

The Haefligers returned to Australia in the late 1930s as the CAS was being launched as the vanguard of a contemporary art movement. They joined the Society together with other young enthusiasts full of hope that a new art would emerge out of the chaos of the war. They were also quick to win praise exhibiting not only with the Australian Academy but also with the Society of Artists, the CAS and Macquarie Galleries. They were promoted in Art in Australia as pioneers of a new direction in the creation of a national culture by William Dobell who advised war time 'isolationists' to learn from these young Australians who were 'turning earnestly to the treasures of Europe as a sure foundation for national culture'.[88] A national culture, Dobell argued, was not something that would grow in isolation; it would only grow and flourish if it had 'deep roots in the past and after long periods of contact with a living stream of culture.' In assimilating the lessons of the great masters, Bellette and Haefliger, he asserted, were 'learning the use of natural forms as motives for creation, rather than as subjects for pretty imitation, and this promised well for the future of Australia art'.[89]

The neo-romantic ideal

Paul Haefliger and Jean Bellette wrote several articles for Art in Australia which sought to foster an new appreciation of European culture.[90] In their articles they supported Peter Bellew's drive for a cosmopolitan art discourse by presenting the art of the past in terms of the universal experience and as a metaphorical parallel to Australia's struggle to create a

new culture from her European inheritance. Bellette, for instance, wove romantic evocations of Piero della Francesca as the universal hero writing:

> It is a good thing that in every age we have among us men who rise up unafraid and above melancholy. Francesca was one of these. Surrounded by discontent, disturbances and quarrels, but endowed by a nature which wished to be universal, he created timelessness and impassivity. The problem of each man, is after all, to generalise sufficiently to reduce the desperate adventure of a lifetime to something equable, calm and capable of enduring.[91]

In similar vein, Haefliger found a metaphor for 'a young man's happiness in finding the road to liberty from an outworn tradition, and his confidence in his power to create a new one', in the 'bright and gay and sparkling colour' of Giotto's St Francis.[92] Published in Art in Australia alongside articles by international figures such as Herbert Read, these rather slim poetic pieces have earnt the Haefligers a reputation for erudition and cultural sophistication that should to be approached with caution.[93]

The Haefligers' contemporaneity was firmly grounded in the notion that modern art was an extension of the Renaissance, not a rejection of it. Art was part of the continuing story of civilisation that could not be broken if Australia were to produce its own culture and become part of Western civilisation. According to Haefliger, Australia was 'a young country with tremendous talents' which lacked the 'sensibility' necessary for culture. 'What Australians lack', he explained:

> is culture, culture is a sensibility, a fineness, Boyd, Nolan are crude and accepted because the culture is lacking here ... But Australia, we lack the consciousness of centuries of tradition, that is in even second rate European, ... a sense of tradition, of a culture that manifests itself in that fineness of feelings which you simply haven't got here ... It is having a sense of culture, something that suggests a tradition, the way paint is put on ... not crude like Boyd and Perceval ... That is why the United States can never compete with Europeans.[94]

Haefliger's belief in a cultural 'sensibility' that only could be found outside Australia, and his ideal of the artist, is typical of what Docker termed Sydney's 'ultimately neo-platonic' notion of art.[95] Articulated in Norman Lindsay's Creative Effort and Madam Life's Lover, and in the poetry of Christopher Brennan, Kenneth Slessor and A.D. Hope, this ideal travels into the

1940s and 1960s in the novels of Patrick White and the art criticism of Haefliger, James Gleeson, Wallace Thornton and Robert Hughes. As Docker explained, Lindsay set the pattern of this neo-platonic ideal with Creative Effort which, inspired by Plato and Nietzsche, presented the theory that the artist was a superhero. Detached from society the artist dedicates his life to higher ideals; that is to the creative effort which constitutes the never ending search 'to discover within himself the universal Ideas necessary for a full and vital life'. The artist's role, therefore, was not to save society but live according to the realm of the higher impulses as a member of an elite aristocracy that derived its values not from society but from an internalised concept of Nature. Artists formed 'an aristocracy of sensibility, predestined by Nature to a higher Life; a Life which does not savour mere social Existence', but seeks instead the aristocratic standard as fixed by Nature. According to Lindsay this sensibility was tied to a neo-platonic notion of an order of consciousness situated somewhere in reality; in 'Perfection in Passion, Beauty, Form and Sensation'. The artist had within himself the ideal values that at the same time existed as Ideas in an outer reality. The task of the individual, thus, was not to depend on external conditions but to live in the timeless realm where he could discover the Ideal within himself.[96]

These ideas were shared by Haefliger, who expressed his romantic concept of art in 'Portraits: Personal and Official'. Art, Haefliger explained, was a matter of the heart and an intuitive, deeply natural process. It was:

> an organic whole, a search for the essential, and only when the essential has been found does nature change to art. But this transformation can take place solely through the intuitive state of mind of the artist; therefore his heart will always embrace the visual scene, and possess it, whatever the subject matter may be. [97]

Art was highly subjective because it emerged from the individual artist's heroic exploration of the self as the expression of life's endless mystery. Thus to:

> the artist life is a mirror, in which he sees reflected only himself. It is this supreme egoism, this stressing of his own personality, that represents the foundations of his art. What he recognises in others is a reflection of his own mind. But if this proves the case, the artist's statement is one of complete bias. The image which he paints, although possessed of a certain physical likeness to the portrayed, is really his, the painter's image. Therefore the so-called portrait is a fallacy and in great art

> it hardly occurs ... even Leonardo, one of the most analytical men of all times, formed his type of portraiture. The Mona Lisa was his ideal long before he met the wife of Francesco del Gioconco. She may be met with among his angels and Madonnas and in most of his compositions ...
> And if the enchanting irony of Mona Lisa's smile haunts us, and spells endless mystery, it is the echo of Leonardo's own deep and complex nature that finds expression.[98]

Haefliger's ideal artist, therefore, was not concerned with the external reality of appearances. The painter, as he extrapolated in his essay on Russell Drysdale was a poet who worked from levels of consciousness which differed from those of ordinary mortals – from 'the underlying emotion which is part of his inner vision. For the artist, reality lies neither in the intellect nor outside of the self but in the 'emotions'.[99] The artist, like Drysdale, was a father figure and spiritual leader who 'loves the country [Nature] as a romantic reality be intuited, not to be illustrated', and it was from this emotional experience that a new form of art would emerge for Australia. Thus for Haefliger real culture was not to be found in Australia, which, tied to the masses and materialism, lacked the 'sensibility' that distinguished the great civilisations of Europe.[100]

Haefliger found a poetic model for his art criticism and Eurocentricity that was well attuned to his romantic predispositions and those of Sydney's cultural elite in the work of the French physician Elie Faure.[101] It was a model that appears to have particularly suited Sydney, having inspired the Lindsays, and been adopted by James Gleeson when he became critic with the Sun. A self-taught art aficionado, Elie Faure's thinking was marked by a nostalgia for a pre-industrial golden age which had considerable appeal with Haefliger who rejected the intellectualisation of art in a belief that the artist was a higher being and a revealer of universal truths. Elie Faure's writings, particularly his four volume History of Art, were notable for their passionate, poetic evocations of art, and it was this that attracted Haefliger.

Like Haefliger, Faure viewed art as 'the expression of life and as mysterious as life itself'.[102] Created from the emotions, sensations and intuitions of the artist, art was not about groups

or movements but about individuals who delved into 'the depths of collective life and the hidden springs of the individual conscience'. As in Bellette's Piero della Francesca, Faure's individuals transcended time and material reality. Mystical, poetic and intuitive art, in Faure's opinion, defied theoretical and scientific explanation. It was the 'plastic poem conceived by humanity', and thus only 'by listening to the heart could one can speak of art without belittling it'.[103] Accordingly art history and criticism were not to be objective recordings of facts and actions but poetic narratives born of the writer's intuitive passion for art. 'The historian who calls himself a scientist', Faure wrote, 'simply utters a piece of folly.'[104] The mystery of art was such that it could not be touched on scientifically, rather the historian had to respond 'from the heart, be partial and be guided by his intuition alone and the courage to make use of it.' In Elie Faure's schema, civilisation is a lyric phenomenon which has little to do with technology, but emerges only after centuries of artistic tradition and that understanding of the universal which art brings to mankind. Countries such as America, he argued, were too young and industry-oriented to be civilised.[105]

Haefliger loved the poetry of Elie Faure, loved his 'golden sentences' and sought to emulate him in his writings and SMH reviews. Sydney responded well, and Haefliger became something of a powerbroker as his reviews set the market standards and trends and his Sydney Group quickly rivalled the Society of Artists in prestige.[106] Not all loved him, however. The young artist historian and socialist Bernard Smith took up the attack in the late 1940s, proclaiming the future of *'avante-garde'* art was at risk as 'Painting in Sydney is becoming increasingly romantic, and the tendency is being aided by "romantic" criticism.'[107] Smith asserted that Haefliger was leading a style revolution which was encouraging a return to notions of 'mystery', 'poetry' and 'melancholy' and to the literary associations and romantic seduction of the Lindsay and Hilder era. This retreat to the past was threatening the achievements made by the Sydney's pioneer modernists who had worked so hard to find an objective art form without moral or literary associations.[108] The danger, Smith stressed, was Haefliger's subjective and partisan criticism which in

promoting 'vague literary sentiments as "reticence", "melancholy", "nostalgia", "mystery" and "spiritual values",' was converting neo-romanticism into a fashion that was threatening to swamp Sydney art.[109] As Smith's article illustrates, Haefliger's fostering of the elitist production of art aroused antagonism amongst those dedicated to the avant-garde ideal of artistic practice.

Haefliger did a great deal to mythologise Sydney as a city of artistic individuals interested only in 'excellence'. When speaking to Richard Haese in 1975, for example, he dismissed any notion that Sydney artists and the NSW CAS might have had a critical platform like Melbourne. In his opinion Sydney artists were not bound by ideology but were simply individuals intent on creating 'good art'. His Sydney Group, he asserted, were:

> just painters, good artists, whose aim is to create good art. The basis was the best - how they painted didn't matter. No[we] didn't see it as being in opposition to social realists-if the painting was good -that was all that mattered.[110]

According to Haefliger the Melbourne art scene was too serious and given to coteries, to competing ideological and stylistic groups which were parochial in their attitudes. In contrast the Sydney scene was wide open. It 'had a joke element and was remarkably tolerant – laissez faire – you could show with any group – artists would get together no matter their style. We didn't have a message at all really.' When the communists (SORA) wanted the CAS to issue Manifestos for human rights, he recalled, 'We said we didn't care. We wanted to paint good pictures – that was better for human kind ... we were always more frivolous, than Melbourne, frivolous but better painters'. Sydney art, he concluded, was extremely good painting but not 'serious': 'it was just fun and games'.[111]

The challenge is whether to accept Haefliger at face value, or, in light of Docker's work, consider him seriously as an heir to Sydney's romantic tradition. While it would be foolish to attribute to Haefliger an intellectual rigour for which he would make no claim, it would be equally foolish to dismiss him lightly as a dilettante. He did take art seriously – living it as an elite life style and being one of the last of a generation who could afford to do so. The problem Haefliger raises is how to evaluate the role of dilettantism in Sydney's art system.

A cultural and social elite

Griselda Pollock has argued in Vision and Difference, that the production of art needs to be viewed as part of cultural practice which she describes in the follow manner:

> as signifying systems, as practices of *representation*, sites not for the production of beautiful things, evoking beautiful feelings. They produce meanings and positions from which those meanings are consumed.[112]

According to Pollock, we need to identify and understand what specific artistic practices are doing; that is their social meanings and effects, and this, she suggests, demands a dual approach:

> First the practice must be located as part of the social struggles between classes, races and genders, articulating with other sites of representation. But second we must analyse what any specific practice is doing, what meaning is being produced, and how and for whom. ... how images or languages or other sign systems (fashion, eating, travel etc.) produce meanings and positions for the consumption of meanings.[113]

A means for evaluating Haefliger and the responses to him, therefore, may lie in an understanding of the social discourse in which he was a key player. For this we need to ask for whom and to whom his rhetoric spoke.

Australian art history, essentially a post-World War II construct, has been shaped to tell the story of the birth of a nation and its culture, and more specifically, the birth of an egalitarian nation with a healthy distrust of authority and the state. This emphasis on Australia's liberalist origins is a key theme of Australian history that has created a situation in which the issue of social class is seldom analysed other than in terms of working class struggle.[114] While John Docker identifies the existence of a cultural elite he does not directly address the issue of its social background nor does he consider how theories such as Norman Lindsay's were constructed to promote and support a certain social group and its use of high culture as a strategy of what Pierre Bourdieu terms 'discernment'.[115] Within Australian art history the issue of how social class affected and shaped art production and patronage is yet to be thoroughly explored.[116] Nancy Underhill, for instance, labours hard to dispel any suggestion that Ure Smith's patronage of modernism and women artists was grounded in social politics. While she makes it clear that modernism was practised by a select circle

in Sydney – the leading retail and newspaper families – she does not relate this to issues of power and elitism. Similarly, feminist studies of Australia's women artists of the 1920s and 1930s are yet to fully investigate the manner in which economic class and social status enabled these women to pursue successful careers.[117]

Women artists such as Margaret Preston and Grace Cossington Smith, were women of private income; they were an example of the American sociologist C. Wright Mills terms *rentiers*. Like Paul Haefliger and Jean Bellette, they were members of Sydney's society's power elite, who, through their social and economic position had a secure income which enabled them the freedom and leisure to practice art.[118] Their success was premised on their membership of a 'leisured elite' whose values and ideals not only constituted the subject matter of their work but also shaped their audience and market.[119] This set of circumstances was are not limited to women artists but can be found also in the relatively affluent and cultured middle class background of many Sydney artists, male and female, including Carl Plate, Margo Lewers, Gerry Lewers and James Gleeson. In Australia, as in Britain, few artists in the 1920s and 1930s made their living from art; the reality was that to be successful one required a private income. Those less fortunate struggled to practice art while engaging in employment; usually commercial art. Australian art history has tended to brush over this factor as if it compromised the integrity of the art produced. However, in Australia as in England this mode of practice continued into the 1950s when, the scholar Alan Sinfield argues, changes in the nature of international capitalism brought shifts in the modes of cultural production, a result of which was the 'effacement and relegation' of women and the scholarly gentleman amateur.[120]

In America, as Wright Mills notes, the *rentiers* were predominantly rich women who 'often became engaged in "the arts" instead of "society" or busily pretended to be'; one thinks here not only of Peggy Guggenheim and Gertrude Stein, but also of Philip Johnson and Edgar Kaufmann.[121] However, in Britain the production of culture was premised on the existence of a leisured elite, an elite of men and women of private means. According to Sinfield 'In the prevailing order of things before welfare capitalism, "good" culture was taken

to be, in essence, the culture of the leisured upper-middle class; that it why it was "high culture".[122] Members of the English intelligentsia, such as T.S. Eliot, Cyril Connelly and Virginia Woolf, asserted that the practice of the arts was the prerogative of the 'cultured and civilised' who, supported and sustained by the upper middle class, had the leisure to take a more long-sighted view of society. The existence of the cultural elite was rationalised on the grounds that the independence provided by a secure income and a high standard of living encouraged a critical spirit and the freedom to experiment. The independence from material concerns therefore fostered experimentation and the freedom to adopt a variety of political and intellectual stances; right-wing, left-wing or liberal, with dissidence and avant-gardism being as much a feature of the cultural elite as conformity. However, while the middle class intelligentsia may have been internally divided, it was consistent in its hostility to the hegemony of the principal part of the middle class – the businessmen, industrialists and empire builders – against whom it used 'good culture' as a banner of dissidence.[123] This carried a note of contradiction in it which, Sinfield is careful to point out, established the leisured elite as fundamentally 'anti-bourgeois bourgeoisie.'

Both Wright Mills and Sinfield emphasise that the concept of a cultured elite was premised on a class power discourse in which the elite viewed themselves as 'the bearers of civilisation' which depended on personal sensibility'.[124] Like Norman Lindsay's and Elie Faure's artist heroes, the social elite believed themselves to be morally and intellectually superior; to be aristocrats, 'finer' animals. For them, as for Haefliger and his circle, art transcended the social and political, and the artist was 'the most highly developed individual consciousness in society' who required 'freedom to express their intuitions'.[125] Culture, as Cyril Connelly explained in a manner similar to Haefliger, was a 'sensibility'; 'a sense of tradition', a set of civilised and cultured values that existed in the old order of Europe and not the new order of capitalism with its infrastructure of the market, academia, the bourgeoisie and mass culture.[126] The aim was to produce 'good' art, art that was 'intuited' from superior knowledge and vision, and thus free from the corrupting influences of capitalism and the mediocrity of the masses. The practice of this 'good' art was reliant,

as Connelly wrote, on the existence of an enlightened bourgeoisie, which in the case of Australian modernism, it is argued, meant the social faction that included the Lloyd Jones, Fairfax, Packer and Murdoch families and cultural leaders like Sydney Ure Smith, H.V. and Mary Evatt, John and Sunday Reed. The production of contemporary art in Australia was dependent on the existence of an urban bourgeoisie that had both the need and means to provide the necessary material, cultural and social infrastructure for this variety of high culture.[127]

Wright Mills argues in his study of The Power Elite, that in a country like America which has never had an entrenched nobility or aristocracy, art and culture are from their very beginnings products of a capitalist ideology which uses them in intricate power games of status and prestige. The nature of the leisured elite, according to Mills, is therefore formed by the nature of the capitalist ideology that sustains it and in the case of America this means corporate capitalism. In the new world of America the power elite is derived from the bourgeoisie who, as captains of economics and politics, monopolise not only wealth but prestige and power as well.[128] The middle class origins and newness of this upper strata make it less visible than in countries where aristocracy have a long heritage.

The terms bourgeoisie, leisured elite or corporate elite do not fit comfortably into the discussion of Australian art and society. For many historical and ideological reasons Australia has mythologised itself as a classless society.[129] Tim Rowse has suggested that Australians tend to see privilege, class and capitalism as 'other'; that is as residing in the imperialist foreign powers against which Australians as an egalitarian society struggle and define themselves. Class struggle in Australia comprises the workers (all Australians) against the capitalist establishment (foreign capitalism). To be Australian is to be anti-capitalist.[130] Nevertheless it is true that a privileged elite fitting Mills' definition of, 'those established families who, in their well-being are quite insulated from the economic jolts and lurches felt by the merely prosperous and those further down the scale', did exist in Australia.[131] In Sydney this meant the '400' urban elite families of the eastern suburbs and country elite of graziers and primary producers whose social life filled extensive papers in

Sydney's daily newspapers. It was this strata of society that sustained the practice of high culture in between the wars, creating the necessary social sites for art's involvement in 'the creation and consumption of meanings'.[132] As with any power elite, their power struggles are evidenced in their use of art and culture as strategies of discernment.

In pre-World War II Australia the dominant ideology was based on a primary industry economy and, accordingly, rural imagery that supported this reading of reality was supported and endorsed by the establishment as being in the national interest.[133] The primary industry elite endorsed and encouraged a national myth built around pioneering, the land, and England as the major market. The city, with its cosmopolitan world of retailing and manufacturing, while important to the economy, was constructed, in texts such as Keith Hancock's Australia, as a site of economic and cultural corruption and a danger to the welfare of the nation.[134] The industrial and machine aesthetic of modernism was read as dangerous and dissenting, as a symbol of capitalist decadence and national sickness. For the other section of the upper strata, the urban elite, contemporary art-modernism with its dedication to the new and sympathy for design and commodity culture, was read as a symbol of the corporate ideology of progress and change, an expression of corporate-manufacturing ideals in both aesthetic and spiritual idioms.[135] It can be argued, that the urban elite used modernism as a business strategy and that, therefore, the enemy for Australian contemporary artists was not so much the capitalist establishment of the city but the capitalist establishment of primary industry.

While Thorstein Veblen contemptuously identified the leisure class's socialising activities as displays of conspicuous consumption, Wright Mills argued that the glamour of cafe culture and celebrity games, together with activities such as art exhibitions, art collections and sport, were not empty displays of wealth but 'a hard fact of well-established business routines'.[136] Besides creating publicity these activities construct status, they function as a social register which co-ordinates, unifies and distinguishes the elite and its hierarchies. Most importantly these activities establish prestige, 'the shadow of money and power', which, Mills explained, 'buttresses power, turning it into reputation and authority and

protecting it from social challenge'.[137] Art and culture, it followed, fed the ideology of the elite by publicly confirming its superiority.

It can be argued, therefore, that Sydney Ure Smith's publications Art in Australia, The Home and Collected Flower Pieces, and the Society of Artists exhibition openings which were covered in the women's pages of the SMH, functioned as a social register of Sydney's monied elite with its specific sub-groups and hierarchies.[138] In Sydney, the home of many of Australia's first families of primary industry, retailing and media, the practice of art involved status and power games.[139] Art was a strategy of aesthetic discernment and distinction used by society women and by businessmen like Charles Lloyd Jones, Warwick Fairfax and John Moore, who engaged in the study and practice of art.[140] As Bernard Smith noted, Sydney was a city that promoted and purchased art, especially that of its own artists. Within this social structure the artist became a symbol of the freedom, independence, discernment, and at times, of the dissidence of an enlightened bourgeoisie; he was a symbol of free enterprise, so to speak. Thus leisured dilettante artists, like Paul Haefliger and the Merioola group, took on celebrity and novelty status, featuring prominently in society pages of the media.

While Australia's discourse of class and power differs from that of America and Britain the similarities that exist offer possibilities for different readings of Australian art production. The urbane and charming Paul Haefliger and Jean Bellette can be considered as a manifestation of Australia's leisured elite; they had the security of private income, membership of society, access to its patronage, and considerable power and credibility to influence opinion as a result. Viewed from this perspective the frivolity of Haefliger's rhetoric takes on an added significance as do the reactions of others to him and his activities. The opposition to Haefliger and his followers by Bernard Smith and those committed to art and social commitment becomes an issue not only of art but also of genuine class tension that carried in it something of Australia's distrust of class elitism. For Smith, Haefliger's blatant social elitism in the immediate postwar years endangered Australia's potential move into a new social democracy. For the abstract expressionists it

provided the impetus to reposition the NSW CAS as an active opponent of the establishment and its cultural and social order.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the evolvement of Sydney's postwar modernist art establishment and the ideas of its leading protagonist Paul Haefliger in order to establish the ideological complexities that underpinned Sydney's production of contemporary art. Haefliger was extremely influential with his romantic criticism encouraging Sydney's preference for 'charming', art for art's sake aestheticism and romantic ideals of individualism and self expression. His influence was also highly contentious acting as a catalyst for the generation of postwar painters who repositioned the NSW CAS as an oppositional artists' group by adopting abstract expressionism as its avant-garde enterprise. While the abstract expressionists rebelled against the geometric abstraction of their predecessors, they also built on the foundations they had laid. They did this by reactivating the NSW CAS as a venue for disruptive, experimental art and reorienting its lecture program and the NSW Broadsheet to promote abstract expressionism as the new revolutionary art form. Thus the NSW CAS, from its inception, was instrumental not only in laying the ideological foundations for Australia's avant-garde production of abstract expressionism but also in establishing the supporting infrastructure that was essential for its development. Most importantly, the NSW CAS was instrumental in activating the practice of critical debate and artistic activism in a city whose promotional art system discouraged dispute and objective criticism.

1 B. Smith, 'Comments on Style-Change and Criticism in Sydney', Society of Artists Book 1946-47, Sydney, Ure Smith, n.d., pp. 47-54 passim.

2 R. Haese, Rebels and Precursors, C. Dixon & D. Dysart, Presenting Australian Art 1938-1941 Counter Claims, S.H. Ervin Gallery, Sydney, 1986.

3 B. Smith, Australian Painting Today; and Two Commentaries on the Exhibition, *'Aspects of Australian Figurative Painting 1942-1962'*.

4 NSW Records. Federal Constitution and Rules of the CAS of Australia, c.1945-6.

5 ibid.

6 See J. Docker, Australian Cultural Elites, pp. 85-102; and Meanjin vol. 3, 1944, & vol. 4, 1945, for an insight into the nature of Meanjin's cultural discourse. See in particular, C.R. Badger, 'In Search of a National Idea', vol. 3, no. 3, 1944, pp. 161-163; and Lloyd Ross, 'Building Community and Nation', vol. 4, no. 1, 1945, pp. 5-8.

7 D. Reid, A Concise History of Canadian Painting, (2nd ed.) Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 212.

8 ibid., pp. 212-213.

9 A. Massey, 'The Independent Group: Towards a Redefinition', Burlington Magazine, April 1987, pp. 232-232; and D. Thistlewood, Herbert Read: Formlessness and Form, London, Routledge and Kegan, 1984, pp. 16-18,116-121.

10 H. Read, Art and Society, London, William Heinemann, 1937; 'What is Revolutionary Art ?', in F. Frascina, (ed.), Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology, London, Harper and Row, 1982, pp. 123-127.

11 'What is Revolutionary Art?', pp. 126-127.

12 Docker, Cultural Elites, pp. 131-154.

13 John Anderson, Studies in Empirical Philosophy, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1962; and Janet Anderson, et al. (eds.), Art and Reality: John Anderson on Literature and Aesthetics, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1982.

14 Janet Anderson, Art and Reality, pp. 17-21.

15 Serge Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War, trans. A. Goldhammer, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 24-41.

16 NSW Records. Correspondence 1944-5. In 1945-6 there was conflict over the direction the CAS should take as Vic O'Connor and Albert Tucker called on the Society to redefine its purpose and the meaning of contemporary art; a federal constitution and charter were negotiated between the

branches, but was never implemented. When the Victorian CAS reactivated in 1954 it brought the issue up again, arguing for the instigation of a federal ruling body that would meet yearly and have its chapter in Melbourne. These moves were met with cautious response from NSW and South Australia and nothing was signed and the states continued to function independently.

17 The NSW, Victorian and South Aust. Broadsheets give a picture of three quite different societies operating in cities which had different patronage systems. South Australia was quite fierce about its independence and difference.

18 The CAS's first decade and the work of the 'Angry Penguins' circle are widely celebrated in Australia's art historical discourse. See Dixon, Counter Claims; Haese, Rebels and Precursors; and C. Dixon and T. Smith Aspects of Australian Figurative Painting 1942-1962; and B. Smith, Australian Painting; Nancy Borlase, 'Three Decades of The Contemporary Art Society', Art and Australia, Vol. 5, no. 2, 1968, pp. 71-72, for Sydney's view of the 'heroic years'.

19 Smith, Australian Painting, pp. 287-289; Haese, Rebels and Precursors, p. 269, and Sigrid McCausland, 'Modern Painting in Melbourne and Sydney 1935-1945: Its Context and Concerns', Final Honours Thesis in History, Australian National University, 1974, p. 85.

20 Haese, Rebels and Precursors, p. 288.

21 NSW Records. The Minutes for April and May 1946 cover the Bellew Affair and its aftermath. See also Plate, AMPA A 347, for an account of the non-confidence vote in Bellew and of the CAS's defeat of the left's attempt to take over control of the Society. The Bellew incident was one of the very few moments when the tensions of personal politics threatened the NSW executive. Plate, when talking to Haese, argued that the Bellew incident was not about radical politics but about Bellew's interference with the exhibition's hangings and his high-handed, proprietorial attitude to the Society. According to Plate many felt that Bellew's involvement in the CAS and Art in Australia was more about personal aggrandisement than any genuine commitment to art.

22 Haese, Rebels and Precursors, p. 69; Interview with Carl Plate, AMPA A347, (Haese Tapes) Haese, in particular, attributed NSW CAS's critical edge to Peter Bellew and suggested, p. 286, that the its non-confidence vote in Bellew was symptomatic of the group's lack of political radicalism and its conservatism. Ivor Francis, 'The CAS: A Look at the Past 1', described the relationship between the SA branch and 'the unseen Federal President, John Reed' as 'interesting', describing Reed 'as the Messiah with Max Harris as his John the Baptist.'

23 Haese, Rebels and Precursors, pp. 255-257, for his appraisal of Sydney art which he claimed lacked the social purpose and conscience that Basil Burdett exemplified in Melbourne.

24 Dixon, Counter Claims, p. 38; and Haese, Rebels and Precursors, p. 287.

25 Docker, Cultural Elites, p. x.

[26] ibid., pp. ix-x; and J. Docker, 'Sydney versus Melbourne Revisited', in J. Davidson, (ed.), The Sydney-Melbourne Book, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1986, pp. 159-167.

[27] ibid., pp. 164-165.

[28] See, B. & J.W. Head, (eds.) Intellectual Movements and Australian Society, G. Melleuish, Cultural Liberalism in Australia: A Study in Intellectual and Cultural History, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995; T. Rowse, Australian Liberalism and National Character.

[29] For an account of this aspect of Sydney art see N. Underhill, Making Australian Art 1916-49: Sydney Ure Smith, Patron and Publisher, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1991; J. Campbell, Early Sydney Moderns: John Young and the Macquarie Galleries 1916-1946, Sydney, Craftsman House, 1988; and J. Campbell, Australian Watercolour Painters: 1780 to the Present Day, Sydney, Craftsman House, 1989.

[30] D. Hickey, Gerald and Margo Lewers: Their Lives and Their Works, Sydney, Grasstree Press, 1982, pp. 35-36, for the founding of the NSW CAS in which Margo and Gerry Lewers were involved. The first meetings were held at the Teachers' Federation Building in Phillip Street, then Rah Fizelle's studio and later Orban's.

[31] Underhill, Making Australian Art, pp. 21-22; and Dutton, The Innovators, pp. 57-61. Lange organised 'Exhibition 1' with the help of Frank Hinder, Grace Crowley, Gerry Lewers and Margel Hinder. Held in August 1939, 'Exhibition 1' included Grace Crawley, Grace Cossington-Smith, Ralph Balson, Frank and Margel Hinder and Rah Fizelle. Margel Hinder, Books I & II, Australian Women Artists, The Women's Art Register, Carringbush Library, tells that Lange was influential on the Hinders, introducing them to European modern art history and especially R.H. Wilenski, The Modern Movement in Art, London, Faber & Faber, 1927.

[32] Underhill, Making Australian Art, pp. 60-76, tended to be dismissive of Lindsay's intellect. Docker, Cultural Elites, pp. 22-31, took it more seriously as did B. Smith, 'Two Art Systems', in Davidson, (ed.), The Sydney-Melbourne Book, p. 174, who acknowledged Lindsay's importance in formulating the ethos of the artist in Australia.

[33] Campbell, Early Sydney Moderns; and Australian Watercolour Painters; and Underhill, Making Australian Art; and Lloyd Rees, Small Treasures of a Lifetime, Sydney, William Collins, 1984 for an account of his years at Smith and Julius.

[34] Lloyd Rees, Foreword, in Campbell, Early Sydney Moderns, p. 5, stated that in his time 'nearly every Australian artist of recognised importance passed through the doors of Smith and Julius. See also B. Pearce, John Passmore 1904-84: Retrospective, Sydney, Art Gallery of NSW, 1985, p. 8.

35 'Surrealism and Popular Culture,' in M. Lloyd, T. Gott, and C. Chapman, Surrealism: Revolution by Night, Canberra, National Gallery of Australian, 1993, pp. 268-275.

36 Campbell, Early Sydney Moderns, pp. 55-57,77.

37 Smith, 'Two Art Systems', p. 173.

38 V. Lawson, Connie Sweetheart: The Story of Connie Robertson, Port Melbourne, William Heinemann, 1990, pp. 251-253, for Bellew's involvement with the Fairfaxes.

39 Campbell, Early Sydney Moderns, pp. 11-44; and B. Smith, 'Two Art Systems'.

40 E. Butel, Margaret Preston: The Art of Constant Rearrangement, Sydney, Penguin Books in association with the Art Gallery of NSW, 1985, pp. 25-46.

41 Campbell, Early Sydney Moderns, p. 56. Ure Smith, 'was a social climber and something of a ladies' man ... a man of many good friends and sycophants and some rather better enemies.'

42 Smith, 'Two Art Systems', pp. 172-175.

43 NSW Records. Albert Tucker, 'Draft of Proposed Changes in the CAS', c. 1944-45.

44 NSW Reports. In 1945 due to their large membership the NSW branch decided to run a yearly state exhibition (Autumn) as well as the yearly interstate show. The 1945 had 239 entries. The 1946 state exhibition had 204 paintings and the interstate had 204 entries 19 from Victoria; 8 from South Australia and the rest from NSW.

45 Carl Plate, AMPA A 347, (Haese Tapes)

46 NSW Records. This was especially problematic in the mid to late 1940s.

47 Forward of The 11th Annual Interstate CAS Exhibition, October 1948, catalogue. The foreword was signed with the initials C.O.P. which suggests it was written by Carl Plate who asked, 'Is this an improvement or have we produced a better show of painting at the expense of the intrinsic value of art?'

48 See Campbell, Early Sydney Moderns; and Australian Watercolour Painters; and Underhill, Making Australian Art, for a good coverage of Sydney's art societies.

49 B. Smith, 'Two Art Systems', p. 172; and H. Missingham, They Kill You in the End, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1973, p. 27.

50 E. Lynn, 'Groups', NSW Broadsheet, September 1964.

51 ibid. 'The promotion of quality is, of course, commendable, especially when we have handy critics to tell what is good and what is not! The Society of Artists had by 1945 become the selling Society of Australia, but the Sydney Group certainly worked for sales as the then National Gallery well knew.'

[52] Lynn, 'The Contemporary Art Society', NSW Broadsheet, May 1961.

[53] Plate, AMPA A347, and C. Plate, 'Talk to the Art Gallery of NSW mainly about the acceptance of Modern Art over the years', 7 June 1973, in Art Gallery of NSW file.

[54] 'The Art Critic'. A summary of a talk to the CAS by Gleeson', NSW Broadsheet, June 1953.

[55] Plate, AMPA A 347.

[56] See Plate, 'Talk to the Art Gallery of NSW'; F. Hinder, Lithographs, Introduction by John Henshaw, Sydney, Odana Editions, 1978, pp. 15-16; Margel Hinder, The Women's Art Register; and Hickey, Gerald and Margo Lewers, pp. 31-40.

[57] Plate, AMPA A 347.

[58] ibid. This paragraph is a paraphrasing of thoughts expressed by Plate to Haese AMPA A 347 and in his Art Gallery of NSW talk.

[59] The only space in Sydney for large group shows, the Education Department Gallery was an important non-commercial venue well into the late 1950s.

[60] NSW Broadsheet, November 1950.

[61] ibid.

[62] Underhill, Making Australian Art, pp. 35, 207; Ure Smith promoted Wilkinson's conservative modern architecture in Art in Australia; Hayward Veal was a representative of the academy establishment, see Campbell, Early Sydney Moderns, p. 25.

[63] Borlase, 'Three Decades', pp. 71-72. In Melbourne and South Australia this involved the revival of the defunct branches. In South Australia the CAS came to life again under the presidency of John Choate, organising the British Loans exhibition in 1953 and issuing its own broadsheet for the first time in 1954; For an account see Ivor Francis, 'The CAS: A Look at the Past 1', South Australian Broadsheet, March 1976.

[64] Borlase, 'Three Decades', p. 72.

[65] ibid. It must be emphasised that this group did not operate to the exclusion of figurative-semi-abstractionist artists such as Weaver Hawkins nor of the early pioneers of abstraction such as Frank Hinder, Margo Lewers and Carl Plate. What occurred was a blending of the old and new guard. Weaver Hawkins, who was president for much of the 1950s and into the 1960s , maintained a semi-abstract style that reflected his English background and training. See Weaver Hawkins 1893-1977: Memorial Retrospective Exhibition 1977-1979, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, 1977; and E. Chanin and S. Miller, The Art and Life of Weaver Hawkins, Sydney, Craftsman House, 1995.

[66] Borlase, 'Three Decades', p. 72.

67 P. Haefliger, 'A New Movement Arrives in Australia. A new art form has suddenly 'hit' Sydney', SMH, 6 February, 1957.

68 G. Mora, 'The Need for Redefinition', Victorian Broadsheet, September 1954, no 1. Barrie Reid was editor of the Victorian Broadsheet which was a grand affair of many pages and mini essays. Reid explained that its aim was to be 'an integral part of the creative life of the community in so far as it relates to events touching on the CAS.' The Melbourne branch re-opened amid much rhetoric, the tone of which is illustrated by George Mora's announcement in the first issues that the CAS was approaching a crisis:

> that occurs to everybody, that grows quickly in importance and strength. The aims of our Society do not appear to be sufficiently clear. Our sacred fight against certain forms of art and bodies sponsoring them seems to be weakened or made less convincing by our lack of a definite attitude towards art.

69 While John Reed and his associates formed a strong old guard presence in Melbourne, a feature of the rejuvenated branch was the promotion of new abstraction and its practitioners, who included Ian Sime, Erica McGilchrist and Clifford Last. See Erica McGilchrist, Personal Statement, Kit 1, pp. 7-9 Women's Arts Register, Carringbush Library, for an interesting account of the tension in the Melbourne Branch between John Reed's group and the non-objective group which was led by Ian and Dawn Sime.

70 Victorian Broadsheet, September 1954. In the first issue Barrie Reid wrote that with 200 members the Victorian Branch was 'the senior body'. John Reed was prompt to produce 'The History of the CAS, Parts I and II' for the Victorian Broadsheet, February and April 1955. See also NSW Records Correspondence, August-September 1954, Sydney's response to Melbourne's bid to reclaim leadership, especially in reference to the annual exhibition policy, met with very firm but polite resistance from NSW's ever tactful president, Weaver Hawkins.

71 Merewether, Art and Social Commitment, p. 47.

72 Haefliger, AMPA A 360; also Dutton, The Innovators, p. 109, who named the Sydney Group as established in 1945 as Wallace Thornton, Jean Bellette, Paul Haefliger, Francis Lymburner, Eric Wilson, Wolfgang Cardamatis, Justin O'Brien, Geoffrey Graham, Gerald Lewers. The number and names involved however varied and on other occasions included Ralph Balson, Tom Bass, Arthur Boyd, Grace Crowley, Lyndon Dadswell, Russell Drysdale, Donald Friend, James Gleeson, Carl Plate, John Olsen, Desiderius Orban and John Passmore

73 C. France, Merioola and After, S.H. Ervin Gallery, National Trust Centre, Sydney, 1986. As France describes, p. 4, Merioola provided a range of talented individuals with an environment full of freedom and artistic stimulus, not only for painting but also for photography and theatre. In September 1947 it was decided to hold a Merioola Group Show, the rationale being that they lived

under the one roof – Merioola – rather than that there was a common artistic goal. The group included Roland Strasser, Arthur Fleischmann, Justin O'Brien, Jocelyn Rickards, Edgar Ritchard, Alec Murray and Peter Kaiser. Merioola, the mansion, was demolished in 1951, by which time most of the artists had migrated overseas.

74 See Merewether, Art and Social Commitment, pp. 46-47; B. Smith, 'The New Realism in Australian Art', Meanjin, vol. 3, no. 1, 1944; pp. 20-25; and E. Young, James Cant, Adelaide, A Brolga Book, 1970.

75 Smith, 'The New Realism in Australian Art'.

76 M. Richards, The Best Style: Marion Hall Best and Australian Interior Design 1935-1975, Sydney, Art and Australia Books, 1993, p. 31, for an insight into the David Jones Gallery which was refurbished by Hall Best, who was its director between July 1947 and late 1948.

77 NSW Records. Minutes for November 1955.

78 Missingham, They Kill You, p. 28; Albert Tucker, NSW Records, draft of proposed changes in the CAS c.1944-45, observed that contemporary art was becoming respectable and firmly entrenched in the cultural life of the community.

79 Borlase, 'Three Decades', p.72.

80 See Smith, Australian Painting, pp. 271-276; and M. Gates, 'Body and Soul', in J. Duncan and M. Gates, Body and Soul, Clayton, Monash University Gallery, 1988, pp. 23-34.

81 E. Lynn, 'John Passmore and the Legend of Paul Cézanne', Art and Australia, vol. 23, no. 1, 1985, p. 57; see also Chapters herein.

82 G. Docking, Desiderius Orban, His Life and Art, Sydney, Methuen Australian, 1983, p. 24, praised Haefliger's criticism and described him as 'erudite and sensitive'; J. Gleeson, 'Painting in Australia since 1945', Art and Australia, Vol.1, 1963, p.3, stated, 'Again the enlightening criticism of Paul Haefliger helped to establish new standards and form opinions.'

83 Haefliger, AMPA A 360.

84 The West[illegible]ter School of Art experience was shared by many in Sydney: Hal Missingham, Weaver Hawkins, Frank Medworth, John Passmore, Carl Plate, Wallace Thornton, Arthur Murch, Eric Wilson, Jack-Carrington Smith, James Cant, Rah Fizelle, Donald Friend, Jean Bellette, Ralph Balson and Arthur Murch.

85 Thistlewood, Herbert Read , pp. 86-91.

86 Haefliger AMPA A 360; Plate AMPA A 347. Plate was one of the few Australians who had attended the first International Surrealist Exhibition 1936-7.

87 D. Mellor (ed.), A Paradise Lost; The Neo-Romantic Imagination on Britain 1935-55, London, Lund Humphries with the Barbican Art Gallery, 1987.

88 W. Dobell, 'Australian Painters Look to Europe', Art in Australia, February 23, 1940, pp. 23-25.

89 ibid., pp 24-25.

90 When appointed editor of Art in Australia in 1941, Bellew broadened its scope away from local issues and a nationalist bias to present 'the art of all countries, all periods and all schools'.

91 J. Bellette, 'Piero della Francesca', Art in Australia, March 1942, republished in Body and Soul, p. 39.

92 P. Haefliger, 'Giotto in Assisi', Art in Australia, March 1942, republished in Body and Soul, p. 40.

93 Gates, 'Body and Soul', p. 27, had high praise for the six articles the Haefligers wrote during Bellew's editorship, calling them ground breaking. This has a touch of cultural cringe to it as Gates is drawn to the mystique of Haefliger's cultivated Europeanness.

94 Haefliger AMPA A360 (Haese tapes)
Curiously, Paul Haefliger did not dispute Richard Haese's suggestion that he did not show with the CAS. The records show that Haefliger did, and indeed many of the early disputes about hanging were the result of Haefliger, Bellette and their friends believing they should have the best positions in the annual exhibitions.

95 Many attribute Haefliger's predilection for European art and culture to his German/Swiss background. Docking, Desiderius Orban, p. 24, wrote that Haefliger was sympathetic to Orban because his native town was Hamburg, and that this gave him 'a sound grasp of the cultural background of Europeans, including a responsive understanding of the classical and romantic traditions in painting'.

96 Docker, Cultural Elites, pp. 59-76.

97 P. Haefliger, 'Portraits: Personal & Official', Meanjin, vol. 5, no. 1, 1946, p. 50.

98 ibid., p. 51.

99 Russell Drysdale: A Retrospective Exhibition of Painting from 1937 to 1960. With an introduction by Paul Haefliger, Sydney, Ure Smith, 1960, p. 11.

100 ibid., p. 9.

101 Haefliger, AMPA A 360; Elie Faure, History of Art, 4 vols, New York, Harper and Brothers Publisher, 1921.

102 Faure, History of Art, vol. 1, Preface, p. xxxvii.

103 ibid., p. xxxviii.

104 ibid., p. xi.

[105] ibid., p. xlviii

[106] Haefliger, AMPA A 360.

[107] B. Smith, 'Comments on Style-Change and Criticism in Sydney in 1947'; C. France, Merioola, states that Ure Smith encouraged Smith to write the essay criticising the romanticising tendency of the group; Underhill, Making Australian Art, argues persuasively that Ure Smith in fact supported the group, promoting their work in Australia, National Journal. However, Smith's article is more an attack on Haefliger, whose criticism and influence had begun to rival Ure Smith's.

[108] Smith, 'Comments on Style-Change', p. 53.

[109] ibid., p. 55.

[110] Haefliger, AMPA A 360.

[111] ibid..

[112] G. Pollock, Vision and Difference, London, Routledge, 1988. p. 6.

[113] ibid., p. 7.

[114] Rowse, Australian Liberalism.

[115] P. Bourdieu, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste, London, Routledge and Kegan, 1984.

[116] I. Burn, et al., The Necessity of Australian Art: An Essay About Interpretation, Sydney, Power Publications, 1988, made an attempt to suggest different modes of appraising Australian art history which included consideration of the importance of the art market. However, Burns holds to the critique of modernism as the critical model. The problem with studies such as Underhill, Making Australian Art; and H. Johnson Roy de Maistre: The Australian Years 1894-1930, Sydney, Craftsman House, 1988; and Roy de Maistre: The English Years 1930-1968, Sydney, Craftsman House, 1995; is that in using the modernist model of art history they try to find indications of avant-gardeness in figures such as Ure Smith and de Maistre which tends to misrepresent the real nature and intention of their practice.

[117] Butel, Margaret Preston; D. Thomas, Grace Cossington Smith: A Life From Drawings in the Collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, National Gallery of Australia, 1993.

[118] C. Wright Mills, The Power Elite, New York, Oxford University Press, 1959, p.109.

[119] A. Sinfield, Literature, Politics and Culture in Post-War Britain, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989, p. 63. Parallels to the notions explored in Sinfield's study of the changing fortunes of the leisured elite under the welfare state in the 1950s can be found in Rowse, Australian Liberalism.

[120] Sinfield, Literature, Politics and Culture, p. 63.

[121] Wright Mills, The Power Elite, p. 109. The connection between Wright Mills social elite and art is evident in the governance of MOMA and especially its International Program which was run by the wives of America's leading captains of capitalism. See H. Franc, 'The Early Years of the International Program and Council' in J. Elderfield, (ed.), The Museum of Modern Art at Mid-Century, At Home and Abroad, Studies in Modern Art 4, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1994, pp. 108-149.

[122] Sinfield, Literature, Politics and Culture, p. 39.

[123] ibid., p. 41.

[124] ibid., p. 62.

[125] ibid., Stephen Spender as quoted on p. 89.

[126] ibid., p. 86.

[127] ibid.

[128] Wright Mills, Power Elite, p. 12.

[129] Pringle, Australian Accent, pp. 96-112. Pringle, unable to satisfy his English fascination with class, was of the opinion that the closest Australia came to having an elite class was the landed squattocracy, but given the nature of its wealth it did not constitute a cultured or power elite.

[130] Rowse, Australian Liberalism, p. 196.

[131] Wright Mills, Power Elite, p. 12.

[132] See Lawson, Connie Sweetheart, who mentions the 400 women of eastern suburbs and country. Connie Robertson was editor of the women's section of SMH which was extensively linked by David Jones' advertising. Lawson writes of Hannah Lloyd Jones' direct involvement in the David Jones business and the importance of society to Sydney's leading business families; the Lloyd Joneses, Fairfaxes, Horderns and Packers. She gives an overview of the business politics of Sydney society and how this was manifested in the nature of the Sydney Morning Herald.

[133] Rowse, Australian Liberalism, pp. 82-83; see also Burns, The Necessity of Australian Art pp. 10-38.

[134] ibid., pp. 116-118.

[135] ibid., p. 177.

[136] Wright Mills, Power Elite, pp. 58-59.

[137] ibid., pp. 83-88.

[138] H. Blaxland, Collected Flower Pieces, Sydney, Ure Smith, n.d. This was a society publication that evidences clearly the interweaving of Sydney artists and society. The book is a social register and includes 17 flower arrangements by Sydney and Melbourne women and artists including Adrian Feint, Thea Proctor, Loudon Sainthill, Mrs Frank Packer, Mrs John Grimwade, Mrs Gordon

Craig, Miss Patricia Lyon, Lady Murdoch, Mrs J.V. Hall-Best, Mrs Dundas Allen and others. Line decorations were by Elaine Haxton and the photography by Max Dupain and Athol Smith.

[139] Sydney was famous for the amount of space its newspapers devoted to women and society. The SMH, for example, ran extensive women's supplements on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

[140] Lawson, Connie Sweetheart, pp. 250-252.

Chapter 2

The Interim Years 1947-54: Forces of Change

In her short history of the 'Three Decades of the Contemporary Art Society' Nancy Borlase portrays the postwar years as a lively period when the NSW CAS was working to create a closer liaison between artists and the community and a newly competitive art market forced the CAS to devise strategies for attracting young emerging artists to its ranks.[1] This chapter focuses on the period of 1947-54 examining the socio-political factors behind these developments that saw the NSW CAS emerge invigorated and ready to fight the cause of abstract expressionist painting in 1954. It argues that Australia's postwar reconstruction period was characterised by two key factors that impacted on the production of culture. Firstly Australia's move into a mixed economy and a middle class suburban society brought prosperity and a confidence in the future that was manifested in corporate and government support for contemporary art and architecture and a heightened interest in the United States of America as the new world leader. Secondly, this confidence was countered by a wide spread anxiety about the future of civilisation as the Western world emerged from the devastation of the war only to be faced by the Cold War threat of atomic annihilation. This anxiety, it is argued, stimulated an international peace movement amongst artists and intellectuals and a call for a humanist mode of painting that deeply expressed the spiritual crisis of the day.

Part I explores the NSW CAS's activities during this interim period when its production of radical painting was in a lull and its leadership passed into the hands of designer-painters, architects and sculptors. Part I argues that the Society now channelled its energies into developing the nexus between art and design and society, thus fulfilling its aim to change Australian culture by introducing contemporary art and thought into the community. The CAS provided a controversial, experimental forum for designers and architects who, like Harry Seidler, used it to promote the principles of Bauhaus and international modernist design and establish their professional profiles as innovative promoters of contemporary culture. The postwar reconstruction program provided a wealth of opportunities for

contemporary art and design drawing its practitioners into the extensive building, decoration and renovation works that accompanied the return to civilian life and Australia's move into manufacturing and commerce. This prosperity together with the growth in corporate and commercial patronage brought a demand for greater professionalism fostering a more complex and diverse art scene which had ramifications for the future. Further to this, Australia's new status at the United Nations as a small peace keeping force saw the government now supporting contemporary art in a bid to build a new cultural identity that was modern and international.

Part I also asserts that by 1953 a climate of opposition was emerging amongst artists and intellectuals as the effects of the Menzies government's anti-communist campaign were being felt. The NSW CAS profile changed as painters, emerging from postwar education, and European immigrant artists, seeking an alternative to the mainstream, began to fill its membership ranks. Driven by deep concern about the spiritual and moral crisis facing Western society they moved to re-activate painting as a humanist mode of expression and the CAS as an oppositional artists' group.

Part II conducts an analysis of the public and critical response to the 'French Painting Today' exhibition (1953) in order to evaluate the nature of its influence on Australian art. 'French Painting Today' has been traditionally represented as providing the inspiration for Australia's move into abstract expressionism. This study argues that the success of the exhibition lay in its timing and its confirmation of Australian developments rather than in the radical nature of the work. It toured Australia when the public interest in contemporary art and European developments were high. While the public enjoyed the exhibition as a cultural spectacle the artistic and intellectual community were more circumspect focusing their concern on the future of painting as a humanist endeavour. This concern was evident prior to the exhibition in the instigation of the Blake Prize for Religious Art in 1950, the revival of interest in expressionism - figurative and abstract - and the public debate about the role of the spiritual and art within Australian culture which James McAuley initiated in 1952. An analysis of the exhibition's public reception and reviews indicates that Australia's

critical response focused on several factors, the most significant being the future of the School of Paris and the European figurative tradition which many believed were under attack from the new world power America and its abstract expressionists. Interest also focused, as the analysis of Bernard Smith's reviews reveals, on the relative merits of the new figurative and abstract modes of expressionism. The evidence thus suggests that, 'French Painting Today', acted as spring board for the critical debate about the nature of abstract art and its meaning for Australian society.

Part I

The NSW CAS: Architects and Designers

Australia's postwar program of reconstruction brought social and political change together with a growth of confidence and prosperity which contributed to a healthy revival of the art market and the acceptance of contemporary art into the mainstream culture. These developments, combined with the popularity of neo-romanticism and the success of Sydney's new art societies, momentarily threatened the existence of the NSW CAS bringing a lull in its practice of abstract art as a critical mode of expression. When Carl Plate called an extraordinary meeting to debate its future in 1949, the energy for its continuance – for the promotion of the new – did not come from painters but from a combination of Sydney's modernist designers, architects and sculptors.[2] Harry Seidler, newly arrived from the United States, the architects Walter Bunning and Arthur Baldwinson, designers Douglas Snelling, Richard Haughton James, Alistair Morrison, Dahl and Geoff Collings, sculptor Tom Bass and the artist, designer and gallery director Hal Missingham now shaped the profile of the NSW CAS.[3] Under their direction the NSW CAS took on a fresh air of professionalism and vigour, with Harry Seidler's design of the 1949 Annual Interstate CAS Exhibition creating controversy in the press.

The design of the exhibition, which was held in the large and tired Education Department Gallery, was radical as it sought to create modernist order from the 252 entries of

architecture, sculpture, abstract and representational painting. Seidler, inspired by his education at Harvard and work with Marcel Breuer, had used a modular system of free-standing false walls and divisions covered with cloth to create light, open spatial divisions, giving sequential flow and unity to the exhibition.[4] James Gleeson writing in the Sun described the design as 'novel and attractive', noting that the 'maze of screens are so placed that the vision is focused on the related groups of paintings and colour is used to flatter and unify'. In contrast Paul Haefliger revealed his disdain for the advanced modes of modernism dismissing the show as a 'tortuous maze' and a 'snare for the unwary'.[5] The exhibition was a success attracting good press coverage and sales with Dr Evatt purchased a work from Sidney Nolan's Eureka Stockade series. Its real strength of the show, all agreed, was the architectural and sculptural entries and the abstract paintings.

Frank Hinder sought to explain the CAS's promotion of the alliance of art and design in 1952 in a Meanjin article 'Painting and the Public'. Hinder, who was a prominent pioneer of geometric abstraction, posited the theory that there was a parallel between modern painting and contemporary architecture's search for new forms for the new age, explaining:

> As with architecture, the arts of painting and sculpture have realised that their service, ... lies in expressing the ideas and changes of our own time in forms and materials expressive of the age. 'Organisation,' 'structural colour,' 'space relationship,' 'the picture plane,' – possibly meaningless expressions except to those who see behind them the re-birth of precision and planning, of idea and material ... of design.[6]

The mural, Hinder reasoned, offered a golden opportunity for the fine and applied arts to unite and create a public art with a new concept of space and form shaped from the materials and ideas of the new era. Indeed, the time was right for contemporary painting as a legitimate mode of cultural expression to move into the public arena, into offices, boardrooms and factories. In his opinion, the spatial nature of modern abstraction was suited to the new architecture that was beginning to unite the world:

> Today, with our new conception of space, we no longer tend to think only in solids and masses. With a fresh understanding of the 'picture plane' – that is, the two dimensional surface on which the work is carried out – the artists can achieve

> design from the flat pattern to those which convey the effect of a forward and backward movement; and without destroying the continuity of the wall.[7]

In order to move into the new world order, Australian architects needed to be informed 'as regards contemporary trends and developments and include murals and sculpture in public buildings.' Thus the lessons of the Bauhaus and America's international modernist experience needed to be learned and integrated into Australia's education system. But until then it was the CAS's responsibility 'to prepare the ground for future developments' by fostering debate and discussion. Hinder explained:

> The Contemporary Art Society in Sydney, by asking architect members to exhibit plans, photographs, and drawings, etc., ... is attempting to bridge the gap between the two arts, and to at least provide a meeting place where members can discuss the problems and possibilities which relate the various arts[8].

Since its beginning, the NSW CAS had fostered the allegiance of artistic disciplines with the aim of promoting new modes of expression and thought. There were not the same professional divisions in the fine and allied arts that would emerge later, but rather contemporary art, as defined by the CAS charter, included all non-imitative modes of artistic expression and thought. The war had seen the return of many outstanding young artist/designers, including Gordon Andrews, Alistair Morrison, Dahl and Geoff Collings, who had been working in the London studios of leading modernists such as Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, and they formed a strong modernist design enclave in Sydney.[9] They were part of the founding membership of the NSW CAS, and like Frank Hinder, who earned his livelihood as a commercial artist, they were seriously committed to the practice of painting, more often than not abstract painting.[10] Margo Lewers, a significant figure in the CAS and a close colleague of Frank and Margel Hinder, began her career as a textile designer but moved on to become a highly acclaimed abstract expressionist in the 1950s and 1960s. Together with Alistair Morrison she held one of the first abstract exhibitions in Canberra, and as an individual won several of the major prizes for contemporary art.[11] Through their membership of its committee the designers helped construct the NSW CAS's public and professional face designing its catalogues and stationery using the non-representational graphic language of European modernism.[12]

For a short period during the postwar era, therefore, the NSW CAS concentrated its energies on the allied arts introducing a new professional focus and ideological direction.[13] This shift is evident in the 1953 lecture program 'The Pattern of Art Today' that took a thematic approach as opposed to the tradition of random topics. The lectures in the series (Douglas Dundas on painting, Lyndon Dadswell on sculpture, James Gleeson on criticism, Ivan McMeekin on pottery, Richard Haughton James on industrial design, and Professor Denis Winston on architecture) were intended to encourage debate about the importance of contemporary culture in the age of rehabilitation, thus reflecting the changing nature of Australian society alluded to by Frank Hinder.[14] By 1953 Australia's move into a mixed economy was well under way, with a boom in manufacturing, business and consumerism promoting the ideal of a contemporary 'way of life' a symbol of prosperity and progress. The expansion of industry and commerce was accompanied by an expansion in the domestic market and the growth of a middle class sector of consumers who, Tim Rowse asserts, the government promoted as 'the backbone of society'.[15] In a bid to encourage manufacturing and consumerism the government promoted nexus of art and industry and the education of Australians to good taste and good design as a project of national concern. The NSW CAS, assisted this process at the 1953 Annual Interstate CAS Exhibition by carrying its theme of the contemporary 'pattern of life' into the public arena with lunch time lectures; one by Arthur Baldwinson on 'The Contemporary Australian House' and another by Hal Missingham on 'Kitchens and Culture'.[16]

As Australia became prosperous, new employment opportunities for artists and designers emerged. The interior designer Margaret Lord recalled, that commissions for contemporary artists and designers to redesign and refurbish buildings, ocean liners, products and public spaces were plentiful as governments, corporations and educational institutions sought to create a visual order for their new modern world.[17] Art and industry ventures such as the Silk and Textile Printers' range of textile designs by forty-six of Sydney's contemporary artists (essentially everyone from Drysdale to Bellette to Roy Dalgarno and Frank Hinder) contributed to a heightened awareness of the importance of culture to the national

economy and helped encourage the emergence of the design professions.[18] The nature of Sydney's art system was beginning to change as corporations and businesses began to offer prizes and scholarships for contemporary art assuming responsibility of fostering community welfare through culture.[19]

Hal Missingham, writing of the Silk and Textile venture, asserted that Australian artists had a natural leaning towards design because of their marked proficiency in the use of line: Australian here meant Sydney with its heritage of commercial art and illustration.[20] Missingham's opinion appears to have been shared by his fellow members of the NSW CAS who kept the focus of the lecture and exhibition programs through out the late 1940s and early 1950s firmly on architecture, drawings and sculpture rather than painting. There was even a proposal in 1948 that the March state exhibition exclude paintings and concentrate on drawings and sculpture, while in 1949 a general meeting debated whether the lecture program should promote art and sculpture or the allied arts. Such was the nature of its orientation the NSW CAS insisted in 1953 that two of a member's six exhibition entries were drawings, explaining that 'it is rightly felt that by the addition of examples of a painter's drawings a better appreciation may be gained of a painter's approach, his personality and point of view.'[21] Whether this focus on drawing was driven by Sydney's black and white tradition, or an interest in surrealist automatism, or by an emerging interest in 'abstract expressionism, is impossible to ascertain.

It is clear, however, that expressive and experimental drawing was highly regarded by Sydney's art and design community. Its rise in popularity in the early 1950s saw the Watercolour Institute prosper as contemporary painters, including Carl Plate and Margo Lewers, freely experimented with the watercolour, gouache, collage and drawing.[22] Creative drawing was also valued by the many architects for whom Roland Wakelin's and Lloyd Rees' drawing classes were a significant element of education at the University of Sydney. Rees, who was particularly admired, inspired students with his passion for art and its history and for what was described as his belief in the energy and spirit of the creative force.[23]

The NSW CAS thus provided Sydney's more radical architects with a venue in which to exhibit their experimental and artistic projects and mix with others committed to contemporary modes of expression. They formed a close alliance with the sculptors, and when the Society of Sculptors was formed in 1951 it included an associate membership category for architects, town planners and designers and elected Professor Denis Winston as its president. The Society, which was formed by Gerry Lewers, Lyndon Dadswell and Paul Beadle, was established primarily to establish codes of professional practice and lobby governments and industry to support the integration of sculpture into the construction of the new public buildings which were changing the face of Australian cities and towns.[24] They were successful in taking contemporary art into the public arena establishing government subsidies and prizes for sculpture. Much of this sculpture was abstract, as the sculptors, including Tom Bass and Leonard Hessing, adopted the vocabulary of international modernism, which informed the buildings and public spaces they adorned. Gerry Lewers, for instance, moved away from his animal forms to create a powerful, organic, circular form of twisted and folded copper ribbons for his highly acclaimed courtyard fountain for ICI House, Melbourne, Australia's first modern corporate glass skyscraper. The graceful curving abstract lines of the fountain were described as standing 'in elegant contrast to the geometric lines of the twenty-two storeys of ICI House.'[25]

In the postwar years then, the NSW CAS worked as a forum for advanced architects, sculptors and designers rather than as a forum for contemporary painting. It is interesting to speculate how this focus on the abstract arts of architecture, design and drawing influenced the development of abstract expressionist painting and how the reactivation of the NSW CAS as an avant-garde force was related to Australia's move into corporate capitalism and international modernism.

International modernism and the welfare state

The NSW CAS's promotion of architecture and sculpture coincided with Australia's embrace of the international modernism which MOMA had defined and promoted.[26] When

Harry Seidler arrived in Australia in July 1948 he was full of a young man's passion for the new – in his case the American work of Marcel Breuer and Walter Gropius. It did not take long for him to join similarly minded souls, including Arthur Baldwinson who also had worked with Gropius, in a fervent campaign to change the face of Australian architecture.[27] Seidler's efforts, which included lectures on Bauhaus Theory and a NSW CAS exhibition of Josef Albers' Basic Design Forms in 1951, found a receptive audience in Sydney's expanding European population and its enclave of modernist designers.[28] His design for his mother's house at Turramurra, 1948-50, with its radical architectural forms, had an enormous impact, winning the Guinnan Prize and becoming 'the most publicised and talked about Modern house of its time'.[29]

Seidler was quickly taken up by the media who promoted him as 'a young man with a cause'.[30] Writing in Voice, he asserted that modernist architecture was ideal for the creation of 'Houses for Australia'. The light, flexible structure of modernism's steel and glass architecture offered a freedom of space and form perfectly suited to the Australian climate and life, therefore, it held the key to the creation of a vernacular architecture for the young and modern Australia. This architecture, with its set of formal values, of space rather than mass, tension rather than harmony, Seidler explained, was premised like Mondrian's paintings on 'a new dynamic symmetry, a balance of unequal parts rather than the conventional static balance of identicals in symmetry.' As an architecture of opposition and tension it spoke of its times. It was the voice of a new age that rejected the vulgar, comfortable cliches of conventional architecture and promised an improved life for all.[31] Seidler's ideas appealed particularly to the left and the more avant-garde, as Voice magazine illustrated in a self promotional advertisement, which used the living room of the Seidler house to symbolise not only of a new mode of living but also a new mode of thought. 'Modern Living', the advertisement pronounced, was 'an expression of Clear Thinking' – 'clear thinking on Australia and the World'.[32]

The architectural historian Philip Drew, however, claims that Seidler was not the main force behind Sydney's adoption of international modernism. In his opinion the ground had been

already prepared because Sydney, in contrast to Melbourne, had developed more of an orientation towards America as it came alive again with the postwar resumption of commerce, trade, travel and publication.[33] The postwar governments' promises to bring the privileges of middle class affluence, full employment, health care, housing, education, and culture to all was accompanied by an enthusiasm for design and architecture as the popularity of the prize-winning Rose Seidler house illustrated.[34] By the early 1950s the feature pages of the SMH devoted considerable space to promoting the latest international modern design and architecture with New York's MOMA setting the criteria of good design and good taste. Popular magazines, including Pix, Women's Weekly and Woman's Day, joined the chorus promoting the latest in modernism, especially from America.[35] In 1954 Walter Gropius was the key speaker at The Fourth Convention of Architecture, which was held in Sydney.[36] The Convention was accompanied by an public exhibition program that included 'The House of the Future' exhibition, which was publicised, along with the star attraction the prefabricated house by Seidler, in the Women's Weekly.[37] The Convention and its key speaker were extensively promoted in the press as the event marked an influential moment in Australia's shift into the idiom of international modernism, which would eventually lead to the Sydney Opera House, for which the first planning meeting was held in November 1954.[38]

Gropius was presented to the Australian public through the Current Affairs Bulletin as 'The Modern Mind'; as a visionary who shaped modernism and spread its gospel around the globe. His was the mind that had taken:

> the loose ends of revolutionary thought in the years following the First World War, gave them direction ... and tied them into a movement which has circled the world, binding men of building together with a sense of purpose which is perhaps yet lacking in many other fields of human expression.[39]

The emphasis of the promotional rhetoric was that Gropius's modernism was the ideal community architecture that brought art and society together. Therefore, it was ideal for Australia's future which was to be built on an ideology of consensus as the government took responsibility for the welfare of the worker in exchange for a peaceful work force.[40]

The future would be built by the community working together for the common good. Gropius, the Australian reader was informed, 'taught that the artist, the engineer and the technician must be brought together to work in mutual understanding, and for the benefit of the whole community.[41] However, this was not to suggest totalitarianism, quite the contrary, for both Gropius and 'the great army of modern architecture' had been vigorously opposed by totalitarian regimes:

> the stronger it grew, the more unpleasant became the opposition. It was called ugly, decadent, inhuman, Communist by the Fascists, and later Fascist by the Communists' But it spread – [as] a fresh, expressive language unlike any previously used by builders since man first pulled branches over the mouth of his cave.[42]

Due to Gropius's efforts, the principles of modernist architecture were now well established, and it was time for countries and regions like Australia to develop 'their own variation' and replace the decadence and chaos of the past with the ideal of 'order, human scale and true community spirit'.[43] Thus, within the consensus of international modernism and Australia's politics the individual was the foundation of society.

The politics of cultural change

The theme of international and national cooperation that Australians used to promote international modernism carried in it the ideals of the United Nations, which Australia had played a significant role in establishing in 1945. Dr Evatt's aggressive leadership at the San Francisco Conference had earned Australia the reputation of being 'the most forward-looking nation' present.[44] He was elected president of the UN in 1948 and his presidency encompassed the formation of the Bill of Human Rights. Evatt saw the war as freeing the Pacific of colonial powers and used Australia's military success to promote it as 'a key Pacific nation' and 'trustee of democratic civilization' in the Asia-Pacific region.[45] At San Francisco he took a strong stance against the 'big powers' (United States, Soviet Union, China, France, Britain) control of the Security Council, arguing for a separate middle-power category for secondary powers such as Canada and Australia who 'both as dominions and nations ... may be expected to take a substantial part in the maintenance of peace'.[46] He

promoted Australia as a world peace-keeping force and became the advocate for the 'small powers' against the 'big', asserting that they deserved equality and high standing in international decision-making. A fervent nationalist Evatt was also an internationalist. He argued that the success of the United Nations rested on 'the need to knit global objectives to the national policy of members, for the effectiveness of the new international organisation would rely not only on the co-operation of signatories, but also on the co-ordination of respective domestic policies.'[47] The credibility of Australia's new nationhood, therefore, pivoted on how it could position itself on the international stage; on how its national identity mirrored the ideals of international democracy and peace and for this it needed a new cultural identity.

One of Evatt's proposals for peace was global full employment; he theorised that if all the world was experiencing material prosperity then there would be no cause for war. By the mid 1950s full employment was a reality for Australia. The years between 1953 and 1955 brought unprecedented prosperity and stability for Australia and a growing obsession with the issue of cultural identity. A substantial population increase, accompanied by growth and changes in industry, education and patronage, brought substantial change to Australian society that had implications for the processes of cultural production. An ideal economic balance of full employment together with business optimism and high profits stimulated a vast increase in public and private expenditure.[48] The salaried middle class accordingly expanded as employment opportunities in management business, the public service and the professional arena increased dramatically. Good wages and credit facilities fed a boom in consumerism with the purchase of new homes, cars and domestic appliances rising dramatically to an all-time high. In 1955 the arrival of the millionth postwar immigrant was celebrated together with the first electricity generated by the Snowy Mountains Scheme, and the opening of a magnificent new oil refinery at Kwinana in Western Australia and the Bell Bay aluminium plant in Tasmania. The Menzies' Coalition Government appeared to have brought such prosperity that Australia could look toward the future with confidence.[49]

This future involved the political and economic repositioning of Australia in a world whose power structure had been destroyed by the war. Instead of Britain being Australia's main ally, Australia now had to independently negotiate its position in the Asia Pacific region, taking into account the emerging Asian nations, the threat of communism, and the superpower, America. The further Australia moved into a mixed capitalism the more complex its relationship with the United States and Britain became. By the late 1950s Australia was borrowing predominantly from the USA and the formulation of it's defence and foreign affairs policies involved extensive co-operation and negotiation with America.[50] This did not bring blind allegiance, however; rather it fostered something of a love-hate relationship. As the Current Affairs Bulletin noted in January 1955, many Australians regarded the USA as 'the great home of aggressive capitalism' asserting that while the USA's defence of democracy should be supported this support should 'be critical and not such as to deprive Australia of its freedom of action'.[51]

As the restructuring of Australia's national identity became a necessity, the definition of culture and thus 'the Australian way of life' was debated at length. Intellectuals, including Robin Boyd and Arthur Phillips encouraged Australians to be critically proud of their own culture and overcome their 'cultural cringe' and provincial belief in the superiority of British and Europe culture.[52] Their efforts were supported by a genre of new publications with titles such as Australia's Home and The Australian Way of Life, which sought to fashion a cultural discourse that supported Australia's new political, economic and social circumstances.[53] The emphasis of this new discourse was exemplified by Boyd's Australia's Home which analysed the history of the home while articulating the ideal of an architectural vernacular that expressed the psychology and sociology of the Australian way of life. Boyd's study typified the cultural shift as it sought to set the standards and criteria for an independent Australia with its own cultural traditions. Accordingly a constant theme of the debate was the need for a sophisticated, intellectual culture of the arts and literature which expressed Australia's uniqueness and maturity and new international status.[54]

The contention, therefore, is that during the immediate post World War II years Australia's cultural infrastructure and discourse entered a state of transition; that is the nature of arts patronage, practice and criticism together with patterns of consumption were changing. Even Prime Minister Menzies now endorsed contemporary art, approving the choice of twelve contemporary artists, figurative and abstract, to represent Australia at the Venice Biennale and in Great Britain in the Coronation year 1953.[55] By 1954 when the new leadership of the NSW CAS was forming, not only had manufacturing and commerce diversified the patronage system for contemporary art, but also a professional middle class sector was emerging as an educated audience for the arts. These factors combined with the beginnings of a commercial gallery system saw the Sydney art scene become more professional and competitive as the arts and design began to fragment into specialist professions. Faced by these changes the NSW CAS moved to recrient its focus again on painting as an oppositional force while the sculptors and designers moved away from the Society to set up their own professional bodies.[56]

The re-positioning of the NSW CAS

With the Sydney art scene dominated by the neo-romantics and the NSW CAS's energies focused on nexus of art and industry the radical practice of painting could be said to have gone into retreat in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The consensus of art historical studies of this era is that artists either fled the cultural desert of Australia for overseas at the end of the war, or withdrew into an alienated state in disillusionment at the failure of socialism, or retreated under a cloud of the Cold War anxiety into the aestheticism of abstraction. Christine Dixon's and Terry Smith's Aspects of Australian Figurative Paintings 1942-62, typifies this perspective by describing the period as one in which 'a fear of the fragility of culture was predominant'. Drawing on the belief that the Cold War era was one of paralysing fear, they argued that the artists experienced a sense of alienation and insecurity which led them to leave Australia in large numbers in search of a culture that was *'always somewhere else.'*[57] The dominant theme of this interpretation of the 1950s is one of a failure of nerve and a retreat; of Australia as a cultural wasteland driven by the Cold

War politics into despairing provincialism while under siege from American cultural imperialism. This study offers the alternate view that the Cold War provided the impetus for the re-activation of the CAS as an avant-garde force and the move into abstract expressionism.

The Melbourne poet Vincent Buckley offered a strikingly different view of cultural activity in the 1950s. He argued that while 'Everyone says the fifties were the dullard among decades; McCarthyism, baffled, immoblized, deprived of cultural force' they were also years of excitement, of growth, of learning.[58] For all the despair and dullness, wrote Buckley, and despite:

> the many reasons for anguish about international affairs, in some ways the prospect seemed hopeful and exciting. The fifties were, for one thing, the decade in which gradually debate, and the organs of debate, began to grow in Australia. It was the decade in which the waves of migration began to change the whole scheme of possibilities for the country. It was the decade when the chance came to estimate just in what sense we were 'part of Asia'. It was the decade in which Australian writing and painting would start to free themselves from their persistent habits, in both cases carrying on the experiments of the forties.[59]

It was not so much a matter that the Cold War killed radical commitment outright, according to Buckley who was at the centre of university and intellectual politics, rather it changed the nature of commitment. 'It was not at all dull', he wrote, rather 'it was *quiet,* and inclined to discuss issues rather than to smash things'.[60]

Exodus and alienation are key themes in Australian art history which are characteristic of the constructs of colonial cultural histories.[61] The postwar exodus was, in fact, not unique to Australia; the lifting of war restrictions and improvements in transport saw artists and intellectuals from every other country travelling. The British flooded into Spain, the South Africans to England and Europe, the Canadians to New York and to Paris, and so on.[62] While it is true that the exodus of Melbourne's leading contemporary artists including Tucker and Boyd created a falling off of artistic activity, the situation in Sydney was considerably different. There, it was not simply a matter of all fleeing Australia. While many who left and would not return like the Merioola group, others, including James

Gleeson, Carl Plate, John Lipscomb, and Bernard Smith, regarded their overseas trips as a necessary process in their education and re-entry into civilian life.[63] In contrast to Melbourne, Sydney also experienced an influx of talent not only from overseas but also from interstate. Many artists and designers isolated from Australia by the war returned home, while artists and intellectuals fleeing England and Europe immigrated to Australia where they played a significant role in constructing its cultural discourse in the 1950s. Together these new additions to Sydney's art scene, who included Michael Kmit, Peter Laverty, Leonard Hessing, Robert Klippel, Ivan McMeekin and Judy Cassab would build on the already cosmopolitan nature of Sydney art and would help to gradually break down the old order.[64]

Other artists, including the war veterans John Coburn, Guy Warren, Tom Bass and Tony Tuckson, concentrated their energies on 'getting on with the business of art and rebuilding a civilian life' in what was essentially a period of rehabilitation and education.[65] Art education in Sydney was changing with increased government funding; East Sydney Technical College was revitalised under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training scheme for ex-servicemen and the sculptor Peter Beadle established a dynamic art department at Newcastle Technical College.[66] John Passmore brought a new vitality to the Julian Ashton School on his return from overseas in 1951, inspiring Peter Upward, John Olsen, John Henshaw and William Rose amongst others to take up abstraction.

Art education, however, was moving away from the private art school towards the institutional, and an emphasis on art as an intellectual discipline. Art was increasingly incorporated into school curricula and by the late 1950s it was a matriculation subject with the number of students studying it at tertiary level increasing dramatically.[67] The expansion of institutional art and design education brought employment opportunities and artists became less inclined to engage in commercial design and advertising, which were emerging as separate professions with their own supporting infrastructures. As the art market and patronage began to expand and prosper, young artists like John Olsen and Leonard Hessing signalled their professionalism by showing with commercial galleries

rather than the traditional artists societies, and more specifically the NSW CAS with its reputation for amateurism.[68]

James Gleeson gives a valuable insight into the different nature of postwar art education and practice in Painting in Australia Since 1954, endorsing Buckley's opinion that it was a fertile and stimulating era:

> In a very precise way the years of the war formed a watershed so that the intellectual and emotional climate of the postwar years is quite different from the prevailing spirit of the years between the wars. Those who studied before the war did so in a paucity of books and reproductions. Those who studied after the war did so in an atmosphere alive with interest in current movements. They were stimulated by the phenomenal increase in periodicals, books and reproductions illustrating and discussing these movements. The old feeling of isolation had gone for good and a wider general interest on the part of the public served as a spur to the younger artists' efforts. In this fertile atmosphere it is hardly surprising that an unparallel flowering should have occurred. For the first time the Australian artists was able to feel that he was working at no real disadvantage because he happened to be living in Australia.[69]

By the early 1950s an enthusiastic climate of debate and discussion existed in Sydney. Controversy raged when art students mounted a protest in January 1953 in the Art Gallery of NSW before William Dargie's seventh Archibald prize-winning portrait of Essington Lewis, Chairman of BHP and Jeffrey Smart took up the cause in the Sunday Telegraph.[70] Art teachers and their pupils and the more radically inclined were finding a gathering place in Rowe Street, with its lively blend of bohemia and international modernism created by Mervyn Horton's coffee shop, Carl Plate's Notanda Bookshop, Marian Hall Best's Modern Design Studio, and Steven Kalmar Interiors.[71] As Gleeson noted, advances in print technology and transport brought an increasing number of publications – books and magazines – and travelling exhibitions, which fuelled a sense of enthusiasm and confidence in contemporary art. Furthermore the emergence of institutional and corporate funded art prizes and scholarships was creating a positive public profile for art in the community while offering artists unprecedented opportunities for financial security.

The Cold War

Politically, however, these were turbulent years for Australian intellectuals, as the election of the Menzies government in 1949 ushered in a repressive Cold War regime of anti-communism and military paranoia. The Communist Party Dissolution Bill had severely divided the country with those who fought against it as an infringement of civil rights being branded communists. A campaign of witch hunts saw those with a hint of left tendencies in their background come under suspicion and have their employment jeopardised. The reputations of such nationally respected figures as Vance and Nettie Palmer, and universities and intellectuals generally, were publicly attacked, with one parliamentary zealot describing the Australian National University as 'a nest of communists who are busy building up their own organizations to subvert the institutions of this country'.[72] This atmosphere of intellectual anxiety on one level bred political caution, as people sought to distance themselves from anything socialist, but on another it led to increasing concern and debate as the issue of civil rights and the freedom of the individual replaced partisan politics as the contested ground.

Menzies used anti-communist propaganda to harness Australians into a consensus of support for his democratic capitalism with its new relationship between worker, state and industry. Delivering the William Queale Memorial Lecture for the Australian Institute of Management in 1954, he warned Australians that the benefits of a free and democratic country could only be achieved if individuals recognised their responsibilities to society.[73] While the greatest achievement of democracy was 'the elevation of the individual, the giving of opportunity to all who have the inherent quality to seize it', it was also true, Menzies emphasised by quoting Thomas Paine that, 'Those who expect to reap the blessings of freedom must, like men, undergo the fatigue of supporting it.'[74] It was the duty of each individual to recognise:

> A vehement concentration upon rights obscures the vital fact that unless duties are accepted and performed by each of us, not only our rights but the rights of others will die for want of nourishment.[75]

The history of civilisation, Menzies explained, was 'a history of limitations on individual freedom' in which liberty was achieved through order. Thus it followed that 'sensible discipline cheerfully accepted and public laws scrupulously obeyed are not the enemies of freedom, but its essential friends.' Australia's prosperity in the Cold War was to be built on a consensus between the worker, management, and intellectuals, that is on the growth of an educated middle class as the backbone of Australian society.[76]

It was a political and intellectual situation fraught with contradiction. Democracy and the ideology of individualism were promoted at an international level to signify Western freedom and solidarity and on a local level to signify Australia's new economy and political maturity. Debate was widely fostered (the opposition to McCarthyism was loud and strong) with cultural events, particularly international peace conferences, being used to signify that democracy nurtured plurality and freedom of thought, and tolerated dissidence.[77] However, as many Australia's intellectuals considered the witch-hunts at home and at McCarthyism in America, this did not appear to be the case.[78] Rather it appeared, as the editors of Voice contended, that man's fundamental human rights - 'the freedom from fear and want' and the right 'for material comfort and spiritual freedom to create without inhibitions' - as defined by the United Nations charter were under serious threat. Voice and Meanjin decried the situation that made it 'possible for every non-conformist expression to be labelled as Communist, and by virtue of this labelling to be jettisoned as undesirable and subversive'. The West's Cold War agents, Voice asserted, were just as intent as the Russians on intimidating and polarising people into anti-communist and communist camps and destroying open critical debate. They had reduced intellectual freedom to the situation that whereas 'Once it was possible to make a criticism and to be opposed in the light of that criticism ... today, the value of the point of view is not considered. Is it orthodox or otherwise? If otherwise – it is Communist'.[79] The creative freedom of the West, the opponents of the Cold War's decisive politics argued, was no more than the freedom to be anti-communist. The individual and culture were being harnessed to fight communism and being used as political pawns. As the Petrov affair painfully illustrated, the problem was not

communism but the attack on the rights of the individual by all governments, Western or otherwise.[80]

The 1,050 delegates who attended the Australian Convention for Peace and War in Sydney in September 1953, did not, however, see the threat to Australia's intellectual freedom solely in Cold War terms.[81] While they expressed their anxiety about the super powers and the spread of totalitarianism, and pledged to support the Authors' World Peace Appeal and international goodwill, their major concern was that Australian culture was at an all-time low. Their resolution was not to fight politics but to protect Australia's national culture from the inroads being made by blatant commercialism and the 'influx of debased forms of literature and art from foreign countries'. Arthur Burns expressed similar concerns in his Meanjin attack on the Congress of Cultural Freedom in which he argued that the real problem facing Australia was the lowering of intellectual standards which had accompanied the postwar shift into mass culture. While the polarisation of Cold War politics suppressed true critical debate, it was the popular media – comics, radio, films – and the mind-numbing prosperity of the welfare state which posed the real threat to culture:

> Comics make the point most clearly: the worst thing about them is not their sex or sadism but their mind-rotting existence itself. Films are not much better. The debasing of radio, press and film has been made possible by universal primary education and general prosperity.[82]

Thus while on one level Cold War politics created a climate of anxiety and appeared to threaten intellectual freedom, the 1950s also ushered in a period, as Vincent Buckley recalled, when universities, intellectuals and artists were highly valued and debate about the role of culture and the artist thrived. The problem facing artists and intellectuals was the redefinition of culture and radicalism within this contradictory climate of prosperity and repression. It was the issue of intellectual freedom that became the uniting platform for a revitalisation of oppositional culture in Australia.

The NSW CAS's new abstractionists

It was within this milieu of expanding education, rehabilitation and political turmoil that the new generation of painters emerged to reactivate the CAS and reposition painting and abstraction as oppositional forces. Among them were the abstract expressionists, who, Peter Pinson has argued, did not form a school in any Manifesto-producing sense but took their cohesiveness from their membership of the CAS, whose meetings, lectures and exhibitions represented a clearing house of their ideas.[83] The 1954 NSW CAS lecture program, titled 'The Background of Contemporary Art', while conservative in content, signalled the change by foregrounding abstraction and attempting to bring the focus of the Society once again to painting. The committee, now revitalised, began lobbying the Federal Government for funding for the arts.[84] In 1954/55 the committee, now consisting predominantly of painters – Weaver Hawkins, Nancy Borlase, Elwyn Lynn, Max Feuerring and John Coburn – engaged the NSW CAS in its first public assault in years on the art establishment and its academic conservatism, signalling their intent to revive the CAS's stance of aesthetic activism.[85]

The NSW CAS, which had been lobbying the NSW Education Department about the life membership of the trustees of the Art Gallery of NSW and their control of the Archibald, Sulman and Wynne Prizes, 'decided to appoint its own panel of judges ... to make an unofficial award as a gesture of protest'.[86] Building on the public interest created by the success of the art students' protests the NSW CAS staged a reject Archibald show the aim of which was to keep the pressure on the Ministry of Education.[87] Held in early 1955 at the Education Department Gallery the show was well publicised attracting attention even from the Melbourne CAS. The NSW CAS's independent judging panel of artists critics, James Gleeson and Paul Haefliger, and layman, Rev Felix Arnott awarded both their Archibald and Wynne Prizes to Michael Kmit for his self portrait and landscape, Cross Section, amid considerable controversy and debate within and outside the Society.[88]

The NSW CAS reject show was part of the ground swell of protest against the Australian art establishment, which also saw the CAS come to life in Melbourne and South Australia.

In Sydney the Art Gallery of NSW and its trustees once again symbolised the establishment and the forces of conservative parochialism in an increasingly international world. The president of the NSW CAS, Weaver Hawkins argued, in the protest letter to the trustees, that it was time Australia and the Art Gallery of NSW followed the world trend of actively promoting contemporary art set by New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, by dividing the gallery into two sections, one for academic art and one for modern art.[89] The NSW CAS 1955 lecture program, Contemporary Art Abroad, took the issue further concentrating the lectures on current developments in the United States, Italy, Britain, Israel, the Netherlands and India, and drawing attention to the international nature of contemporary art practice.[90]

Another initiative of the new committee was the 1955 Madach Prize, which took its theme from Imre Madach's Tragedy of Man; an existentialist drama dealing with 'Man's metaphysical uncertainty, struggle for knowledge and better living'. Madach's Tragedy's theme of man's strength to carry on despite the seeming futility of life is a fine example of Cold War angst. In the drama, Adam travels through time experiencing the great tragic moments of mankind. In Paris, for instance, he speaks as Danton only to end on the guillotine, while in the twentieth century's communist society, he finds 'the individual does not count, all are only atoms of the State'. When he finally awakens from his dream he wonders if it is worthwhile to go on when the voice of the God calls, 'Man, struggle and have faith.'[91] Significantly, the prize money of £250 was donated by the Hungarian community whose war time experiences fed a horror of fascism and communism which they brought with them to Australia.[92]

Sydney had a strong European community of Lithuanians, Hungarians, Poles, Germans, Austrians, and Yugoslavians who were actively influential in the arts.[93] The architects Harry Seidler, George Molnar and Stephen Kalmar were influential in promoting modernist design and architecture, while the artists Judy Cassab, George de Olszanski, Henry Salkauskas, Desiderius Orban, Max Feuerring, Stanislaus Rapotec and Leonard Hessing

helped to shape the practice of abstract expressionism. Many of these artists became key figures in the NSW CAS using it as a platform to promote graphic art and expressionism.

Desiderius Orban gave many lectures to the NSW CAS, preaching a doctrine of free expression and experimentation that was most compatible with Sydney's penchant for abstraction. His pupils, Margo Lewers, Sheila McDonald, John Ogburn and John Olsen, recalled that he encouraged them to experiment with materials and media, to play with line, shape and colours, and to doodle on sheets of newspaper and wrapping paper in order to encourage the impromptu and the intuitive.[94] Orban himself explained the process in terms of creative freedom; 'I try to guide them [pupils] in the direction of freedom. Let the painting talk to you and you will realise that you are only the vehicle for the creative impulse which is within you'.[95] Orban's teachings, laced with notions of personal and creative freedom, had great appeal, particularly as the repressive regime of Cold War politics gave fresh importance to the principle of artistic freedom. He also gave active credence to belief in the autonomy of the artist in a rhetoric that is not dissimilar to that of the American abstract expressionists:

> I have to paint what the painting dictates to me to do. This is creativeness itself. If you let the painting talk to you, it may become a work of art.[96]

Orban, thus, not only offered a rhetoric to support the practice of abstraction but also the means to inject it with an expressive intensity that was lacking in Sydney's geometric modes of abstract art.

Orban was only one of many who made a sizeable contribution to Sydney art. The Central Europeans had a great love of drawing and the graphic arts that meshed well with Sydney's drawing tradition, as too did their rich heritage of craftsmanship. Even more important was their expressionist and metaphysical tradition and their preference for the dark end of the tonal scale, which offered Sydney artists a way out of the decorative 'charm' school impasse, based as it was on the disinterested detachment of British neo-romanticism. They brought an expressive intensity, with vigorous brush and line work and rich romantic tonalities, which was unusual for Sydney, and perhaps more acceptable than

Melbourne's figurative expressionism because of its basis in technical excellence and its attempt to express the universal realm of experiences rather than local social realities. Many immigrants, as a result of their experiences with fascism and communism, harboured a deep dislike of social realism and politics.[97] That is not to say that they were without deep concern for the politics of the day, but their 'political' focus, as the Madach prize indicates, was with humanism and with its ideals of the individual, universal experience and freedom, all of which were sympathetic to Sydney's intellectual traditions.[98] The humanist intensity of the content and form of the Europeans' art offered Sydney artists the means to move their abstraction out of the realm of formalist decoration into the realm of expressionism as the trauma of the Cold War years demanded.

Part II

'French Painting Today': Expressionism and Abstraction, A Humanist Mode of Painting

Australia's shift into abstract expressionism has been attributed largely to the influence of the 'French Painting Today' exhibition which many artists cite as a turning point in their artistic development. It has been customary, within the colonial constructs of Australia art history, to view this exhibition, together with the Murdoch Herald exhibition and 'Two Decades of American Painting', as moments of cultural enlightenment. Within this construct the direct contact with the art of the metropolis offered by a visiting exhibition makes Australian artists painfully aware of their isolation and inspires the more radical to throw off the shackles of provincialism and embrace the new. This interpretation has been encouraged by Bernard Smith's Australian Painting and Robert Hughes' The Art of Australia, which, as constructs of the 1960s provincialism debate, relate the colony's struggle for cultural independence to its battle to overcome the 'tyranny of distance' and the problems of provincialism and cultural isolation. The strengths and weaknesses of Australia's art are thus born of the colonial dilemma of whether to follow the international

style and always be a pale imitation of the metropolis, or to seek to create an indigenous national school of art from its provincial experience.

Within this discourse visiting exhibitions, are positioned to emphasise the geographical isolation and cultural deprivation which Australian artists constantly struggled to overcome. Accordingly, Bernard Smith praised 'French Painting Today' in his Voice reviews for providing the opportunity 'to enjoy paintings the like of which are rarely seen in this country', and 'assess the quality of paintings of world-famous artists and artists relatively unknown, without being intimidated by writers and luxury reproductions'.[99] While there was much the truth in what Smith wrote, the truth needs to be recognised as limited, constructed to support a myth of cultural identity which in reality does little to explain why the French exhibition 'captured the imagination of Australians as no other exhibition has ever done'.[100] It does not, for instance, explain how or why this exhibition was privileged as significant above the exhibitions of contemporary German and British art which also toured in 1953.[101] Nor does it explain why the most controversial feature of the exhibition was the contemporary abstract painting as the 123 works on display included not only the works of the modern masters from Matisse to Picasso and Dali, but also those of the new generation School of Paris with its groupings of abstractionists and realists and exciting young artists including Gustav Singier, Bernard Buffet and Vieira da Silva. The issue of interest, therefore, is why the abstract works fired the Australian imagination?

Organised by Charles Lloyd Jones through the auspices of the Art Gallery of NSW, this exhibition of French modernism was a cooperative venture between the French and Australian governments.[102] With impressive official patronage, the show toured Australia between January and September 1953, accompanied by excellent press and radio coverage which promoted the modern art as revolutionary and confronting thus helping to make exhibition highly successful in terms of attendance. The SMH filled its social pages with news of the exhibition's opening week. There were copious photographs of the glamorous opening party while others showed society women in 'modernistic outfits' viewing the 'radical' modern works or lunching after viewing.[103] Both the front page stories

and the features section engaged in promoting controversy by recording snippets of the ridiculous responses of the 'mystified' public. 'A well known Sydney Artist (name withheld) ... described 90% of the exhibition as cheap junk', read one headline, while another article reported that opening night spectators disagreed with Hal Missingham that Marchand's Spring was the highlight: 'Rude, I call that,' said one woman, 'Who ever saw an emerald green woman anyway?' These snippets, combined with frivolous reports about the ejection of an artist from the art gallery for ridiculing the paintings, helped to stimulate a public outcry that the work was incomprehensible.[104] Why people – practitioners and public – should quarrel so furiously over art forms, a SMH editorial informed the public, was one of the ancient mysteries of painting, music and literature.[105] Quarrel they did, however, which was good for the press whose reports encouraged the conflict by using a tone of either lighthearted ridicule or serious debate, depending on which element of the public it was addressing. While the death of Stalin on 7 March abruptly removed the exhibition from the limelight, it did not quell the debate about modern art.[106] When Michael Kmit won the Blake Prize in April 1953, modern art was once again a matter of public controversy which prompted a frustrated Russell Drysdale to write to press asking when would the Australian public accept that artists can only use the language of their day and 'in all decency, lay this bogy of modern art peacefully to rest?'.[107]

The timing of the French exhibition was significant. In Sydney its showing in March and April 1953 closely followed on the NSW CAS and art students' protests against the Archibald Prize, providing extra weight to their public campaign against the trustees' of the Art Gallery of NSW continued support of academic painting. On another level, the government and media support for the exhibition positioned it as a symbol of change and progress as Australia moved towards a new cultural identity in which internationalism played a larger role. With modern art integrated into the mainstream of Australia's cultural discourse, the contentious issue was no longer contemporary art per se but the question of the relative merits of realism and abstraction, and the changes in the leadership of world art and politics.

The function of art in a time of spiritual crisis

Tim Rowse has argued that by 1953, when the structure of Australia's postwar political economy and social order was largely in place, the nature of culture became contested ground as its relationship to the state and nation came under review. Confident in Australian prosperity, intellectuals and cultural commentators began to debate the nature of Australian society and the role of art within it. James McAuley triggered a debate in 1952 arguing in Meanjin and The Australian Quarterly that the function of art was to express the highest of man's ideals. The role of art was to express the sacred, which McAuley described as 'the ultimate source of being and order and value in the physical universe and the world of man'.[108] While few questioned McAuley's thesis that art should deal with the higher realm, many disagreed with his conservative and religious definition of sacred and modern art.

McAuley argued that the origins and true tradition of art could be detected in primitive, medieval, Byzantine and oriental art, which harmonised with society by creating an evolving 'symbolic language of spiritual ideas'; a metaphysical, if not religious order, which gave symbolic expression to the unifying concepts of life. He drew on anthropological writings to theorise that in the pre-Renaissance man, united in spirit with the cosmos, accorded the sacred tradition primacy over culture. Man had formulated and expressed his ethical and mental values through his art and culture, the meaning and form of which was shaped by his belief in the higher realm of the spirit.

Such was the effects of modern secularism, McAuley lamented, that in the twentieth century culture was accorded primacy over the higher realm. The Renaissance had brought the secularisation of art and society. Its concern for naturalistic recording of existence had led to anti-traditional and modern art that rejected the sacred in favour of the subjective. He wrote, in modern and anti-traditional tendencies the belief was:

> that the proper function of art is neither to serve any secular or sacred use, nor to express any secular or sacred meanings, but simply to create 'beauty' or to please: aims which turn out in practice, and often in theory, to be identical with the stimulation of feelings and emotions for their own sake.[109]

Modernism, with its art for art's sake aestheticism, individualism and principle of originality, had destroyed all spiritual and intellectual values in art in favour of the emotional and sensational. In denying the essential truth that the artist is never merely an artist but is always a social being, modern art had placed the interests of the individual before the common good, producing the separation of art and society. It subordinated art to society thus contributing to the decay of social morals and ethics. According to McAuley, art that was devoid of higher concerns was self-indulgent fashion, mere ornament or propaganda and as such it was 'a perversion and decadence and a sure sign of the approaching exhaustion of cultural vitality'. Modern art, he concluded, was a symptom of the spiritual malaise which produced fascism and the totalitarian horrors of the postwar years. What Australia needed was a return to the sacred and:

> The creation and appreciation of a truly traditional art [which] requires that one place oneself at the point of view of a coherent spiritual and social culture, which is not very easy to do in our present condition.[110]

While McAuley's opponents attacked his views as extreme and outmoded they shared his belief that art should address the spiritual malaise that blighted mankind in the aftermath of the war. Judith Wright argued, that art should work for 'the establishment of a society stable enough, yet free enough, to permit the true development of the tasks of man'.[111] Hiroshima, closely followed by the communist coups in Czechoslovakia and China, the trial of Cardinal Mindszenty in Hungary, the Korean war, and repressive government actions such as the Communist Party Dissolution Bill, stimulated a climate of ideological argument and concern for the future of humanity.[112] Since the late 1940s, cultural journals including Meanjin had carried extensive articles describing the crisis facing Western civilisation. These essays, which were written by intellectuals of the calibre of André Koestler, Jean Paul Sartre, James John Sweeney, André Malraux, Herbert Read and Alex Comfort, conveyed the message that the world was facing its greatest spiritual crisis ever as the possibility of a third world war loomed large.[113] The Authors' World Peace Appeal called for intellectuals to take a stance against the politics of war expressing the state of anxiety with their statement that 'We writers believe that our civilisation is unlikely to survive another

world war'.[114] A program for world peace conferences, which included the Melbourne Writers Conference for Peace in April 1954 and Sydney's Australian Convention on Peace and War, September 1953, also worked to galvanise writers and artists behind the cause of international peace.[115]

The pressure for artists to resume some form of social involvement was intense as it was asserted that they should adopt a stance against the governments and the military programs that were threatening the world with annihilation. At the Melbourne Conference Walter Murdoch went so far as to state, 'It is treason for a writer to try to preserve an artistic detachment, apart and aloof from public affairs'. Interest in the art was burgeoning as intellectuals called for the revitalisation of painting as a mode of humanist expressionism. Bernard Smith and Alan McCulloch helped stimulate interest by debating the possibility of an Australian manifestation of expressionism ('an art of the inner') in Meanjin.[116] In Sydney, Voice ran a series of articles by James Gleeson, Strom Gould and Bernard Smith on the topic of understanding and interpreting 'Modern Art', which explained art as an expression of the abstract realm of the imagination and unconscious.[117] In Melbourne, Max Harris wrote passionate and provocative articles in Direction appealing to poets and artists to once again become impassioned with the cause of humanity while emphasising that this involvement would be different from the surrealist-inspired socialism of the war years. He urged artists to re-engage with art as an exercise in 'spiritual statement'.[118] They were to find their inspiration in humanism, and more specifically in the writings of Martin Burber, and the poetry of T.S. Eliot and Dylan Thomas, which explored 'the meaningful moments of living', the nature of human relations, and the feelings and apprehensions as constituting the essence of existence.[119] In his opinion art needed to turn its back on decoration and material appearances to address the grim realities of being; the reality that 'we' the common people, alone in the world and alone before God, create myths of meaning from the existentialist search for the universal nature of the human spirit; from the common subjective experience.[120]

There was, in fact, a widespread interest in the expression of the inner experience, or, as Harris phrased it, 'significant content' as the inauguration of the Blake Prize in 1950 highlighted. As a prize for contemporary religious art, the Blake Prize was unusual because it had neither official church support nor encouragement. It was the initiative of the Jewish migrant Richard Morley and the Jesuit priest Michael Scott who put together a supporting committee of artists, religious and lay persons, which included Jean Bellette and Russell Drysdale.[121] According to the Blake Prize historian Rosemary Crumlin, this group of concerned individuals were 'a social, intellectual and religious elite', who inspired by the European Sacred Art Renewal Movement envisaged a flowering of sacred art in Australia along the lines of the Notre Dame de Toute Grace experience.

Several of the Blake committee were members or friends of the NSW CAS which undoubtedly helped shape their intention to reform the kitsch nature of religious art by encouraging artists to apply the aesthetic and expressive advances of contemporary art to create images of religious power and relevance. For the artists involved, the Blake Prize offered a golden opportunity to take contemporary art to the heart of the Australian community. Accordingly the committee adhered to the ideals of contemporary art when setting out the guidelines by avoiding being prescriptive as to what constituted religious art, and in the initial years the Prize was awarded to both figurative and abstract work. Perhaps inspired by the French example, but more probably by their own ideals, the Blake committee believed that the new form of sacred art would emerge from faith and trust in the ideal of creative freedom and the integrity of the artist's search for truth rather than from the restrictions of dogma.[122] They found support for their stance in the philosophers P. Tillich and T. Greene's thesis, that religious art did not have to be 'explicitly' religious, because any art, abstract or otherwise, which expressed an honest search for the 'Ultimate Reality' was, 'implicitly', religious.[123] Others within the religious and artistic community, however, did not agree. They argued that religious art must make explicit use of symbols and motifs in order to be intelligible to the general public. This conflict of ideals created on-going tension between the artistic community and the public as is evident in the following

chapters. The issue of concern at this stage is why a prize for sacred art became eminently prestigious and desirable within Australia's fundamentally secular artistic community?

Clearly Sydney's traditional interest in an art of inner necessity and ultimate truth was sympathetic to the new concern for the spiritual as Sydney artists quickly dominated the Blake Prize competition, making it a vehicle for their artistic concerns. Crumlin is of the opinion that few artists had any genuine interest in religion but chose to use the Prize as a vehicle to advance the cause of abstract expression and artistic autonomy which seems reasonable. However, this does not explain why a religious art prize was so interesting to Australian artists, and why they chose it specifically as an arena in which to conduct the fight for creative freedom. Some indication of the artists' relation to sacred art is evident in their early use of the traditional themes of the Flight into Egypt, The Way of the Cross and the Crucifixion as metaphors for the plight of European refugees and human suffering. This suggests that, secular though they were, the artists viewed Christianity as a parable of peace and opposition to regimes of oppression and used the Blake Prize as an arena in which to engage in peaceful yet publicly influential opposition to the establishment and its repressive forces.[124]

Support for this hypothesis can be found by viewing the Blake Prize and essays such as McAuley's, within the wider context of an international climate of spiritual anxiety that was stimulating a new interest in religion and in the artist as the protector of spiritual values. In England, for example, the Bishop of Chichester explained that a relationship existed between the Church and the artist, because both put spiritual values first. The artist was a spiritual, unworldly man who was insusceptible, like the Church, to the materialism of modern democracy. As one who could lead the people to rebel against the spiritual poverty of an age, the artist was more necessary to society than engineers and scientists; only he and the Church could provide the people with a much-needed spiritual vision.[125] Thus the artist was engaging in a social good in his search for a personal subjectivity.

'French Painting Today': the critical response.

It was within this climate of heightened interest in contemporary art and its ability to express the spiritual crisis facing Western civilisation that 'French Painting Today' toured Australia. As a historical survey of French modernism, it was designed to promote the School of Paris as the leader of world art, and it included extensive coverage of young artists whose work Australians vaguely knew through travel and art reviews in Cahiers des Arts, the Listener and the Spectator. International interest in the future of the School of Paris had been high since the Marshall Plan of 1947 saw the United States become a powerful force in the reconstruction of Europe. Growing concern about American cultural imperialism was expressed in the British press as Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg were publishing essays in Partisan Review and Art News promoting American abstract expressionism as the avant-garde.[126] On a more popular front Life magazine had been stimulating interest in the New York School raising Jackson Pollock to celebrity status by promoting him and 'the strange art of today' as 'controversial and scandalous'.[127] Whether the artists read the intellectual journals was not especially important. The art world had been abuzz with speculation about the future of painting since the 1950 and 1952 Venice Biennales when the American and French abstract expressionists made their debut on the world stage alongside new European developments in figuration. These developments created speculation as to the future direction and leadership of world art with the key question being: realism or abstraction? France or America? So, as Bernard Smith observed, the French exhibition, with its excellent survey of recent painting, offered Australians the opportunity to participate in this international discourse and judge for themselves the relative merits of the new developments in figuration and abstraction.

The French exhibition offered several levels of experience for Australians which are worth considering for the insight that they offer into the differing attitudes towards modernism and abstraction. Max Feuerring, a recent immigrant, used the exhibition's survey nature to give the Australian public a history lesson which, by implication, suggested that contemporary art was still very new to Australia. In Meanjin and on ABC radio he presented an 'Imaginary Interview with French Artists', which drew on the writings of Matisse, Rouault,

Laurencin, Chagall, Dufy, Picasso, Braque and the newcomer Leon Gischia, to explain the different modernist schools from fauvism to surrealism and most recently 'neo-humanism'.[128] The fundamental tenet of modernism, the French masters told their interviewer, was that art constituted a personal quest to 'reconcile the things of the external world with our inner being' using the expressive properties of form, colour, and structure. Such was their personal integrity and dedication to art as the expression of the inner world, they would burn two hundred paintings like Rouault had, rather than have them compromised in any way. Overall, the message of the 'interviews' was that contemporary art was so severe a break with tradition, so diverse and personal, that it needed constant explanation, particularly in Australia where true art was yet to be created and appreciated.

Nothing in the Feuerring's interview was radical. Its argument would have been familiar to those had read R.H. Wilenski's History of the Modern Movement or attended the NSW CAS lecture programs.[129] It was a conservative view of art coloured by a immigrant's nostalgia for the European mother culture that viewed Paris as the unrivalled centre of world art. In his Voice review Feuerring told the reader that '100,000 painters from all over the world are working in Paris today'. But the greatness of the School of Paris, which lay with its old masters and their technical discipline and 'good taste' was now under threat by the new generation whose abstract work took up too much space in the exhibition. They were 'strange', Feuerring stated as he interpreted their 'incompetent' 'crude' art and retreat into 'pure formalism' as a sign of Europe's crisis of faith and decadence. 'One cannot help wondering', he wrote:

> why these young painters, who only a few years ago respected the subject in its natural form, have skidded into the abstract. The refusal of the younger generation to come to grips with reality, taking refuge in the fairyland of pure elements, is perhaps indicative of the resignation of our time.

Abstract art lacked the capacity to express the reality of the day; it was essentially indulgent escapism. Nevertheless, concluded Feuerring drawing attention to Australia's isolation and ignorance, while the exhibition was imperfect it was 'a milestone exhibition in the development of Australian art' from which Australian painters should profit.[130]

Feuerring's imaging of Australia was not totally negative. It contained the dream of the land of promise; of Australia as a prosperous nation with a youthful culture yet to be brought to maturity. In his Meanjin interview he played the provincial game of asking the French visitors for their impressions of Australia. Matisse saw a connection with Mediterranean culture and predicted 'an exciting future for this country'. Braque was surprised to find here that necessary precursor of modernism, the 'modern metropolis', with mad peak hour traffic, while the Sydney born Frenchman Eduard Georg gave the typically expatriate reply; 'Australia is a land of sun. Its history records catastrophes of nature but not tragedy. This is good for Australia, but does not inspire my art. It is a happy country.'[131] This rhetoric was somewhat double edged, on one level it was an example of 'cultural cringe' and on another it supported Australia's call for new cultural identity in which contemporary art and its accompanying sophistication signified Australian independence and a move into internationalism.

Fourteen years on from the establishment of the CAS, Feuerring's interpretation of modern art must have seemed fairly predictable to the intellectual readers of Meanjin. This leads one to question to what extent writings such as Feuerring's functioned, not only to educate but also to support the myth-making process which positioned contemporary art as shocking and unintelligible to the general public. The French exhibition was a significant cultural event which provided intellectuals and artists with an opportunity to display their discernment and educate the masses. Its success was to be measured not by the quality of the art displayed, but as Feuerring stated in Voice, by its ability to arouse extreme emotional responses from the public:

> It affects the viewer in either a positive or negative sense – it leaves nobody indifferent. It causes delight or unmasks ignorance, reaffirms beliefs in art or causes their negation. The viewer hates or loves these paintings. Contact takes place on an emotional level.
>
> This is regarded as the greatest success of art, for one of its tasks is to arouse emotions. Here the exhibition does not fall down.[132]

Bernard Smith was much more circumspect and critical in his reviews. Smith was a member of the new intelligentsia that emerged had during the postwar years influencing and shaping Australia's new cultural discourse. With Russel Ward he was amongst the Australian National University's first doctorates and his thesis, when published as European Vision and the South Pacific 1768-1850, was acclaimed for introducing a new critical rigour to Australia's cultural discourse.[133] Accordingly Smith used his Meanjin and Voice reviews of 'French Painting Today' to shift the focus of art criticism away from its traditional subjective modes towards its practice as an intellectual discipline.

Smith wasted no time in his reviews on the old masters and old modernist myths, nor with the suggestion that Australians were ignorant of modernism.[134] There was nothing decadent nor intentionally shocking in the 'French Painting Today' exhibition, he wrote. Rather the success of the show was due to the fine range of quality work by the younger generation, which represented 'better than the art of any other country, the hopes and fears of our time'.[135] Fresh from studying at the Warburg Institute in London, Smith reviewed the exhibition with a great enthusiasm for the latest developments in contemporary art seizing the opportunity to promote a new critical method for evaluating and discussing painting. At the Warburg, under the tutelage of Rudolf Wittkower and Charles Mitchell, he had consolidated his knowledge of connoisseurship and experienced the study of art history and criticism as an academic discipline with an 'objective' methodology for establishing criteria of excellence.[136] Launching an attack on the Elie Faure modes of the Australian critics in March 1953, he drew attention to the fact that the:

> art critics of the Australian press are, almost without exception, painters, not critics. Most of them know little or nothing about the traditions, the techniques or disciplines of criticism.[137]

Smith argued that while great art might be difficult to understand, it could be understood, but not if judged according to the vagaries of the public's emotions. Rather, understanding was to be gained through the use of an objective method based on the formal analysis of the painting, knowledge of the artist's intention, and an understanding of the artistic and social circumstances under which it was developed. Criticism, Smith explained, was a

discrete activity, which, different from the creative act, did not involve emotions, but sought instead to:

> understand exactly what the artist had in mind; judge whether he succeeded in saying what he was trying to say; and finally, decide if what he had said was worth saying, and to what extent.[138]

Smith's Meanjin review was a finely crafted piece of criticism which not only sought to illustrate the effectiveness of this critical method but also to engage Australians in the international debate about the future direction of contemporary art with its co-existing streams of abstraction and realism.[139] In Smith's opinion 'one of the most notable features of the exhibition' was the abstract painting, which varied greatly in range and quality. However, he noted, that few of these works were actually 'pure abstractions' in the manner of Ben Nicholson and Piet Mondrian.[140] The closest was Hans Hartung who had 'perfected his own way of painting'. Smith, began his review with an analysis of Hartung's style introducing the notion that painting was a process. 'A painter to his fingertips, Hartung', Smith explained:

> turns his tools of trade into precious instruments and reduces painting to the purity of its initial acts. His loaded brush is drawn across the dry canvas or moist colour and we can trace, if we wish, the history of its movement. Hartung makes great use of black, for by its transparency he can suggest quite subtlety a sensation of space, and his calligraphic method makes it possible for him to suggest rather free and transient perspectives. His paintings have the lithe sinewy grace of Chinese writing and their perfection is irresistible to those who are quite pure in their aesthetic.[141]

Thus Hartung's talent as an artist resided in his knowledge and mastery of the process of painting: in his understanding of the properties of the formal elements, materials and tools which go to construct a painting, and his development of personal techniques and strategies to craft them into images of aesthetic purity. To understand and evaluate abstract painting one needed, therefore, to understand the creative process; that its artistic intention and value lay in the recognition of the process rather than in recognition of the image.

One of the biggest problems which critics faced when confronted by the new abstraction was how to convey an image of the work for the reader; how to describe a painting that had no recognisable imagery and whose subject matter was 'non-visible'. As Smith's treatment of Hartung indicates, he handled this challenge with skill and sensitivity, using the description and comparison of formal elements and technical mastery to poetic effect, while making qualitative assessments of the artists and their work. Braque, for example, was presented as an 'engineer' of pictorial form, who, conscious of 'the stress, strains and tensions', opposed 'the curved to the angular, the textured surface to the plain surface, monochromatic colour to pure colour', to provide a sense of space that was 'ordered and perfected into classical beauty'.[142] The works of Pierre Soulages who used 'abstract constructions for an expressive purpose' were judged to have more vitality than Léger's, which were too self-assured, undemanding and decorative. Soulages was distinguished from Manessier because he was not interested 'in extracting the formal essence from a momentary experience, but [was] content with a personal display of force', while André Lanskoy was 'more intimate, sweeter in colour, seeking to ingratiate himself with the spectator rather than command'.[143]

While it was possible to objectively describe and assess the technical and aesthetic quality of the abstractions, it was extremely hard to do the same with their subject matter. Smith was 'inclined to doubt' whether themes such as Lanskoy's 'the scent of water 'and 'prolonged desire' could lend themselves 'to abstract pictorial treatment', and 'whether anything more than a purely arbitrary relation could be established between a complex notion such as 'prolonged desire' and 'a complex pattern of non-representational colour'.[144] He warned that abstract painting was 'a trap baited for the unskilled and the cocksure' with even the talented Hartung paying an enormous price for his perfection because his paintings were 'like signs in a language never to be deciphered'.[145] The problem with abstraction, Smith explained, was its obsession 'the idolisation of an ephemeral technique' which led Hartung and his fellow abstractionists to run the risk of allowing the means to become the end.[146]

Smith's socialist beliefs made him ideologically opposed to abstraction and deeply sceptical of metaphysics. In Place, Taste and Tradition he had argued that abstract art alienated art from its social purpose and caused its dehumanisation. He believed that modernism's pursuit of art for art's sake had led art into an impasse of elitist aestheticism from which it could be saved only by a return to realist art which depicted the central realities of the artist's time and place.[147] However, he also believed in contemporary art's ideal of plurality, and that experimentation with styles was essential for the creation of the new. Hence in order to emphasise that the most important principle of contemporary art was the search for new formal means to express life's changing values, Smith treated abstraction with seemingly the same critical rigour that he accorded all the art in the exhibition. 'These paintings taken in all', he wrote in Voice:

> are blind to neither the tragedy of life nor to its wonder and beauty, but they have been painted, most of them, only for those who are still trying to understand the time. To those who know, they have little to say.[148]

The consensus of opinion amongst the critics was that the French exhibition's vast range of artists and work graphically illustrated the diversity and personal freedom that was a characteristic of contemporary art. They looked for the exhibition's continuity not in stylistic groupings but in the expression of significant humanist concerns, or as Smith phrased it in themes such as the 'spirit of joy' and 'the darker side of life'. The deeply expressive work of Rouault and Chagall were definite favourites with reviewers.[149] In Smith's opinion 'The finest paintings in the exhibition, which convey something of the quality of our own uneasy times' were not the abstracts but the semi-figurative work of Picasso and Marchand which revitalised traditional symbols and motifs into personal expressions of human concern. As Smith explained, Picasso had brutally distorted and disfigured the woman's breasts in Orange Bodice into a grotesque allegorical map of war in order to express his 'personal reaction to the invasion of France' thus creating 'a spiritual symbol of France divided against herself'.[150] The power of Picasso's art, therefore, lay in his ability to do what abstractionists failed to do; 'find potent symbols for his private feelings, and symbols which, for all their potency, can be stated with utter simplicity in a completely pictorial language'.[151]

It was André Marchand's Spring that the artistic community regarded as the highlight of the show. Marchand had been acclaimed as the most important successor to Picasso, Braque and Chagall, and for Smith Spring constituted 'the one painting which comes close to being a masterpiece', because its unity of form and content created an accessible image of human significance. Spring, Smith elaborated, was an image in which colour and line functioned symbolically and aesthetically, and the artist's personal imagination was harnessed for the better good, unlike Lanskoy's paintings, where the artist indulged his personal inclinations to create charming, aesthetically seductive images.[152] Smith's poetic description of Spring emphasised the lineage of its symbolic language and its disciplined treatment of humanist concerns:

> Despite its apparent simplicity the painting is full of subtlety; the judicious use of the 'white line', the modulation of the blacks, and the control of complementaries all bespeak a master of colour construction. The painting has gained, too, because Marchand has chosen a traditional subject to provide harness and rein for his roving imagination. The colour, so satisfactory for its own sake, gains significance by reason of its symbolic references just as the figures do. As for the subject itself it is clear that there is no romance or sentiment in Marchand's interpretation of spring ... Marchand's Spring is a very old, primitive and pagan spring, a 'cruel April' that requires no masculine gods to prompt it into existence.[153]

The power of Marchand's modernism lay in its continuance of the Graeco-Roman humanist tradition; it did not reject the past but built on the universalism that gave it continuing relevance. With its sensibility derived from the combination of technical excellence, rationalism, human content, tradition and innovation, Marchand's painting epitomised that which made the School of Paris great.

Smith concluded his review, perhaps not surprisingly, by arguing that realism was the future direction of art. He advised 'Those who are inclined to dismiss the exhibition because of the unfamiliar nature of many of the works, notably abstract paintings' to pay attention to the large numbers of pictures 'which stick quite close to the world of familiar appearances'. In fact 'naturalistic painting is more strongly represented than our first impressions might lead us to suspect':

> A study of the paintings with the aid of the catalogue does reveal something of a 'return to realism' amongst the youngest painters, ... Jean Pierre Capron, for instance,... paints a mysterious *Fishing Port near Venice* full of cool sombre colour ... Minaux's massive *Country Still Life* ... is splendidly painted and organized with great pictorial skill ... [while] Bernard Buffet ... is another young painter who prefers a representational though highly stylised manner of expression.[154]

The work of these young painters, he predicted, was a definite indication that French painting was not heading, 'as contemporary American painting seems to be, sternly towards the northern latitudes of non-representational painting'.[155]

The politics of the School of Paris

Hal Missingham and Charles Lloyd Jones had begun the organisational initiatives for 'French Painting Today' in 1951 when the world was looking to Paris for signs that European civilisation had survived the war and re-emerged cleansed with all its fine sensibilities intact.[156] The end of the war saw the West's intelligentsia flock to Paris, seeking to be once again at the centre of high cultural activities.[157] As the American abstract expressionist John-Franklin Koenig has stated, Paris occupied a legendary place in the world's imagination as the centre of civilised bohemian culture where intellectuals were envied and admired, and the artist was 'prestigious, even glamorous, even if [he] ... lived in poverty in a garret'.[158] The concern of intellectuals and artists, was whether the tradition of Western culture, as exemplified by Paris, could or should survive the ideological havoc wrought by the World War II, the Holocaust, the atomic bomb, and now the imperialist posturing of USSR and USA.[159] For Bernard Smith in particular, the issue for concern was the future of Europe's humanist tradition of realism and the increasing cultural influence of America.

By the early 1950s Paris was alive with debate as the French Salons supported the different modernism groups of geometric abstraction and figuration and small private galleries promoted the aggressively avant-garde developments in Art Brut, art autre and art informel.[160] At the establishment level, Matisse, Braque, Chagall, Rouault, Dufy, Léger,

Villon and Picasso were winning international accolades, and their status as the great masters of twentieth century art was secure. The French government embraced modernism as a form of cultural propaganda, opening the Musée National d'Art Moderne, with Jean Cassou as director, and promoting the School of Paris extensively in travelling exhibitions and international art and trade fairs. As the 'French Painting Today' illustrated, the officially promoted modernism was a somewhat 'conciliatory form' based on the sure foundations of fauvism, cubism and geometric abstraction and a new generation of modernists whose work upheld André Lhôte's edict that art should be 'capable of soothing contemporary neurosis'.[161] Under the guidance of Lhôte, the School of Paris had become the new academy producing works of French sensibility, technical excellence and refinement that endorsed the values of the establishment.[162]

In protest Paris' radicals, lead by Jean Paul Artaud, André Breton, Jean Dubuffet, George Mathieu and Michel Tapié, launched an existentialist-inspired revolt against the rational order of the establishment which denied the chaos and ugliness of life. Drawing on primitive and deviant art forms they experimented with non-conventional materials and creative processes in order to create a subversive, gritty and crudely gestural art that disrupted the figurative and abstract conventions of modern art. Their work with its disturbingly ugly and confrontingly irrational expression of the human experience successfully disrupted European ideals of refinement and good taste.[163] Thus it was asserted they posed a threat both to the continuance of the School of Paris and to European tradition of representational art.

The French avant-garde of Art Brut and art autre were major influences for the NSW CAS's abstract expressionists, however, in 1953 they had to be content with the 'French Painting Today' exhibition. In the month that it was exhibited in Sydney it was attended by 150,000 people which is clear evidence that School of Paris modernism was popular with the public.[164] The success of the exhibition also indicates that Australians were intensely interested in the issue of the future of international culture as their country was increasingly drawn into an international power circuit of politics and economics. The French exhibition

was, in fact, representative of the international trend to exploit culture and travelling exhibitions as part of international diplomacy and Cold War propaganda. As the exhibition toured Australia, America launched its first post-World War II exhibition of contemporary American art in Paris, at Musée Nationale de l'Art Moderne, as part of a propaganda campaign which used art and culture to promote the United States as the friend and ally of all democratic nations.[165] In a manner similar to 'French Painting Today', the American exhibition in Paris included a diversity of abstract and figurative painting emphasising the importance of plurality and freedom of expression in a democratic world.[166]

Australians were well prepared for the Cold War rhetoric of international peace and unity that accompanied 'French Painting Today'. Travelling art and cultural exhibitions sponsored by UNESCO and visiting international representatives of the Congress of Cultural Freedom such as Stephen Spender were becoming a feature of cultural life.[167] As the Cold War progressed the message promoted by these cultural productions focused on the importance of international modernism, and universalism, to the cause of peace and protection of the democratic ideal of the individual right to intellectual freedom.[168] The British Council had pioneered the use of art as propaganda in the aftermath of World War II when it inundated Europe with exhibitions of English contemporary art.[169] While other nations followed suit, it was the United States that developed travelling cultural exhibitions into a 'Cold War Weapon' in what it described as a global 'battle of the arts'.[170] As the Cold War developed and America grew more aggressive in its cultural campaigning promoting its abstract expressionists as the new avant-garde, concern grew about the threat posed by the brash new world power to the traditions of European culture and most especially to the School of Paris leadership of world art.[171] As the 1950s progressed, the practice of abstract and figurative art became increasingly drawn into the games of Cold War diplomacy which, in the West, were intent on the internationalisation and politicisation of art.

Conclusion

The 'French Painting Today' exhibition, therefore, marked an important moment in development of abstract art and internationalism in Australia. As this chapter has established, it toured at a time when interest in the potential of expressionism to fuse with abstract and figurative modernism to create a new humanist art form was high. Thus it provided a springbroad for the on-going debate of the concerns which the Blake Prize for Religious Art and James McAuley's debate about the meaning of art had brought to the fore. For the artists and their critics, specifically Bernard Smith, 'French Painting Today' offered the opportunity to begin the ideological debate on the relative potential of realism and abstraction to express significant spiritual and social concerns. It also offered the opportunity to link the future production of contemporary painting directly with international developments, most particularly with the debate over the future of School of Paris and the emergence of America as a new cultural power.

The timing of 'French Painting Today' was pivotal to its success in more ways than one. The public's enthusiasm for the exhibition reflected the increasing importance of contemporary art and culture to Australia's national agenda. By 1953 the growth of manufacturing and commerce, combined with Australia's international status as a new independent nation, had activated significant social and cultural changes which included the creation of a new institutional and commercial infrastructure for the production and consumption of contemporary art. Now that contemporary art was the establishment's new academy, a climate of confident and competitive activism emerged amongst Sydney's younger painters many of whom moved into the NSW CAS changing its ideological direction back to the production of painting as an anti-establishment art form. Their interest in cultural activism and experimentation with new art forms having been assisted by the influence of European immigrants and the growing concern about impact of the Cold War on human rights and more specifically intellectual freedom. The interim years of 1947-54, therefore formed an important period of transition for Australian culture in which the production of contemporary art and its relationship to society changed dramatically.

1 Borlase, 'Three Decades', pp. 71-72,

2 Borlase, 'Three Decades', p. 71; also Plate AMPA A347.

3 NSW Broadsheet, June 1951. The out-going committee consisted of Arthur Baldwinson, Nancy Borlase, Walter Bunning, R. Emerson Curtis, Phillipa Keene, Weaver Hawkins, Charles Salisbury, John Lipscomb, Harry Seidler, Douglas Snelling and Mrs E. Towndrow.

4 NSW Records. The records include the exhibition catalogue and newspaper reviews with photographs of the exhibition.

5 Haefliger, SMH, 15 October, 1949, wrote that the architecture, sculpture and abstract 'Art' lent a measure of stability to 'an orgy of amateurism'. He named T. Bass, J. Reaney, J. B. Mason, Frank Hinder, Grace Crowley, Ralph Balson and K. Harrison as the best abstractionists and Orban, Nolan, Lymburner, Gleeson, and Imre Szigetif the better amongst the representationalists. Gleeson, Sydney Sun, 14 October, 1949, named Dahl Collings and Margo Lewers amongst the best and praised Nolan's Eureka Stockade series. The Department of External Affairs also purchased works.

6 F. Hinder, 'Painting and Public', Meanjin, Winter, vol. XI, no. 2, 1952, p. 146.

7 ibid.

8 ibid., p. 147.

9 M. Lord, A Decorator's World: Living with Art and International Design, Sydney, Ure Smith, 1969, pp. 95-108. Margaret Lloyd who had worked in London returned to Melbourne because of the war but soon moved to Sydney to join the gathering of modern designers and artists she had known in London. She became involved in government-funded programs, teaching interior decorating to the public and armed forces. See also A. M. Van de Ven, 'Images of the Fifties: Design and Advertising', in J. O'Callaghan (ed.), The Australian Dream: Design of the Fifties, Sydney, Powerhouse Publishing, 1993, pp. 43-58.

10 Hinder, Lithographs; and Margel Hinder File, Women's Art Register.

11 Hickey, Gerald and Margo Lewers, p. 89.

12 Douglas Annand and Alistair Morrison designed the CAS exhibition catalogues, letterheads etc which are excellent examples of modernist graphic design. See Van de Ven, note 9 above, for information on these designers-artists.

13 The new professionalism manifested in the emergence of professional societies, including The Society of Interior Designers. See Lord, A Decorator's World, pp. 183-186; and Richards, The

Best Style, pp. 50-51. Richards stated that with the postwar expansion of home ownership an entire industry was founded.

14 See NSW Broadsheet, 1953, for lecture program and a monthly summary of the lectures.

15 Rowse, Australian Liberalism, pp. 129-136, for an account of the postwar construction of a new middle class and a domestic market to support Australia's shift into a mixed economy in which the government formed a close alliance with industry.

16 NSW Broadsheet, October 1953.

17 Lord, A Decorator's World, pp. 95-108, 124-129.

18 C. Alcorso, The Wind You Say, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1993, pp. 79-89; A New Approach To Textile Designing By A Group of Australian Artists, Sydney, Ure Smith, 1947, Foreword by Claudio Alcorso and essays by J. T. Burke, H. Missingham, and S. Ure Smith.

19 Missingham, 'Prizes and Scholarships', They Will Kill You, pp. 80-90.

20 Missingham in A New Approach To Textile Designing.

21 NSW Broadsheet, January 1948; NSW Records, letters complaining that the proposal to exclude painting from the March 1948 exhibition was discriminatory against painters; NSW Broadsheet, July 1949, report on the general meeting discussion about the focus of the lecture program.

22 Campbell, Australian Watercolour Painters, pp. 199-213; also Plate, AMPA A347; and Plate, 'Talk to the Art Gallery of NSW mainly about the acceptance of Modern Art over the years'. Plate talked extensively of the shortage of materials after the war and how this forced artists to experiment with different materials and techniques. Sydney artists' (Lange, F. Hinder) interest in colour experiments also encouraged experimentation with watercolour and gouache.

23 J. Towndrow, Philip Cox: Portrait of an Australian Architect, Ringwood, Viking, 1991, pp. 75-93. Towndrow's, p. 85, account of Cox's years at University of Sydney, c. 1957, describes how the architecture course was conducted and the art classes run by Roland Wakelin and Lloyd Rees. Wakelin's teaching was very beaux arts, involving plaster casts of Roman emperors as well as colour wheel exercises. There was an emphasis on drawings which were admired for their artistic flair. Among those studying at the same time as Cox were Robert Hughes, Daryl Conybeare, Ken Wolley, Leonard Hessing, Penelope Evatt, John Crothers and Tanya Lewers. George Molnar, the Hungarian-born architect and cartoonist, was a lecturer. Lloyd Rees was admired for his ability to inspire students with his passion for art 'which was not highly philosophical but deeply rooted and inevitable'.

24 Hickey, Gerald and Margo Lewers, pp. 58-62, 63. Frank Hinder and his sculptor wife Margel, Gerry and Margo Lewers and Lyndon Dadswell, formed with a strong circle of influence in the

NSW CAS during the interim years. Gerry was a sculptor and businessman who worked in the family construction business and sculptured part time. Margo turned to abstraction under the tutelage of Desiderius Orban.

The Society of Sculptors and Associates was established by Gerry Lewers, Paul Beadle and Lyndon Dadswell in 1951. The committee consisted of Lewers, Beadle, and Dadswell. Members included John D. Moore, Charles Salisbury, Tom Bass, Bim Hilder, Arthur Baldwinson, Robert Klippel, Alistair Morrison and Anita Aarons. Categories of membership included: Members – sculptors; Associates – architects, town planners and designers; Hon Members – students; and later Friends of the Society – for those interested in the allied arts.

When the Society of Sculptors formed, Bim Hilder went to architects and came up with a string of commissions. The Society was supported by Dr Coombs of the Reserve Bank, who, to encourage public sculpture, organised a number of competitions for the new Reserve Bank buildings around Australia. The Society also lobbied to have a percentage of the final costs of a building set aside for sculpture as it was in some European countries. In fact, after World War II it became policy to use a percentage (1/2 – 2%) of the building costs on monumental arts, that is on murals, mosaics and/or sculpture. See also E. Lynn, 'Public and Pop Art', Meanjin, vol. XXI, no. 2, 1962, pp. 226-228.

25 Hickey, Gerald and Margo Lewers, p. 68. A line quoted from an ICI promotional pamphlet.

26 See E. Kaufmann Jr., Introduction to Modern Design: What is Modern Design? What is Modern Interior Design?, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, Reprint editions, 1969; H. Matthews, 'The Promotion of Modern Architecture by the Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s,' Journal of Design History, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 43-59; and T. Riley, The International Style: Exhibition 15 and the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Rizzoli, 1992.

27 K. Frampton, Four Decades of Architecture: Harry Seidler, London, Thames and Hudson, 1992, p. 31; and Philip Drew, 'Dwelling on the Dream: The Architectural Vision', in O'Callaghan, The Australian Dream, pp. 91-105.

28 Borlase, 'Three Decades', p. 71; and Frampton, Four Decades, p.19; see also Richards, The Best Style, p. 47, for the influence of Seidler's Bauhaus lectures on colour theory.

29 Drew, 'Dwelling on the Dream', pp. 99-101. Furnished with Eames and Saarinen furniture and contemporary fabrics, the Rose Seidler house was the most complete showcase of modern interior furnishings to be seen anywhere in Australia.

30 ibid., p. 98; See also Frampton, Four Decades, p. 31, for press response.

31 H. Seidler, 'Accent on Living; Houses for Australia', Voice, December 1952.

[32] Voice 1952.

[33] Drew, 'Dwelling on the Dream', p. 68; also Rowse, Australian Liberalism, pp. 134-138, on the influence of C. Hartley Grattan who was a pioneer of Australian American relationships and an advocate of Australia's move into American style capitalism.

[34] Rowse, 'Reconstructing Australia: The Populist Ideal', in Australian Liberalism, pp. 129-185. The postwar reconstruction was led by intellectuals, including H. C. Coombs and Lloyd Ross, who had become influential in government policy and opinion-making during the war. They advocated a new ideology of consensus, which Lloyd Ross, p. 130, termed 'socialism without doctrine', in which government and industry conspired to harness the energy of the war effort and unite the nation behind the construction of a manufacturing based economy.

[35] See SMH January and February 1953 for articles on modern home design which promoted MOMA as the ideal, together with Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House, the work architecture and design of Ray and Charles Eames, and Richard Neutra.

[36] W.E. Lucas, & R. Harvey, 'Architectural Convention: Design for Living', Voice, 1954.

[37] Frampton, Four Decades, p. 31, reference to Australian Women's Weekly, May 1954, 'Home of the Future'.

[38] J. Yeomans, The Other Taj Mahal: What Happened to the Sydney Opera House, London, Longmans, 1968, pp. 9-10.

[39] 'The Modern Mind: Walter Gropius', Current Affairs Bulletin, 26 April, 1954, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 3.

[40] See Rowse, n. 34 above.

[41] 'The Modern Mind', CAB, p. 3.

[42] ibid., p. 8.

[43] ibid., p.13.

[44] P. Crockett, Evatt: A Life, Melbourne Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 216; and K. Buckley, B. Dale and W. Reynolds, Doc Evatt: Patriot, Internationalist, Fighter and Scholar, Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1994, pp. 10-11.

[45] Crockett, Evatt: A Life, p. 193.

[46] ibid., p. 219.

[47] ibid., pp. 215-216.

[48] Lord, A Decorator's World, pp. 114-129

[49] See 'Australia – The Year Past', Current Affairs Bulletin, 31 January, 1955, vol. 15, no. 8; and 'Australia-1955', Current Affairs Bulletin, 6 February, 1956, vol. 17, no. 8.

50 R. Ward, A Nation for a Continent: the History of Australia 1901-1975, Melbourne, Heinemann Educational, 1977, Chapter 10, 'The Menzies Hegemony c. 1950-1960', pp. 301-336; and R. G. Casey, Friends and Neighbours: Australia and The World, Melbourne, Cheshire, 1954.

51 'Australia – The Year Past', Current Affairs Bulletin, vol.15, no. 8, 31 January, 1955, p. 124.

52 A. Phillips, 'The Cultural Cringe', Meanjin, vol. IX, no. 4, 1950, pp. 299-302.

53 R. Boyd, Australia's Home, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1953; G. Caiger (ed.), The Australian Way of Life, Melbourne, William Heinemann, 1953, was published under the auspices of the Australian Institute of International Affairs and included seven essays on the nation, family, education, politics, economy, religion and international relations; W.V. Aughterson (ed.), Taking Stock: Aspects of Mid-Century Life in Australia, Melbourne, F.W. Cheshire, 1953, dealt specifically with the Australian way of life, which included literature, towns and cities, universities, schools, sport and art.

54 L.A. Triebel, 'Book Review, Symposium on Australia', Voice, January 1954; and E.M. Higgins, 'Book Reviews Analysing National Problems', Voice, March 1954.

55 NSW Broadsheet, April 1953. The artists were William Dobell, Russell Drysdale, Sidney Nolan, Lloyd Rees, Jean Bellette, Donald Friend, Justin O'Brien, Frank Hinder, Ralph Balson, Constance Stokes, Arthur Boyd and Godfrey Miller. The Royal Art Society protested because all the artists exhibited with the CAS or the Society of Artists.

56 G. Cochrane, The Crafts Movements in Australia: A History, Sydney, New South Wales University Press, 1992, see Chapter 3, 'Beginning Again 1940-1963', pp. 58-90. The Australian Society for Designers was set up by Harry Haughton James in 1951; the Society of Interior Designers by Mary Hall Best, Leslie Walford, Mary White and Phyllis Shilleto and Margaret Lord in 1951.

See also Richards, The Best Style. Marian Hall Best pioneered international modernism in interior design as the market for art and design expanded to include a new clientele of Europeans and young status oriented professionals. She promoted modern painting and particularly abstract work by displaying paintings by Sidney Nolan, Justin O'Brien, Frank Hodgkinson, Carl Plate, John Coburn, Leonard Hessing and others, in her shop, exhibition installations and major public commissions.

57 Dixon and Smith, 'Varieties of Withdrawal' in Aspects of Australian Figurative Paintings 1942-62, p. 31. Their critical model is the 1980s Marxist revival of the provincialism debate and critique of colonialism. See also McCausland, 'Modern Paintings in Sydney and Melbourne 1935-45', p. 85.

58 V. Buckley, Cutting Green Hay: Friendships, Movements and Cultural Conflicts in Australia's Great Decades, Ringwood, Penguin, 1983, p. 183; also Chapter 5, 'Movement inside a static country', pp. 76-88, and Chapter 10, 'An End to the Fifties', pp. 183-220.

59 ibid., p.185.

60 ibid., p.183.

61 B. Ashcroft, et al., The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures, London, Routledge, 1989, Introduction, pp. 1-13.

62 See Doris Lessing, Under My Skin, London, Harper Collins, 1994. pp. 404-419 for the exodus of South African intellectuals to England and Europe; Mellor, A Paradise Lost, pp. 41-42 for the immediate postwar British exodus; and Reid, A Concise History of Canadian Painting, pp. 226-264.

63 B. Smith AMPA A 358 (Haese Tapes); J. Gleeson, AMPA A 361 (Haese Tapes); and Plate, AMPA A 347.

64 The profile of the CAS changed gradually as the younger artists began to join: 1947 Tony Tuckson and Nancy Borlase, 1948 Elwyn Lynn, 1949 Thomas Coburn, Tom Bass, 1950 George Olszanski, 1951 Henrikas Salkauskas, Don Gazzard, Robert Dickerson and 1954 John Olsen.

65 Smith AMPA A 358; Gleeson, AMPA A 361; and Plate, AMPA A 347.

66 Pinson, Abstract Expressionism in Sydney, p. 13. John Coburn taught at East Sydney Tech, as did Tom Gleghorn. John Olsen, Leonard Hessing and Hector Gilliland taught at the University of Sydney Architecture Department. Gilliland taught graphic design to architecture students.

67 'Advances in the Art' in the supplement: 'Pageant of the Ten Millions', SMH, 9 March, 1959.

68 Lynn in Gates and Duncan, 'Body and Soul', p. 5, claimed that Hessing and Olsen did not show with the CAS and that Olsen told Robert Hughes that he was in the group as a writer, not an artist. The records indicate they were members of the CAS and probably showed early in their careers. Hessing became a committee member in the late 1950s.

69 Gleeson, 'Painting in Australia Since 1945', p. 9.

70 Dutton, The Innovators, pp. 122-123. A young John Olsen was one of the student body who were reported in the press as having marched around the gallery protesting before the portrait of Essington Lewis, giving three cheers for Picasso and then leaving.

71 Richards, The Best Style, pp. 63-64, for an account of Rowe Street. Hall Best's shop, p. 53, was run by her sister Dora Sweetapple, who had an established reputation in art and design and was on the Blake Prize committee. The Hungarian architect Steven Kalmar established a shop in 1947 in Rowe Street specialising in custom designed modern furniture while George Molnar, the

Hungarian architect and cartoonist, established Artes Studios around the same time. See also C. Dawson, 'Goodbye Rowe Street', SMH, 29 April, 1972.

72 Ward, 'A Nation for a Continent', p. 309, and pp. 301-335; R. Ward, A Radical Life: The Autobiography of Russel Ward, Melbourne, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 200-208, 221-229; and Missingham, They Kill You, pp. 9-10. The members of SORA employed by the Education Department felt the scrutiny, particularly Rah Fizelle, Bernard Smith and Hal Missingham.

73 R.G. Menzies, 'William Queale Memorial Lecture', Meanjin, vol. XIII, no. 4, 1954, pp. 605-609.

74 ibid., p. 605.

75 ibid., p. 606.

76 ibid. pp. 606-607.

77 Reports of these conferences were published in cultural journals. Meanjin, vol. XIII, no. 4, 1954, pp. 610-621, published 'Congress For Cultural Freedom', a report of the 1950 Berlin congress at which the Congress was formed amid much debate and opposition from English and Europeans. This interestingly followed the extract of Menzies' speech and reports on the Australian congresses.

78 See also Arthur Burns', Congress for Cultural Freedom', Meanjin, vol. XIII, no. 4, 1954, pp. 618-621.

79 Voice, was launched in 1951 'For the freedom of expression and for the protection of Australian democracy'. It took a strong stance against anti-communism publishing, 'This Month: Can We Celebrate?' in July 1953, which argued that the anti-communist witch hunts were an infringement of human rights.

80 Ward, A Nation for a Continent' for the Petrov Affair, pp. 309-314.

81 See 'The Uneasy Chair', and the 'Australian Convention of Peace and War 1953, , vol. XII, no. 4, 1953, pp. 487-491.

82 Burns in 'Congress for Cultural Freedom', Meanjin, p. 620.

83 Pinson, Abstract Expressionism in Sydney, p. 6.

84 NSW Records. Correspondence for 1954. The CAS approached the Federal Government for funding for the Visual Arts on the line of the Commonwealth Literary Fund, firstly for artists, then for painting and sculpture in all new government buildings.

85 ibid. The committee for 1953/4 was Weaver Hawkins, pres., John Liscombe vice pres., Max Collard, (architect) sec., Beatrice Gore clerical sec. and treas., Robin Moore editor NSW Broadsheet. Nancy Borlase, Anita Aarons, George Olszanski, Roy Fluke, Charles Salisbury,

Phillipa Keene, John Kaplan (librarian East Sydney Tech.) and Toby Moore formed the rest of the committee.

1954/5 Committee – Weaver Hawkins pres., John Kaplan and Toby Moore vice pres., Robin Moore editor NSW Broadsheet, Elwyn Lynn, Nancy Borlase, Roy Fluke, Anthea Mawky, John Coburn, Max Feuerring, George Olszanski, Peter Dodd, Beatrice Gore.

1955/66 Committee: Frank Hinder pres., John Kaplan, Max Feuerring, Tom Gleghorn, Tony Tuckson, Stan Rapotec, Elwyn Lynn, Nancy Borlase.

86 NSW Records, Weaver Hawkins, Correspondence, March 1955.

87 M. Horton, (ed.), The Archibald Prize: An Illustrated History 1921-81, Sydney, Art Gallery of NSW, c.1982.

88 Rev Felix Arnott who, was from St Paul's College Sydney University was a supporter of the CAS. See F. C. Hinder, 'Archibald, Wynne, Sulman Art Awards', Meanjin, Autumn, vol. XIV, no. 1, 1955, p.122, for the element of controversy.

89 NSW Records. Weaver Hawkins, Correspondence, March 1955.

90 ibid.

91 CAS NSW State Exhibition, Madach Prizes, David Jones, 13-21 April, 1955. The Prizes formed the focus of the Autumn State Exhibition. There were three sections: Section 1 – General, Judge Lloyd Rees, Section 2 – Abstract, Judge Paul Haefliger, Section 3 – Tragedy of Man, Judge James Gleeson. Sections one and two were for CAS members only. All three Prizes were won by Eric Smith. The General included a sculpture by Harry Seidler and entries by Paul Haefliger, Weaver Hawkins, Roy Fluke, Robert Dickerson, Peter Dodd, Max Feuerring, Michael Kmit and Elwyn Lynn. The Abstract included Nancy Borlase, John Coburn, Dahl and Geoff Collings, Roy Fluke, Weaver Hawkins, Michael Kmit, Elwyn Lynn, Eric Smith, Henry Salkauskas.

92 NSW Records. The Prize was donated by Mr Leslie Markos of Pannonia Publishing Co.

93 Their impact was not only as artists but also patrons and intellectuals. See Alcorso, The Wind You Say; Borlase, 'This Week in Art: The Vision of a Lithuanian Displaced', SMH, 25 April. 1981; J. Cassab, Judy Cassab Diaries, Sydney, Alfred Knopf, 1995; Docking, Desiderius Orban; France, Merioola and Beyond; Gates and Duncan, Body and Soul; Elwyn Lynn, Judy Cassab: Places, Faces and Fantasies, Sydney, Macmillan, 1984; A. McCulloch 'Migrant Artists' in Australia, Meanjin, vol. XIV, no. 4, 1955, pp. 511-516; and 'Migrant Artists in Australia', Meanjin, Autumn, vol. XV, no. I, 1956, p. 97.

94 Docking, Desiderius Orban, pp. 26-28.

95 ibid., p. 26.

[96] ibid., p. 27.

[97] Lynn, Cassab, p. 14.

[98] See Buckley, Cutting Green Hay, pp. 183-206, for the influence of central European intellectuals.

[99] B. Smith, 'French Painting Today', Voice, April, 1953.

[100] ibid.

[101] A German exhibition which included the work of Willi Baumeister and Ralph Nech had toured in late 1952 and early 1953, while the 1953 Annual Interstate CAS Exhibition included an exhibition of Contemporary British Art organised by the British Council and the South Australian CAS. The German show was less well promoted and as noted in NSW Broadsheet, January 1953 it toured during the Christmas break.

[102] French Painting Today; an exhibition arranged between the French and Australian Governments through the Boards of Trustees of the National Art Galleries of Australia for exhibition in the Commonwealth, January-September 1953, Sydney, 1953. See also Missingham, They Kill You, pp. 54-55; and Dutton, The Innovators, pp. 121-122.

[103] SMH, 1 March, 1953, ran several articles: 'Artist ejected from Art Gallery for ridiculing painting in French Art Exhibition', p. 3; 'Party and Sydney People and French Painting'; in the Features Section. 'Party' reported on the opening party while 'Sydney People' had Miss Edwina Hordern and Clare Lloyd Jones jnr. pondering Picasso's Orange Bodice and Miss Maretti wearing a modernistic white and black outfit while examining the black, white and orange composition of Le Corbusier.

[104] The report of the opening, SMH, 1 March, 1953, noted that while an artist was ejected for ridiculing modern art, art students were ejected for demonstrating in favour of modern art. John Kaplan, wrote a short piece promoting the exhibition in the SMH, 26 February, 1953, in which he argued that what was revolutionary about the modern art in the 'French Painting Today' was that did not depict appearances and the 'external experience'. SMH Saturday, 28 February, a photograph of the Aboriginal Lami Lami viewing Jean le Moal's Archaeology was accompanied by the caption 'Now I wonder what Namatjira would say about this one?

[105] Editorial, 'Art as a source of Anger', SMH, 6 March, 1953.

[106] SMH, 7 March, 1953.

[107] R. Drysdale, Letter to editor, SMH, 13 April, 1953.

[108] J. McAuley 'Tradition, Society and The Arts', Meanjin, vol. XI, no. 4, 1952, p. 328; also see J. McAuley, 'The Traditional View of Art', Australian Quarterly, December 1951, pp. 57-66; J. Wright,

'Art and Tradition-A Rejoinder', Australian Quarterly, March 1952, pp. 73-76; Arthur Burns, 'Theology and the Arts', Meanjin, vol. XI, no. 4, 1952, pp. 342-347; and G. Sharp 'An Artful Theory or A Theory of Art?' Meanjin, vol. XII, no. 1, 1953, pp. 114-116.

109 McAuley, 'The Traditional View of Art', p. 57.

110 ibid., p. 66.

111 Wright, 'Art and Tradition', p. 73, While Wright agreed with McAuley that there was a need for a wholly new concept of art and a stable 'coherent spiritual and social culture', she did not agree with his rebuttal of modern art and science. She advocated that the new art form was to be derived not by retreating into the past and religion but from a 'truly impartial investigation of ... [art's] relation to the life and development of man'.

112 Buckley, Cutting Green Hay, pp. 183-188.

113 See Meanjin for 1954.

114 'Author's Peace Appeal' Meanjin, vol. XIII, no. 4, p. 159 and p. 476.

115 See Buckley, Cutting Green Hay, p. 78; 'Congress for Cultural Freedom', Meanjin, vol XIII, no. 4, 1954, pp. 610-621; and 'Peace and War Convention' in 'The Uneasy Chair', Meanjin, vol. XII, no. 4, 1953, p. 487-491.

116 B. Smith, 'Australian Expressionism', Meanjin, vol. XI, no. 3, 1952, pp. 256-261; and A. McCulloch, 'Australian 'Expressionism', Meanjin, vol. XI, no 1, 1952, p. 47.

117 J. Gleeson, 'Interpretation is Personal', Voice, October 1952; S. Gould, 'Understanding the Artist', Voice, February 1953; and B. Smith, 'Carping the Critics', Voice, March 1953.

118 M. Harris, 'The Faded Years', Direction, vol. I, 1952, pp. 5-12; and 'New Directions in Painting', Direction, vol. 3, 1954, pp. 4-10.

119 Harris, 'The Faded Years', pp. 7-9.

120 Harris, 'New Directions in Painting', passim.

121 R. Crumlin, 'An Investigation of Some Aspects of the History of the Blake Prize for Religious Art 1949-1975', MA, Visual Arts, Monash University, December 1983, pp. 24-29.

122 ibid.

123 ibid., p. 3, quoted from P. Tillich and T. Greene 'Authentic Religious Art', Art Digest, vol. XXVIII, no. 19, August 1954, p. 13.

124 R. Crumlin, The Blake Prize for Religious Art – the First 25 Years. A Survey, Melbourne, Monash University Gallery, 1984, pp. 6-10.

[125] Rev. G.K.A. Bell, 'The Church and the Artist', Listener, 13 January 1955, pp. 65-66.

[126] See Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea; and S. Guilbaut (ed.), Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris, and Montreal 1945-1964, Massachusetts, MIT Press, c. 1986/7 for accounts of America's relationship with European culture in the immediate post World War II years.

[127] 'Jackson Pollock: Is he the Greatest Living American Artist?', Life, August 1949: Pollock's work were published in American Vogue, March 1950, see T.J. Clark, 'Jackson Pollock's Abstraction' in Guilbaut, Reconstructing Modernism, pp. 172-238.

[128] M. Feuerring, 'An Imaginary Interview with French Artists', Meanjin, vol. XII, no. 3, 1953, pp. 279-291.

[129] Wilenski, was widely read by the first generation of the NSW CAS abstractionists, see Margel Hinder File, Women's Art Register.

[130] M. Feuerring, 'French Art: Strength and Influence', Voice, June 1953.

[131] Feuerring, 'An Imaginary Interview', Meanjin, pp. 281, 284, 288.

[132] Feuerring, 'French Art: Strength and Influence'.

[133] B. Smith, Interview with author, 15 November, 1995, also AMPA A358; and Ward, A Radical Life, pp. 218-221.

[134] B. Smith, 'The French Art Exhibition', Meanjin, vol. XII, no. 2, 1953, pp. 165-174.

[135] Smith, 'French Painting To-Day', Voice.

[136] Smith, Interview with author. Smith was introduced to connoisseurship by A. D. Trendall while studying archaeology at Sydney University. Trendall had studied with J. D. Beazley who was a disciple of Morelli, the father of this discipline. Both Trendall and Charles Mitchell were influential on Smith. Smith had a British post-graduate scholarship to the Courtauld but as he had not completed his degree, Anthony Blunt recommended he move to the Warburg. This, he recalled, had the positive result that he encountered the teaching of Wittkower and Mitchell.

[137] Smith, 'Carping the Critics', Voice.

[138] ibid.

[139] Smith, 'The French Art Exhibition', Meanjin. It is new for Australia in its use of the iconography - iconology method of art criticism. Ursula Hoff was also a pioneer of this mode of criticism along with the Fine Art staff at Melbourne University.

[140] ibid., p. 165.

[141] ibid., p. 165.

[142] ibid., p. 167.

[143] ibid., p. 166.

[144] ibid., pp. 166-167.

[145] ibid., p. 166.

[146] ibid., p. 165. Smith took the phrase from Arnold Toynbee.

[147] Smith, Place, Taste and Tradition.

[148] Smith, 'French Painting To-Day', Voice.

[149] Smith, 'The French Art Exhibition', Meanjin, stated p. 167, that 'It is the recurring note of humanism which provides what the broadcasters call the 'continuity' for the exhibition'. Feuerring, Smith and the press reviews isolated these artists as individuals who captured the dimensions of humanity, joy, and suffering. Max Harris did likewise in his Direction articles.

[150] Smith, 'The French Art Exhibition', Meanjin, p. 170.

[151] ibid, p. 171.

[152] ibid. Smith concluded his section on Lanskoy with damaging faint praise: 'Yet there can be no doubt that Lanskoy's paintings have a pleasant charm of their own, to which the titles are enticements'.

[153] ibid., p. 171.

[154] ibid., pp. 172-173.

[155] ibid., p. 173.

[156] Sinfield, Literature, Politics and Culture, p. 86, for the British perspective.

[157] For discussions of the Americans and Canadians in Paris see J. Koenig, '*Abstraction chaude* in Paris in the 1950s' in Guilbaut, Reconstructing Modernism, pp. 1-16; C. Nuabert-Riser, 'Marginality as a Political Stance: The Canadian Painter Jean McEwen', in Reconstructing Modernism, pp. 113-129; and M. Auping (ed.), Abstract Expressionism: The Critical Developments, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, New York, Harry N Abrams, 1987.

[158] Koenig, '*Abstraction chaude*', p. 1.

[159] Auping, Abstract Expressionism, Introduction, p. 11.

[160] See G. Viatte 'Aftermath: A New Generation', in Aftermath: France 1945-54: New Images of Man, London, Trefoil Books with the Barbican Centre, 1982, pp. 11-18, 27-28.

[161] Viatte, Aftermath: France 1945-54,p. 12.

[162] As the 'French Painting Today' catalogue emphasised they engaged in the decorative arts producing life-enhancing work such as tapestries, or costumes and theatre designs: Soulages for example was praised for his designs for Roger Vaillant's Héloise et Abélard and Louis Jouvet's production of Graham Greene's The Power and the Glory. 'French Painting Today' included four Aubusson tapestries by R. Dufy, M. Gromaire, J. Lurçat and Matisse, and the catalogue entries listed artists' involvement in decorative projects including theatre and significant public works. This emphasis on decorative arts was probably part of French pride in its leadership in this field, but it would be used by opponents as a symptom of French art's tendency for decoration, charm and good taste.

[163] ibid., p. 12.

[164] Missingham, They Kill You, p. 55.

[165] Franc, 'The Early Years of the International Program and Council', pp. 118-119. See also Franc's clear historical account of the establishment of the International Foundation by the Rockefeller Foundation. The program originated by Rockefeller to counteract the negative feelings to USA in South America which was threatening oil etc. The aim of the International Foundation, which organised and sent exhibitions all around the world was 'to win respect for the cultural achievements of our free society' and convince 'other nations ... that the objectives of the United States are in harmony with and will continue to advance their legitimate aspirations from freedom, progress, and peace'. Less overtly its aim was to foster a supportive climate for the international expansion of corporate America.

[166] Nine painters were represented; Ivan le Lorraine Albright, Stuart Davis, Arshile Gorky, Morris Graves, Edward Hopper, John Kane, John Marin, Jackson Pollock and Ben Shahn. There were also sculptures by Alexander Calder, Theodor Roszak and David Smith.

[167] H. David, Stephen Spender: A Portrait with Background, London, Heinemann, 1992, pp. 262-266.

[168] D. Sutton, 'The First International Congress of Art Critics', College Art Journal, vol. VIII, no. 2, Winter 1948-49. The first International Congress of Art Critics, held in Paris in 1948-49, was called to address the issue of universalism and cultural isolation in a shrinking world. At the Congress, a key debate on aesthetics was presided over by Herbert Read. It concentrated on the respective merits of abstract and realistic painting and stimulated heated debate amongst the delegates.

[169] Mellor, A Paradise Lost, passim.

[170] 'The Responsibility of the Artist in Contemporary Society', College Art Journal, vol. XV, no. 3, 1956, pp. 197-227. An American press release, p. 205, proclaimed in 1955, that 'Art and Entertainment' had been transformed into the 'Latest "Cold War" Weapon':

> Musicals in Europe, symphonies in Asia, art exhibits in Latin America – all play a part in the culture campaign and the Government is making up the deficits. It's a new field for the US. The Communists for the first time are meeting real competition in a global battle of the arts.

[171] The theme of the American's propaganda campaign, as E. A. Spaeth's paper to the annual convention of The American Federation of Artists, 'America's Cultural Responsibilities Abroad', College Art Journal, vol. XI, no. 2, June 1951, pp. 115-120, explained, was that America was now a mature nation with a democratic and free culture that epitomised all that was good about capitalism. It was time, she informed the audience, for America to follow Britain and France and use contemporary art exhibitions as 'propaganda'; as a means for spreading knowledge about the American way of life.

Chapter 3

The NSW CAS Broadsheets: Theories of Abstract Expressionism

One of the first strategic actions of the abstract expressionists when they took control of the NSW CAS in 1955 was to appoint Elwyn Lynn, an artist with a background of intellectual activism, as editor of the NSW Broadsheet. This chapter makes a discursive exploration of the NSW Broadsheet in order to establish its centrality to the Society's production of international abstraction as an avant-garde enterprise. It argues that Elwyn Lynn played an important role in the formation of the NSW CAS's new ideological direction, shifting the NSW Broadsheet's focus onto the critical debate of ideas and the promotion of abstract expressionism as an autonomous, intellectual practice grounded in aesthetic theory and art history. International in orientation, the NSW Broadsheet's new discourse differentiated the NSW CAS from other producers of abstract art, especially those whose practice was grounded in romantic ideas of subjectivity. This enabled the NSW CAS to take a pre-eminent role in the production of abstract expressionism as an anti-establishment art form. The aim of this chapter is to establish not only the nature of this discourse but also the origins of the ideas it proposed and how they were negotiated and formulated into an ideological discourse which addressed the specifics of Sydney contemporary art and its relationship with international developments.

Part I centres on Lynn's first essay, 'Abstract and Kitsch', in order to investigate the quality and theoretical nature of Lynn's writing and the NSW Broadsheet's avant-garde rhetoric. 'Abstract and Kitsch' was the committee's manifesto which introduced the NSW CAS's new agenda calling on artists to reassert the autonomy of art because abstract art was being converted into commercial art and kitsch by Australia's burgeoning commercialism. The manifesto also set the course for action drawing attention to the French and American artists who were leading a revolt against commercialisation and Cézannesque abstraction by developing a form of 'abstractionist-expressionist' painting. An exploration of the ideas in this essay indicates that Lynn drew on pre-World War II avant-garde theory in order to re-activate the NSW CAS's traditional commitment to artistic anarchy. While Lynn's theory

of the avant-garde was inspired by a range of sources, including Herbert Read, Clement Greenberg and Leon Trotsky, he was most influenced by the liberalist theories and critical methodology of John Anderson. Anderson provided Lynn, and therefore the NSW CAS, with a seminal model for the formalist practice of abstraction as a philosophical discipline which challenged the establishment by privileging the value of the process of creativity over the actual art object. Thus, Lynn's theory of the avant-garde was shaped to both address the realities of the Sydney art scene, and relate them to international developments in abstract expressionism.

Part II explores the manner in which Lynn developed the NSW Broadsheet discourse using a combination of essays and book reviews to raise the standard of discussion within the CAS and counteract the influence of Sydney's romantic ideal of art. An analysis of the NSW Broadsheet reveals that Lynn set the terms of the debate about art criticism while promoting the move towards formalist art practice by introducing the latest developments in aesthetics, art criticism, theory and history in a polemical manner. The contention is that the NSW Broadsheet provides not only an invaluable insight into the international discourse of art in the 1950s but also into Australia's response to these developments. The 1950s expansion of art history, theory and criticism intruded onto art production in several ways. Seminal texts such as André Malraux's, Museum without Walls and Suzanne Langer's Feeling and Form encouraged the intellectualisation of art as a critical discipline in its own right. Furthermore these texts facilitated the development of international abstraction by defining abstract art as the universal language of humanism and offering ideological and practical advice to the practitioners of abstract expressionism. Elwyn Lynn and the NSW Broadsheet, then, were instrumental in establishing the ideological and theoretical framework for the NSW CAS's avant-garde production of abstract expressionism.

Part I

Theories of the Avant-Garde: 'Abstract and Kitsch'

Australia's abstract expressionists emerged in the mid 1950s when the impact of the post-World War II reconstruction period and Cold War politics were beginning to have an impact on the production of culture. Sydney's art infrastructure was undergoing major change as a result of equally major changes in Australia's social and political character. These circumstances stimulated the new leadership of the NSW CAS, John Coburn, Nancy Borlase, Roy Fluke, Peter Dodd, Elwyn Lynn, and Max Feuerring, to launch a campaign of activism, in which painting, specifically abstract expressionist painting, was positioned as oppositional if not avant-garde. With Elwyn Lynn as NSW Broadsheet editor the committee signalled its ideological shift by converting the Society's news sheet into a 'little' magazine dedicated to the promotion of abstract expressionism as a revolutionary art form. As 'an organ of opinion', NSW Broadsheet now published news of CAS activities, political, promotional and otherwise, and essays which were often proclamative and manifesto-like in quality introducing readers to a broad range of critical ideas and issues.[1] Widely circulated throughout New South Wales and interstate the NSW Broadsheet offered the CAS abstractionists a collective identity and a shared theoretical and ideological orientation that distinguished them from other practitioners of abstract art.

Lynn's first essay, 'Abstract and Kitsch', April 1955, which was tentatively couched in the language of avant-gardism reads like a manifesto for aesthetic change as it announces the bankruptcy of abstraction's geometric phase and the move into a new revolutionary aesthetic of abstract expressionism. A short polemical piece, it launched an attack on the bourgeois respectability of geometric abstraction and its connections with design and commerce, arguing that 'Abstract painting and sculpture, being the most obvious contributions of modern art, are, by virtue of that very modernity, in most danger of commercialism'.[2] Lynn used the essay to sound the warning that corporate Australia's increasing acceptance of modernism should be regarded with suspicion reminding the CAS

members that it was the plight of advanced art to be appropriated by the bourgeoisie who converted it into kitsch for the masses. He asserted that abstract painting, like all revolutionary art before it, was in the process of being converted into kitsch by the advertisers and commercial art of capitalist culture. Kitsch, he explained, was the commercialisation of 'true art products'. As 'a new phenomenon of mass culture' it posed a threat to advanced culture. Essentially 'adulterated imitation', it was a parasite that derived its inspiration from 'sophisticated art', popularising and simplifying all art forms into market commodities. As a product of commercial art, kitsch was anonymous, devoid of individual creativity and originality, and thus the antithesis of modernism. It was essentially propaganda, 'obvious, banal and dogmatic', blatant in meaning, and 'aimed only at consumer impulses and satisfaction'.[3]

On a professional and promotional level this attack on commercial art and kitsch was typical of the attitudes of the cultural elite, for whom advertising traditionally constituted capitalism's version of propaganda, and to whom the masses signified mediocrity and gullibility. Cold War politics had brought an added negativity towards commercial art as advertising was attacked for being the West's equivalent to totalitarian propaganda and brain washing, while the growth of the mass media fed concerns about the future of culture. The welfare state and the growth of the consumerist middle class had seen advertising and commercial art emerge as a new cultural force supported by government, industry and commerce. In its bid to establish the social and psychological consensus of a shared way of life during the postwar, the Australian government had followed the lead of America by turning to the advertising industry for advice.[4] Exploiting its new respectability, the advertising industry became a powerful lobby group internationally promoting itself through prestigious publications such as Advertising and the Artists and the exclusive *Alliance Graphique Internationale* as the 'art' profession of the modern age.[5] Its apologists argued that the formal language and imagery of commercial art had developed with modernism, with post impressionism, cubism, surrealism and constructivism, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Léger, Matisse and Picasso, Dali, Klee, Mondrian, Alexander Calder, and Ben Nicholson,

to create a new, abstract form of visual communication which was quintessentially modern. Ashley Havinden, argued on behalf of the advertising industry that, as advertising's great imagery was the product of talented individuals, of artists from Cassandre, Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Matter, McKnight Kauffer and Graham Sutherland to Paul Rand, it had all the creativity, moral integrity and aesthetic credibility associated with art. Better still, he asserted, advertising was not elitist. It was a powerful educational force which could bring the benefits of culture to all, and improve the quality of life through its promotion of art. Thus Havinden concluded:

> Culture and good taste may, once, have been 'caviare to the general'. Of recent years, the general public have shown that, given the chance, they can appreciate 'caviare' and even acquire a taste for it. Art is, perhaps, the one truly universal language, by-passing limitations of race, caste and class.[6]

By 1955 when Lynn was writing 'Abstract and Kitsch' commercial art and design were flourishing, with abstract imagery being extensively used by governments and business as a symbol of modernist and progress. The new popularity of contemporary design and abstract imagery posed a challenge to the privileged position of art, creating a professional rift between artists and designers as people asked was commercial art 'Art or advertising?'[7]

For the NSW CAS to maintain its credibility as the vanguard of advanced modernism it needed to re-invent itself as a young, anti-establishment art group. To facilitate the process Lynn re-activated the rhetoric of the CAS's early years when Trotsky, Greenberg, Anderson and Read first promoted abstraction as the avant-garde art form. Lynn's essay references to propaganda and the revolutionary nature of abstraction, for instance, recall Read's writings of the late 1930s. Read's promotion of art as anarchy, and of the surrealists as 'revolutionaries opposed to all the bourgeois ideals of capitalist culture', had influenced the formation of the NSW CAS, thus in referencing Read, Lynn signalled the need for the NSW CAS to revisit its ideological origins.[8]

Herbert Read: art and anarchy

In his writings, Art Now (1933), Art and Society (1937), 'What is Revolutionary Art?' (1935), and Surrealism, 1936, Herbert Read argued that art was not about external appearances but the 'expression through the senses of states of intuition, perception or emotion *peculiar to the individual*.'[9] Driven by 'internal necessity' (instinct and intuition), art was an autonomous activity; 'a mode of knowledge at once its own reality and its own end'. He believed the world of art, was 'a system of knowledge as valuable to man – indeed, more valuable – than the world of philosophy or the world of science.'[10] A central tenet of this world of art, as the surrealists and abstractionists illustrated, was the use of aesthetic anarchy to highlight the fundamental tension and struggle that exists between the individual and the social order which seeks to control and restrict his freedom.[11]

Freedom, Read argued, drawing on Benedetto Croce's theory of liberty, was not a state of rest or of least resistance, but a state of action, of projection, of self-realisation'.[12] Art was subjective, individualistic and exploratory of the spiritual aspects of mankind. Accordingly it was 'the poets and artists of each age, who constituted the world's most important oppositional force, because they relied on their imaginative powers, despising and rejecting the acquisitive materialism of men of action'.[13] Art was about the mind as opposition; about the psyche, the imagination, about spiritual and aesthetic values, which, according to Read were distinct from values in ethics, sociology, religion or philosophy. Art, he wrote:

> is concerned with sentience, with visual cognition, with symbolization, but never with intellection, generalization or judgement. On that dogma, supported as it is by the whole force of the modern science of art, the practice of contemporary art stands and falls.[14]

For Read art and aesthetics were not just about beauty, external appearances and the confirmation of the material. By their very nature they were inherently opposed to the rationalism and materialism of capitalist culture and therefore constituted a potential revolutionary force devoid of the problems of partisan politics.[15] The surrealists and abstractionists had set the example for aesthetic anarchy by demanding a total revaluation of all aesthetic values and turning to the realms of the irrational and metaphysical – 'felt

thought' – thus creating the revolutionary attitude that distinguished contemporary art as contemporary.[16] By removing the partisan politics from surrealism, Read offered artists the notion of art as an anti-establishment attitude.

It was abstraction, however, Read hypothesised under the influence of Naum Gabo, that was the ultimate order of aesthetic revolution, because, in fostering man's instinctive tendency to abstract and work freely from the imagination, abstract art led a return to the primal origins of true art. It confirmed the independent and revolutionary nature of art by placing the artist beyond the power of politics.[17] In 'What is Revolutionary Art', Read argued with persuasive fervour that the aesthetic independence of abstraction made it the true revolutionary movement of modernism and ensured its rejection by totalitarian regimes. Western society, he asserted, needed to recognise:

> that all the artists of any intellectual force belong to this movement; that this movement is contemporary and revolutionary; and that only the apparent independence and isolation of the abstract artist – his refusal to toe the line and become an emotional propagandist – only this fact hinders the Communist from accepting the abstract movement in art as the contemporary revolutionary movement in art.[18]

Read's writings were influential in Australia with his theory of aesthetic anarchy informing the anti-establishment ideology of the NSW CAS, which continued to foster its open exhibition policy throughout the 1950s as an ongoing public attack on established aesthetic values. Inspired by surrealism, it held, that because art was individualist and driven by inner necessity there could be no one criterion of perfection and thus adopted aesthetic protest as the 'revolutionary attitude' of contemporary art. For others committed to the autonomy of art, especially in the NSW CAS, it was not the politics or style of surrealism, however, that appealed. Rather it was, as Carl Plate recalled, the 'attitude' that art could be anything; that it could, like music and Paul Klee's lyrical surrealism, express the non-visual 'world existing outside the familiar'.[19] Read offered a non-dogmatic approach to artistic anarchy with his notion of a surrealist 'revolutionary attitude', and such was its appeal that his theory of opposition and abstraction (the 'essence') informed the NSW CAS

rhetoric. A quotation from his Coat of Many Colours was used in the NSW CAS's 1946 Autumn Show catalogue to instruct the public, that 'Modern art is a challenge: a challenge to lazy thoughts, to tired senses and uneasy minds' and explain, that the intention of modern art was to shock and disturb the spiritual and moral complacency of capitalism.[20]

The new abstract revolution

While much of Read's anti-capitalist, anti-communist rhetoric translated comfortably into the Cold War climate, the support for his theories of subjectivity and socialist ideal that all men were artists, was on the wane. Furthermore, abstraction was losing its oppositional impact as Lynn pointed out in 'Abstract and Kitsch'. In seeking to differentiate between kitsch and true art, Lynn expressed the NSW CAS's concern that abstract art needed to be redefined as oppositional according to the politics as the day. His essay, was a call to arms encouraging members to launch a campaign of aesthetic anarchy, reminding them that kitsch and commercial art were aimed at consumer impulses and satisfaction while true abstract art constituted symbolic representation created by individuals unconcerned about market or audience.

'True art', Lynn advised, was never satisfying, but was evasive and difficult to explain or understand. It was the product of the 'aesthetic impulse' which drove artists to create and others to appreciate, and which could never be 'satiated', never 'passive', because it 'seeks in what can only be called a creative way'. Created from the individual's 'aesthetic compulsion', true abstraction was 'aimed at no one and could be beautiful if we died tomorrow'. It operated in a realm of its own according to its own rules; it did not seek to please or placate the masses but, like all great art, operated in opposition to capitalism's manipulation of them.[21] Thus Lynn suggested, that faced with burgeoning consumerism and the respectability of geometric abstraction, the CAS needed to re-assert the autonomy of art, and re-position painting and sculpture as advanced, and distinct from the satisfying commercial art of mass culture.

Initiatives were being made in this direction, Lynn informed readers, by artists in France (Mathieu) and the American 'action' painters (Pollock and Reinhardt), who:

> Partly in revolt against commercialisation and sheer Kitsch, and partly because they thought they were imitating other painting, ... have developed a free, loose, thrown-on style in the manner of Vincente or a style of vast luminous washes of colour like Rothko.

This new abstraction created without reference to objects and appearances, Lynn speculated, 'would be difficult to imagine ... being used commercially as it is so easy to do for a Gris, a cubist Picasso, or austere Ben Nicholson'. These developments, however, were not, as some claimed, 'a desperate move by innovators to save abstract art from a cul-de-sac'. Rather they were an extension of art's traditional tendency to abstract (the aesthetic impulse to express the underlying patterns of human existence) which could be encountered in art as diverse as Braque and Klee, in the overall patterns of Brueghel's Children's Games, and in the calligraphic lyricism of Graves and Tobey. Abstraction, particularly abstract expressionism, it followed, was a diverse and ancient tradition. It was not a break with the past but a continuance of the history of art as man's search for significant form.

By referring to developments in both Europe and America, Lynn emphasised the international dimensions of the avant-garde movement alluding to the tensions between the School of Paris and American abstraction by citing the USA as the source of a 'revolt' against the dominance of European linear abstraction. In drawing the essay to a conclusion, Lynn pronounced the exhaustion of Cézannesque abstraction which constituted the academy, and the emergence of abstract expressionism as the new art of opposition with its centre in the USA. 'Perhaps the invention of the term abstract expressionism', he wrote:

> indicates that many considered that abstract art that derived from Cézanne was too dry or had all the tiresomeness of grandmother's patchwork quilt (a broken-down broken touch). U.S.A. is the centre of the abstractionist-expressionist revolt against North European linear abstraction, which is still stronger than any other in Germany, which, today, seems a little ashamed of its expressionism. Perhaps

> there's less chance with Kitsch in this form and in it may lie the future of abstract art.[22]

Lynn's essay is significant as the first referencing of abstract expressionism within Australia's critical art discourse. This referencing of American developments raises the question of when Lynn and his fellows came into contact with the American discourse, in particular the writings of Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, and the nature of its influence on the Australian discourse. It also raises larger questions about the nature of international influences on the formulation and conduct of the cultural discourse of a young nation like Australia. Do these early references offer proof, that Sydney, suffering from cultural deprivation, did jump on the bandwagon of the latest fashion from the new imperialist power, America? Or is it more a case, given Lynn's presentation of abstract expressionism as pluralist and international, and his subplot of the threatening advance of mass capitalism (America), that the issue of influence is far more complex than art historical texts have hitherto indicated?

Clement Greenberg and the American avant-garde

As the title of Lynn's essay 'Abstract and Kitsch' bears close similarity to Greenberg's 1939 Partisan Review essay, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', it is tempting to speculate that it was a homage to the American critic Clement Greenberg who defined the avant-garde for America's abstract expressionists.[23] Lynn was definitely familiar with Greenberg's writings.[24] A Trotskyite when young, he frequented Ben Palley's Haymarket Bookshop, which imported American publications, and continued to keep abreast of the left discourse, by reading Partisan Review and The Fourth International. His interests were broad, and driven by a passion for critical debate he kept a close eye on the international art discourse. He avidly consumed the few art journals that did exist, most particularly Art News and L'Oeil, together with cultural journals which, like Meanjin, Quadrant, Listener, Horizon, Nation, Life, Time and the New York Times, drove the Western world's cultural debate throughout the 1950s.[25] As evidenced in his NSW Broadsheet writings, Lynn's ideas were derived from a range of Australian and international sources including art

criticism and history, literary criticism, aesthetic theory and philosophy. The point that deserves consideration, therefore, is not if he actually knew this or that writing, but how he used these influences to fashion a critical discourse to support the Australian practice of abstract expressionism.

Lynn claimed in an interview that he derived his idea of kitsch from Greenberg and Rosenberg. While the evidence supports this it also indicates that the influence was somewhat cursory, functioning to provide the germ of the ideas rather than the formulative theory.[26] Lynn, in fact, drew on a wide range of sources to formulate his commercial art versus true art argument, and his promotion of abstract expressionism as the challenge to the latest totalitarian regimes. Any similarities with Greenberg result as much from shared influences, especially Trotsky, as from direct reference.[27] Greenberg had built on Marx and Trotsky in 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' to argue that kitsch was an establishment strategy for appropriating high culture, desensitising it and converting it into an academic panacea for the masses. The avant-garde and kitsch, he explained, were new cultural phenomena of the industrial age. The avant-garde, having withdrawn from the market place into bohemia, functioned as a 'superior' separate culture given to challenge and criticism, while kitsch was formed as a rearguard action against the aggression of the avant-garde's critique of capitalism and was designed to keep 'a dictator in closer contact with the "soul" of the people'.[28] Kitsch, it followed, was an antagonistic threat to advanced culture because, 'Should the official culture be one superior to the general mass-level, there would be danger of isolation' and the ruling elite would lose its control.[29]

Greenberg reasoned with a rather superficial commitment to Marxism, that kitsch was a product of mass culture that emerged when the peasants, settled in the cities as proletariat and petty bourgeois, learned to read and write for the sake of efficiency, but did not win the leisure and comfort necessary for the enjoyment of the city's traditional culture. 'As the new urban masses' they set up a pressure on society to provide them with a culture for their own consumption and therefore:

> To fill the demand of the new market a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, kitsch, destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide.[30]

Defined in terms of the ignorance of the masses, class struggle and profit, Greenberg's kitsch draws its blood from a fully mature culture, debasing it, depriving it of its daring and transforming it into popular taste. A product of industry, 'it is mechanical and operates by formulas' offering the public 'vicarious experience and faked sensations' while pretending 'to demand nothing of its customers except their money – not even their time'. By watering down all that is new and genuine, reducing it to academic emptiness, kitsch threatened the existence of the avant-garde and genuine culture, making it an integral part of the productive system and seducing artists with 'temptations of enormous profits'.[31]

It is clear from this brief summary of Greenberg's definition of kitsch that the similarities with Lynn's essay existed more in concept than in dogma, definition or detail.[32] Lynn's definition of kitsch is different in language and tone, especially with its references to commercial art, 'consumer impulses' and 'satisfaction'. He did not position kitsch as a product of mass ignorance but a device of establishment – of advertising, for example – to keep the masses passive and satiated, rather than, as Greenberg suggested, a class action to destroy 'superior' culture. The two did come together, however, in their agreement that kitsch embraced imitative and representational art, which by nature lent itself to propaganda and was thus adopted and exploited by totalitarian regimes, whether capitalist or communist, to ingratiate themselves with their subjects.[33]

Greenberg's notion of the avant-garde was pessimistic. He argued that its important function was not to experiment but to 'keep art moving in the midst of ideological confusion and violence' which demanded retiring altogether from public life into pure formalism and the God-like pursuit of aesthetic absolutes. Lynn was more optimistic (how can avant-garde-high culture be in decline in Australia when it is yet to establish its history) implying that art was more socially engaged. He followed Trotsky's belief that avant-garde should be critical and subversive, and that its power lay in its pursuit of experimentation – and in

new splinter movements (abstract expressionism) which introduced fresh ideas to counteract the exhaustion of radical art (geometric abstraction) and the bourgeoisie's academicisation of art. Thus, Lynn's enemies at this stage were not the forces of communism or class conflict, but the capitalist establishment and the advance of commercialisation in Australia.

Lynn neither used the term avant-garde nor articulated a dogmatic definition of it, in itself. In this, his essay bears only slight resemblance to Greenberg's. The existing similarities appear to result not from direct reference, but from shared knowledge of Trotsky whose formulation of an avant-garde theory for abstract painting was influential in the late 1930s on those of Lynn and Greenberg's generation who were seeking an alternative to Stalinism.[34] Lynn was familiar with Trotsky's theories of art and revolution having witnessed the philosopher John Anderson's adaptation of them into Australia's philosophical and cultural discourse. Rather than being derivative of Greenberg, Lynn's sometimes tentative and obscurely expressed ideas about art and society and avant-gardism were derived from an amalgam of sources. Of these sources the most fundamentally influential, methodologically and conceptually, was Anderson, who taught him philosophy at Sydney University. Lynn was an enthusiastic follower of Anderson, acting for a time as secretary of his Freethought Society. As a result Anderson's ideas and critical methodology permeate Lynn's critical writings. Lynn was not alone in this; Andersonianism was a pervasive force in Sydney, if not Australia, for three decades from 1927 to 1958 as John Docker and subsequent studies of cultural liberalism have established.[35] For this reason it is important that one has a good understanding of Anderson's theories as they applied to the practice of art.

John Anderson: art as a moral enterprise

Anderson, who has been described as one of Australia's 'few original thinkers', introduced the principle of cultural criticism as a life discipline to Sydney University students throughout the 1930s and 1940s. He was extremely influential, with his philosophy and

critical method being carried into the general community as his pupils rose to prominence in academia, the civil service, journalism, the legal profession, teaching, politics and the arts. With his Freethought Society Anderson fostered a climate of vigorous cultural debate among those studying at Sydney University, promoting freedom of speech as the central tenet of Australian intellectualism and cultural practice.[36] Most importantly Anderson encouraged his students to adopt philosophy's questioning and critique of culture as 'a way of life'; to trust nothing as absolute and use polemics along with empirical inquiry and experience as strategies for discovery, opposition and change – for the creation of the new.[37 38]

Fascinated by aesthetics, by the modernist literature of James Joyce, T.S. Eliot and the surrealists, Anderson developed a sophisticated theory of culture and artistic autonomy which he posited in two key essays, both of which appealed to the cultural elite to oppose the establishment. In 'Art and Morality', 1941, he condemned the prohibition of the import into Australia of James Joyce's Ulysses. In 'The Servile State', 1943, he protested against the advance of totalitarianism as evidenced in the Labour Government's plans for postwar reconstruction with their emphasis on social consensus and nationalism.[39] Influenced by Marx, and later by Trotsky, Anderson believed that art should be autonomous, critical and subversive and engaged in man's struggle for liberty. Anderson did not, however, adopt their theories in total.[40] He did not agree for instance with their key idea that man needed economic security and material sustenance before he could engage in cultural ideas and activities, arguing instead that mental well-being was more important than material well-being.[41]

Rejecting Marx's notion of class and power, and building on Australia's liberal heritage, Anderson argued that political power lay not in property or class but with the artist's freedom to choose his theme, and with agitation.[42] He took inspiration from Sorel to formulate a theory of a society in which each person, worker or otherwise, had an equal choice (power) to be either a consumer or a producer. He saw consumers as those who chose the ends rather than the means as a way of life, preferring security and material

comfort to productive activities and enterprise. In so doing they surrendered their independence and creative spirit (free will) for the protection of the state which promised a stable, safe and equal world free of conflict and struggle. They became slaves of the servile state which, whether capitalist or communist, was fundamentally anti-intellectual, dogmatic and oppressive.

Anderson's theory of the servile state was premised on the belief that authoritarian movements deny the necessity and naturalness of conflict, fostering instead a solidarist view of society to cover the inequalities, and suggest, that as all is well in the workplace there is no need for struggle. As he phrased it 'To aim at a stable society is to attempt to do away with the conditions under which free activities are possible' and to seek to create a climate of servility.[43] Suspicious of promises of peace, Anderson asserted, that liberty was not a condition of a safe and secure society but could only exist in struggle, because opposition and tension were essential to change and the creation of new ideas. Drawing on Benedetto Croce, he argued, that History was essentially the history of man's struggle for liberty and the movements (modernism) that had traditionally enlivened society and advanced freedom had had to engage in constant struggle, in the 'perilous and fighting life', or lose their independence and creative spirit under 'protection'.[44] The maintenance of a high level of culture, therefore, depended not on economic and political security but on the existence of a plurality of movements which took their chance in the social struggle.[45] In Anderson's opinion, the concern of 'true art', therefore, was not reform and revolution but the mind in opposition.

This is where Anderson's theory of the good artist came into play. While the bad artist was a 'purveyor of consolation, a caterer of consumptive or servile mentality', the good artist used the skills of inquiry to be subversive, 'courageously risking all to discover, [and] push past the inertia of custom and protection of privilege'.[46] Extremely creative, the good artist was a producer whose was fundamental opposed to the 'consumer' view.[47] As a producer, the intellectual-artist recognised that the power that shapes reality was in the mind, and that, what the institutions and agencies of society offered were false realities, designed to

pacify and subdue. Accordingly artists lived as 'a resistant minority', focusing their lives by choice on 'goods' – 'those mental activities and those social activities which are "free" or enterprising and which exhibit the spirit of enterprise'.

Anderson argued that 'goods' (unlike the products of the material world) were not seen as passive but progressive and moral (they were lived). They grappled with new problems and the 'causes' to which men devoted their lives; to human and mental concerns such as the 'eternal affirmation of the human spirit' which James Joyce explored in The Portrait of a Young Artist.[48] The real struggle for liberty took place in 'goods'. In the act of writing and painting about, thinking and questioning, human issues; in exploring themes, such as criminality (Crime and Punishment), loneliness (Moby Dick), exile (Ulysses), that exist in the mind and not externally.[49] According to Anderson a work of art was produced by overcoming a conflict in the artist's mind and the conflict was strongest when the artist was dealing with human issues. In producing a work the artist asserted himself against obstacles – life's conflicts – and so affirmed the inner spirit.[50] Thus the:

> building up of the work out of diverse materials, the bringing of a single structure of apparently conflicting phases, *corresponds* to the overcoming of the artist's inner conflict ... the artist solves his own mental problem or disentangles a certain complication in his mind, in solving the aesthetic problem, ie., in finding the structure of the subject. This gives a certain aesthetic characterisation of the work, viz, that it is a solution or is articulated.[51]

The key point of Anderson's argument being that it was not the inner conflict that constituted the aesthetic character or meaning of the work but rather its structure.

Anderson's formalism

Anderson, who was a strong advocate of the autonomy of art, quoted Trotsky when teaching that art was not a social servant and should be judged, 'by its own law, that is, by the law of art'.[52] He believed that art was a separate and independent sphere of inquiry in its own right, operating according to its own order, which was the order of aesthetics.[53] Anderson's was a formalist theory of art and aesthetics premised on the realist argument that the aesthetic character of objects was 'quite distinct from our attitudes to them', from

our personal and social responses to them.[54] Things have characters and 'beauty resides in the structure of such things and not in skilful evocation of feeling or enjoyment of feeling'.[55] To make an aesthetic judgment one must understand a thing's characteristics and recognise 'the wholeness, harmony and radiance of a thing; when it is apprehended as one thing, as a thing, and as the thing that it is'.[56] Joyce's work for instance did not merely do what art did but showed what art did. Thus to understand art one needed to understand its laws which had little to do with representation or imitation, emotions or social comment, but were concerned with how well the artist dealt with 'structure and theme'. As in literature the meaning was not in the words themselves but in the structure (rhythm, sequences and phrases, metaphor and the way the words are arranged) as it was with music and painting.[57]

Anderson taught that a work of art must be built around 'a real theme, a recognisable complication whose working out has an objective order, if there is to be any appreciation of structure, any recognition of the goodness and badness of works and thus any aesthetic theory and discussion'. Aesthetic contemplation consisted of recognising how well the great artist 'seizes' his theme, shaping and structuring it, consciously or unconsciously, building everything up around it so that it hangs together; 'arranging the elements of his art and theme into a single work that is beautiful in its wholeness and not simply a collection of bits and pieces'.[58] The aesthetic question – the question of quality- therefore was simply 'whether the material is developed properly; an analysis of the subject, a presentation of its structure, will be what we look for in a work of art'.[59] Good art, unlike commercial art, as Lynn argued in the NSW Broadsheet, was not concerned with pleasing the public but with how well it *deals* with (structures) its human theme. Engaged in the ongoing struggle for liberty, so frequently epitomised as the conflict between innovation and conservatism, true art was about the creative process and not with outcomes and ends – not with revolution. The artist worked for himself, without concern for the marketplace and social organisations, seeking to break rules and transgress boundaries and discover new perceptions and insights that might offer the way out of a social impasse.[60] Within Anderson's schema 'art

for art's sake' was not about lifestyle, artistic intention or a retreat into formalism, but - 'a good' - a moral enterprise.[61]

The question, of course, is to what extent Anderson's teachings influenced the NSW CAS and the Sydney avant-garde practice of contemporary abstraction. His theories were clearly sympathetic to the whole notion of the CAS and to the oppositional practice of abstract art. It is probable that his formalist and 'art for art's sake' arguments predisposed many, like Lynn, towards abstract expressionism; the international manifestations of which appeared to endorse Anderson's privileging of the creative act.[62] One definite attraction of Andersonianism for Lynn was its rejection of romanticism and its interpretation of art as the subjective experience of emotions and feelings. Anderson's 'realist' philosophical interpretation of art for art's sake and the mind in opposition, offered Lynn's generation a serious theoretical alternative to Sydney's romantic theory and criticism, and to Herbert Read's equally romantic reading of abstraction and subjectivity. This would important to the abstract expressionists as they became increasingly under attack for the supposed self indulgent subjectivity of their work.

As Elwyn Lynn's 'Abstract and Kitsch' illustrated, Andersonianism affected his readings of world developments. Lynn for example drew on Anderson to define abstract expressionism as an international movement of diverse groups of abstractionists struggling and cooperating in a climate of creative conflict to produce the new.[63] This was in marked contrast to Greenberg's dogmatic and exclusive notion of the Americans as *the* avant-garde with its accompanying nationalistic rhetoric which was the antithesis of Anderson's ideals of free will, pluralism and anti-solidarism. Perhaps the most important factor for Sydney artists, however, was that Anderson was a respected philosopher who argued that artistic activities were of great cultural significance and should be divorced from the market place, social posturing and nationalism. Together with his influential followers, Anderson established the intellectual and moral credibility of artists in a traditionally unsympathetic society, privileging art as the highest form of cultural production while providing artists with a model for laissez-faire avant-gardism. Through heated public debate and writings the

Andersonians established the arts as a respected mode of cultural criticism with the moral responsibility to act as a necessary, subversive social conscience, as Australia moved increasingly into corporate capitalism. The contention, therefore, is that while Lynn drew on international avant-garde theory to formulate the NSW CAS's manifesto, it was John Anderson's theories and critical methodology which enabled him to shape an ideological platform that was ideally suited to the artistic traditions of Sydney and Australian art.

Re-activating the avant-garde

The NSW CAS was not alone in promoting abstract expressionism as the avant-garde. While the revitalised Melbourne Branch expended much of its energy constructing the history of the 'Angry Penguins' circle, it also enthusiastically promoted abstract and non-objective art in its broadsheet and exhibition program, establishing Ian Sime as its spokesperson for abstract expressionism.[64] The potential fusion of expressionism with abstraction to create a new humanist art form was a much discussed topic especially since the 'French Painting Today' exhibition had drawn Australian attention to the changes in international art being caused by Europe's decline and the rise of the Cold War super powers. The rhetoric that accompanied the French exhibition, as we has been shown, emphasised the spiritual crisis facing mankind and pressured artists to take a stance as the super powers appropriated art and culture to conduct an ideological warfare.

As Cold War politics increasingly intruded into artistic production, figurative modernism became associated with the USSR's appropriation of social realism as the official art form of communism. This development brought abstraction under greater scrutiny, with the most contentious issue being whether abstract art was capable of communicating the significant dimensions of mankind's spiritual crisis. Max Harris believed not, asserting that abstraction was a threat to Australian contemporary art, the strength of which was figurative. Lamenting the award of the Pittsburgh International Prize to Ben Nicholson and prizes at the international sculpture competition on the subject of 'The Unknown Political

Prisoner' to Barbara Hepworth and Margel Hinder, he wrote of feeling duped by *pure* abstraction:

> I cannot relate a pure abstract to the emotive concept of 'an unknown political prisoner'. I don't think a *pure* abstract CAN have anything to do with a humanistic subject. I do not want to see the strengths of Australian contemporary art dissipated by a flood of abstracts.[65]

Art, he warned, was growing increasingly decadent as egocentric and subjective abstract work was dominating the international art scene, overwhelming exhibitions and carrying off the prizes. It was Harris' and others belief that the humanity of art was under threat from the advance of international abstraction as it encouraged artists to withdraw into indulgent individualism and self expression.

The practice of abstract art then was becoming increasingly controversial and contested. Elwyn Lynn's appointment as NSW Broadsheet editor therefore can be read as a counter attack by the new committee of the NSW branch as it set out to give itself and abstract expressionism a critical and historical claim to avant-gardism. Drawing on his Andersonian background, Lynn provided the supporting discourse, countering the campaign against abstraction by shifting the emphasis away from romantic ideals of subjectivity and self-expression to formalism and intellectual autonomy of art. His aim with the NSW Broadsheet, he informed Bernard Smith, was to challenge and change the nature of the NSW CAS's discourse. He wanted to:

> raise its standard from a gossip cross between a high-school paper and a local liberal ladies' pamphlet: to mention aesthetics, to hint there is something besides the broken touch, called linear art, and to undermine the notion that to be contemporary for the sake of contemporary is a psychological programme and not an aesthetic one.[66]

On appointment he immediately began introducing theoretical ideas using the 'Books' section in March 1955 to briefly contrast opposing attitudes to abstraction expressed in Suzanne Langer's Feeling and Form (significant form) and Wyndham Lewis's The Demon of Progress in the Arts (anti-abstraction) and pose the question of whether 'works of art can symbolically represent emotional qualities, atmosphere'. He also introduced Malraux's The

Voices of Silence suggesting that 'art is a movement of its own, with its own history' and not, as many books treat it, 'a mere off-shoot of more "basic" social movements'. Thus he engaged in instructing readers, while establishing a theoretical framework within which to debate not only the nature of abstract expressionism but also its place in the art history. By referencing international art texts and aesthetics he sought to establish abstract art as an autonomous field of inquiry, concerned not with the day-to-day of Australian society but with the universal struggle for understanding.[67]

In the following months Lynn introduced essays as a regular feature to facilitate education and debate. Always argumentative and sceptical, frequently sarcastic and witty, his essays were structured in the Andersonian manner which opened an argument with an established fact or idea which was then empirically tested against other views and the local experience for credibility. Published in conjunction with 'Books' and 'Significant Publications', the essays set the polemic, while the book reviews highlighted key sources for new ideas and background information. Structured in this manner the NSW Broadsheet provided a critical and theoretical framework, based on aesthetics, criticism and art history, for the NSW CAS's discourse of abstraction.

The NSW Broadsheet's discourse lent a decidedly different character to the NSW CAS from that of other branches, especially Melbourne, whose broadsheet was more introspective and amateurist in the traditional CAS manner.[68] The essays in the Victorian Broadsheet lacked critical consistency, with those by John Reed, Barrie Reid, George Mora and Ian Sime not being informed by the current climate of international writings and ideas as much as by the subjective and personal. Its focus was the local experience and traditions together with the internal artistic politics and developments within Australia, Melbourne and the CAS. In contrast the NSW Broadsheet was marked by greater breadth and depth of argument and information, and by cohesiveness, not only in its agenda of avant-gardism, but also in its reporting of contemporary art activities at home and abroad, whether abstract or figurative. It projected a greater sense of collectiveness between the committee of the NSW CAS and its disparate membership which suggests that the views

expressed therein were representative of the group, and that accordingly, Lynn's essays were intended as Manifestos by the NSW CAS committee. It is significant that in turning to Greenberg, Malraux, Langer, and Wyndham Lewis, Lynn signalled that the intention was not to start anew. Rather the aim of his essay 'Abstract and Kitsch' was to re-activate the established avant-garde tradition of abstract art and thus remind NSW CAS members that it was their engagement in this tradition that first distinguished their practice from other artist societies and groups.

Part II

Theories of Abstract Expressionism: New Criticism and History

At the same time as he laid the ideological foundations for the NSW CAS's avant-garde agenda, Elwyn Lynn established the philosophical framework for the production of abstraction in a series of essays which offer an invaluable insight into the theoretical shift that accompanied the art world's move into abstract expressionism. In the August 1955 NSW Broadsheet, Lynn used quotations from the aesthetic theorists Ducasse, Collingwood, E. Hanslick, J.F. Herbart and G.E. Moore, to challenge Sydney's popular belief that art was subjective and that its aim was to excite emotions and be expressive of feelings and beauty. He suggested that the validity of this theory had long been disputed using G.E. Moore to argue that even in 1903, it was asserted that as all 'judgements of taste are merely subjective', notions of ideal beauty and non-beauty were false.[69]

The theory that imitation constituted the aim and aesthetic value of art, Lynn stressed, had also been under challenge with J.F. Herbart explaining to art lovers in 1808:

> To appraise the essential value of a work of art rightly, we must set aside the effect of association so far as it does not actually condition the apprehension of the work. It is only a particular application of the maxim that imitation can never be set up as a principle of aesthetic.

Indeed, as early as 1798 art had been recognised as a distinctive creative process that involved a great deal more than the imitation of emotions and appearances, when Goethe

argued that when the artist selected 'a subject from nature, the subject [was] no longer under nature's jurisdiction'. As Goethe stated, it was a:

> fact, that the artist creates the subject at the moment when its significant, characteristic, interesting features dawn upon him – at the moment ... when he endows the subject with higher value.[70]

Lynn used this introduction to aesthetic theory to establish the principle that art constituted a critical discipline in its own right and promote the need for a formalist theory of criticism. He was clearly launching an attack on Sydney's Elie Faure modes of criticism in his bid to raise the standards of Sydney's contemporary art discourse. Inspired by Anderson, he presented aesthetics as a philosophical discourse in which the nature and value of art was continuously defined. He emphasised that aesthetics were not about absolutes but competing theories which informed and affected the practice of criticism and thus the evaluation and appreciation of art. To stress the point further, he concluded by referring to two recent collections of essays by Harold Osborne's, Aesthetics and Criticism and William Elton's, Aesthetics and Language thus drawing attention to a shift of attitude in the study of aesthetics as the nature of art, and its relationship to feeling, abstraction and expressionism were being redefined.[71]

Aesthetics and criticism

Stimulated by his reading of Osborne, Lynn published a lengthy essay titled 'Criticism' in September 1955 which attempted to stimulate debate by 'tentatively' articulating a formalist theory of art which rejected the connection of art with aesthetic emotions and confirmed the autonomy of art. He began by privileging the artist as *the* authority highlighting the tensions between the artist and the critic whose role, he stressed, was to educate and inform the public about art. The artist was sympathetic to the critic who had unenviable demands placed on him not only to show equal appreciation of all art from 'the serious fun of Klee, the riotous colour of Géricault', but also to 'distinguish the baroque from rococo in abstract expressionism'. However, when the critic strayed from his designated role and proposed 'to indicate to the art public the absolute and relative merits of a work and sets up

to instruct the reader where they lie', then the artist was rightly critical. This, Lynn asserted, was because such criticisms were usually not based on what the artist knew to be the true nature of art, but on 'latent aesthetic theories' that, having much to do with feelings and little to do with art, were invalid.[72]

Having set the scene, Lynn embarked on a critique of contemporary criticism to emphasise the importance of aesthetics to criticism, of intellectual debate to art. He proposed that all criticism involved some theory of aesthetics because:

> any critic who repudiated valuations from his work and refused to arrange works in a hierarchy of excellence would have to equally consider, says Osborne, shipping invoices and sonnets, cathedrals and jakes, portraits in galleries and wanted photographs at the police station.

The problem with contemporary criticism, therefore, was not aesthetics per se but the nature of the criteria of excellence and whether it was based on 'invalid' aesthetic theories or on an understanding of the practice of painting as an autonomous field of critical inquiry.

To illustrate his thesis, Lynn proceeded to identify and discredit the many modes of criticism in use, beginning with 'the most commonly invalid' which 'deal with the effect of the work rather than with the work itself'. People, he explained, learnt 'nothing of the work' if they are told that it 'helps the class struggle, impedes the tourist trade, promotes religious revival or provides escape for the neurotic or nostalgic.' Emotions, class struggle and catharsis did not constitute the value or meaning of a work of art but states of mind and social circumstances. Indeed, 'That the work should have pleasurable effects (corpses on crosses!) meets with the objection that one would be discussing peoples' mental states, but not the work of art'. Lynn attacked Sydney's romantic heritage, and to a degree the NSW CAS's geometrical abstractionists and their mentor Herbert Read, by asserting that transcendental theories, which claim that art's intention was 'to lift us to a higher plane or reveal eternal truths more vividly', were also invalid. By placing art in the realm of the subjective they led to ambiguous and nonsensical pronouncements such as André Marchand's claim that: "Behind each tomato is the universal the painter must contemplate. It is simple and a mystery"!' Pictures, Lynn stated rather dogmatically, 'must

be seen before they are judged, but mere seeing them, feeling about them, being stimulated by them does not make them good'.[73]

Casting his net wide Lynn dismissed virtually all established modes of criticism including those 'Realistic and naturalistic theories, that amount to no more than the craft of imitation' which 'are still around but in heavy disguise' in surrealism's 'verisimilitude'. He also attacked 'those abstract painters who claim they are painting the real nature, the true essence of say, a stove ... claiming to imitate what exists below surface appearances'. 'The impressionist method by which the critic tries to arouse in you the experience he had of the work' was fraught with 'logical and practical difficulties' because the critic was once again dealing with 'feelings' which vary from individual to individual and are immeasurable. This, Lynn claimed, was also the problem with the expressionist theories which asserted either that 'the painting embodies an emotion' or 'that this emotion was in the creator and is recreated in the spectator'. With Andersonian fervour, Lynn stressed that the truth was emotions did not exist in paintings, they existed 'only in minds and only the painter or his psychoanalyst knows what feeling impelled the creator'. As these theories of criticism confused emotions and effect with art, they were therefore unreliable when it came to judgments of artistic merit and intent and therefore should no longer be sustained. Nor, Lynn continued, should:

> scepticism – "art is basically relative" – or obscurantism – "art is incommunicable" be endorsed, because these were 'the refuge of challenged critics, who say it is all a matter of private feelings. This would reduce art criticism to an autobiography of the critic.

The solution, therefore, lay in the development of an objective and intellectually rigorous mode of criticism that recognised art as an autonomous discipline with its own criteria for measuring achievement.

Positing his formalist model of criticism, Lynn argued, that the real subject of criticism, and for that matter art, was not the subjective response. It was those elements that constituted a work of art in its entirety, that is 'the aesthetic forms, relations, tensions, balanced harmonies, resolution of opposed movements and the like, along with colour juxtapositions

and intensities'. 'If the critic's task is to deal with formal values,' he continued, 'he will do more than apply the terms "good" and "beautiful": he will delineate what qualities of the beautiful he finds in the work'. He will seek to assess a piece in terms of its completeness as a work of art, pointing out 'the parts of a work that do or do not imply a complete or possible work' and, like a lawyer, construct a logical case based on the factual evidence before him on the canvas and not on intangible feelings.

The intentions behind Lynn's 'mention' of criticism and aesthetics were to stir the dead wood within the NSW CAS and raise the standard of criticism which, he asserted, was impeded in Australia 'by the lack of space, the necessarily continuous fight against entrenched academicism, absence of a critical journal and dearth of a critical public'. In typical Andersonian manner Lynn issued the disclaimer that 'much of the foregoing is tentative' and invited 'opinions on criticism, homegrown and imported'.[74] His intention was not to be dogmatic but to be polemical and create a situation in which the conflicting opinions necessary for lively critical debate could flourish. In this he was successful, attracting responses from Max Feuerring, Weaver Hawkins, Oscar Edwards and Reg Cummings which he published in the NSW Broadsheet.[75] All were clearly discontented with the state of Sydney's criticism, and agreed that the true critic, as Feuerring put it, should understand 'his secondary position in art', keep 'his language ... simple and intelligible to all without embroidered circumlocutions' and recognise that 'His great task ... is to put into words the visual elements such as form, colours and composition'.[76] With different words and phraseology they argued that the critic's role was not to create taste or 'dwell on subject matter', because as Weaver Hawkins put it, 'any intelligent person should be able to read that for himself'. The critic's job was 'to suggest the unifying content of the work in which it has its artistic being or lack of it'. While a critic might 'justifiably point out faults in colour-notes, rhythmic movements, balanced tensions etc; all, ... technical things' he could 'not condemn on grounds of sensibility, poetry, mystery; all emotive things'. It was not the critic's part to tell the artist what to do or how to do it, but to interpret what the artist did.[77]

Lynn's efforts to intellectualise the NSW CAS discourse was well supported, with Reg Cummings, who was cynical about artists' involvement in controversy and criticism, hypothesising that the arts were 'nothing more than mediums of thought and communication' and contemporary art was 'a new language'. Cummings advised, that contemporary art could only be understood by 'the average man' if he was prepared to 'Learn the artist's language', and that artists should remember that they were thinkers and 'forget the word creator – creation follows thought'.[78] More sophisticatedly, Feuerring and Weaver Hawkins agreed with Lynn's veiled attack on the amateurist and socialite disposition of Sydney's art critics, arguing that criticism required 'a comprehensive theory of aesthetics',[79] and 'a theory of art'.[80] Max Feuerring, even suggested that 'The true critic [was] a scientist, a scholar with long years of study at universities in art centres and private research'. The consensus of the dialogue was that art was first and foremost an intellectual and creative discipline – an autonomous field of inquiry – and that criticism had paid little credence to this to date. Feuerring attributed this weakness in Australia criticism to cultural isolation explaining:

> The Science of art (Kunst-wissenshaft) can be studied, additions constantly made, but rarely in Australia, for we have so little exchange of art that no comparing is possible, except by prints, usually mass produced, deformed, examples that produce wrong conclusions. This resulting lack of assurance can lead a critic to compensate his limitations by friendship with the artist, a feature of small and isolated communities, where the friendship intensifies with the quality of achievement.[81]

Weaver Hawkins, who was less affected by 'the cultural cringe', made the important observation that criticism 'in the way we mean it today' was 'a fairly recent innovation brought into existence by the great activity and variety of modern trends and the growth of many kinds of publications'.[82]

A Museum Without Walls: the new history and criticism of art

Weaver Hawkins' observation about the changing nature of art criticism was well grounded and reflected the impact on cultural practice of the postwar expansion in publishing, reproduction and media was having on cultural practice. The expansion of the print media

was producing a diffusion of Western intellectualism and cultural ideas on an unprecedented scale. In the sphere of art, advances in photogravure, colour separation, inks and print technology and cost efficiency brought a vast increase in the number of illustrated publications. At the same time the Cold War reconstruction of Western culture was affecting the nature of art history and criticism. These trends were evident in Lynn's NSW Broadsheet monthly book section where a new genre of illustrated world histories of art, including B. Meyers, Art and Civilisation, H. Read's, A Concise History of Modern Painting, and W. Haftman's, Painting in the Twentieth Century, appeared alongside an increasing number of regionalist art histories which included N. Pevsner, The Englishness of English Art, and B. Smith's The European Vision and the South Pacific.[83] These new art histories constructed a narrative of universal humanism which set the perspective for the increasingly popular phenomenon of monographs on modern artists (Paul Nash, Jackson Pollock, Modigliani and Picasso, Sidney Nolan, Matisse) the rhetoric of which celebrated the individual's contribution to 'mankind's' quest for the universal experience. As the titles suggest, modern art was the focus of publishers and its history was being shaped into the different stylistic categories of individual, group and movements with regional stylistic histories being prominent as was indicated by Sam Hunter's, Modern American Painting and Sculpture; School of New York, L. Thomas', Modern Australian Painting and Sculpture, The World of Abstract Art – American Abstract Artists, John Rothenstein', Modern English Painters and Sam Hunter's, Modern French Painting.[84]

This proliferation of stylistic art histories was facilitated by the advances in reproduction which, André Malraux argued in 1953, were making the art of all countries and all eras accessible for all to view, compare, and interpret for the first time in history. Malraux predicted, in his influential study Museum without Walls, that, as the world of museums had introduced a 'wholly new attitude towards the work of art', so the age of reproduction would create a totally new artistic order for the world and lead to greater intellectualisation of art.[85] The age when art was restricted to the walls of museums, he asserted, was over. A museum without walls was opening out to create a new situation where the student of art:

> can examine color reproductions of most of the world's great paintings, can make acquaintance with a host of second-rank pictures, archaic arts, Indian, Chinese and Pre-Columbian sculpture of the best periods, Romanesque frescoes, Negro and 'folk' art, a fair quantity of Byzantine art .... We ... have far more great works available to refresh our memories than those which even the greatest of museums could bring together.

In Malraux's opinion the benefit of this new museum was that it would 'carry infinitely farther that revelation of the world of art, limited perforce, which the "real" museums offer us within their walls'.[86]

The universality of style

It was Malraux's theory that the museum had led to the intellectualisation of art by isolating pictures from their original context and often hanging them with 'rival and even hostile works'. Assisted by the wide availability of reproductions, scholars and curators were able to now categorise the world of art into stylistic groups, family types, themes and to resuscitate neglected periods and artists. Thus art was becoming more and more intellectualised.[87] Reproduction had long been central to the study of art history and connoisseurship had helped to shape it by having 'multiplied accepted masterpieces, promoted other works to their due rank and launched some minor styles – in some cases ... invented them'.[88] The latest advances in print technology, especially colour, were having an even greater impact, changing not only the discipline of art history but the understanding of art and its relation to the history of mankind.[89] Colour reproduction, Malraux argued, was breaking the stranglehold that drawing had had in the appreciation of art when engraving and black and white photographs had been the predominant media of access to the world of art, and was forcing a reassessment of the values by which art works were judged. The introduction of the language of colour to art history, meant that 'picture, fresco, miniature and stained-glass window seem of one and the same family':

> For all alike ... have become 'colorplates'. In the process they have lost their property as objects; but, by the same token, they have gained something: the utmost significance as to the *style* that they can possibly acquire.[90]

According to Malraux, the photographic reproduction process was feeding a fresh understanding of style and a new critical methodology because art works could be photographed to draw attention, through lighting and cropping etc, to previously unnoticed similarities. This process was further facilitated by the standardised photographic formats of size, tonality, matt, gloss, and so on which helped to simulate a sense of family, of stylistic groupings across artists, ages and races. For the first time the complete works of artists could be compiled, and artists could be assessed according to their personal style or within the grouping of a school or period. Themes could be detected over centuries or across cultures and this, Malraux contended, was forcing a reassessment of what makes *the* masterpiece, and, more importantly, the purpose of art.

'A world-wide humanism'

A deeply committed humanist, Malraux[91] envisaged that these developments would break down cultural barriers, especially national and racial, and create:

> a new field of art experience, vaster than any so far known ... And this domain [the world of art] - which is growing more and more intellectualized as our stock-taking and its diffusion proceeds and methods of reproduction come nearer to fidelity-is for the first time the common heritage of mankind.[92]

History would no longer focus on the Greco-Roman tradition, but instead tentatively sort through 'the successive resuscitation of the whole world's past' to create a new world wide order. Within the Museum without Walls:

> our notions of life and history of art, indeed our notions of art itself, have changed still more, now that the significance of ancient statuary is being appraised in terms of the ancient world as a whole ... against the East, India, and China, and the non-Romanized barbarian world.[93]

The world, Malraux suggested, was in the process of rebuilding the nature of culture, of 'the quality of the world', not just from the traditions of Western Europe but from all other times and cultures, and this offered the opportunity to create 'a humanism unconceived of as yet; a world-wide humanism'.[94]

The greatest vehicle for Malraux's visionary world order was modernism with its celebration of formalism and individualism. He proposed that the viewing of art across cultures and

time had brought an awareness of the modernist truth that style was a means of expression in itself, and that the real 'subject' of painting was 'the presence of the artist himself upon the canvas'.[95] It was now clear that painting, like music, was a language quite independent of the thing or subject portrayed and that its concern was not politics or religion but the artistic expression of the existentialist experience.[96] Art was an autonomous intellectual and spiritual pursuit, the 'supreme value' of which was 'Creation'; that is the individual artist's struggle to give birth, and so metaphysically defeat 'Destiny'.[97] As man grappled with the language of art, past, present and future, to 'express' his particular interpretation of the world, he re-invented himself and art anew, and revolted against fate, against fatality.[98] As the Museum without Walls illustrated, each masterpiece constituted a victory over time, over fate, not because the ideas it dealt with were beyond time, but because a 'living style' had been wrung from the past. Indeed the new museum was revealing for the first time the universality of art, and opening:

> up a field of infinite possibilities bequested us by the past, revealing long forgotten vestiges of that unflagging drive that affirms man's victorious presence. Each of the masterpieces is a purification of the world, but their common message is that of their existence, and the victory of each individual artist over his servitude, spreading like ripples on the sea of time, implements art's eternal victory over the human situation.[99]

Art, and not party politics, was the way to revolution, and it was those archetypal modern artists Goya and Manet, who were the revolutionaries, the heroes because they struggled to 'express' the agony of their lives – to face their subterranean voices - and to forge a humanist vision of the spirit that was at once universal and liberating.

While it can be argued that Malraux's grand humanist vision was the product of the Cold War depoliticisation of art, it can be equally argued that it involved the depoliticisation of the avant-garde and the politicisation of culture. Malraux was the Minister for Cultural Affairs in the de Gaulle government. His Museum without Walls had its origins in the advice he had given to de Gaulle to disseminate 'the idea of a democratic culture' by sending art reproductions all over the world and 'opening to all comers, the doors of the cultural past'.[100] The contention is that Malraux was instrumental in incorporating the Western

ideals of egalitarianism and universalism into a new history of art and culture which advanced the ideal of internationalism in the face of increasing anxiety about the spread of communism.

Malraux's The Voices of Silence was essentially a manifesto for the unfolding of a new Western imperialism which, widely acclaimed and debated, was adopted as a legitimising narrative for the advance of international democracy. Containing statements such as:

> The first culture to include the whole world's art, this culture of ours, which will certainly transform modern art (by which until now it was given its lead), does not stand for an invasion but for one of the crowning victories of the west ... [101]

it gave validity to the West's dissemination of culture, which was epitomised by the work of UNESCO, the cultural propaganda wing of the United Nations. As Hal Missingham informed Meanjin readers in 1954, the manner in which UNESCO's extensive educative program of books, pamphlets, films, loan exhibitions and portfolios of 'the best reproductions of fine art from all over the world including the murals of Masaccio, Egyptian and Indian art and Australian aboriginal art' was making the world of art accessible to all was 'unique in history'.[102] UNESCO, he argued, was breaking down cultural isolation and deprivation and opening up a new age of cultural tolerance with its ideal of educating for peace and progress, plurality and universalism.

The international politics of abstract expressionism

Malraux's writings, which were widely read by artists and intellectuals, are representative of a general trend to reshape art history and criticism to support the humanist discourse of internationalism, democracy and individualism. Within this myth of art and civilisation the artist was defined as a cultural and spiritual hero, and art as 'a vocation', while creativity signified the ultimate freedom and triumph of the spirit over the material.[103] While still a revolutionary dedicated to surmounting the fate of man, the artist's concern was no longer with the masses and material change but with the creation of a secular spiritualism that involved notions of truth, the freedom of the individual spirit and the eternal nature of mankind. The story of art became less a record of beauty and verisimilitude and more a

record of 'successive emancipations' and 'harvests' of the 'seeds of individual genius' as the artist was seen to pit his freewill against the demands of the state to 'style' something deeply personal and revelationary from the universal language of art.[104] True freedom, as Kenneth Clark told an American audience in 1955, was found only in genius and:

> To believe in genius is to believe in inspiration ... a belief which involves a mystique as mysterious as a belief in inspiration ... Inspiration is a form of possession; but it is also the highest freedom, for only at such moments can man escape from the thousands of preconceptions which normally enclose his mind.[105]

It was Clark's theory that true genius was to be found in personal style, in the artist's ability to transcend the conventions of the past and present (the limitations of style) and infuse art's stylistic vocabulary with the private and personal, the significance of which resided in the shared fate of mankind. He reasoned that the inspiration necessary for genius was the product of that restless 'spirit' which made Western art great and produced the great crises of the human spirit on which genius feeds. Like many Cold War art historians, Clark believed that genius – Leonardo's visionary military machines, Goya, Picasso's Guernica, Dada – emerged not from peace but from crisis and conflict, from man's darkest moments; from that restlessness which was the source of creativity as well as the source of wars and destruction. As Clark phrased it, while there might be good reason to regret the mania for change and originality in Western art, 'the restlessness of Western man is a fact, and ... his spirit has been most powerfully illuminated when most in ferment'.[106]

The combined effect of the expansion in mass reproduction and the new art histories was the depoliticisation of art and its establishment as an autonomous field of human endeavour. Art was no longer concerned with social radicalism or with political reform, which Clark emphasised when he wrote:

> To have formulated a belief in a social philosophy is already for the artist, prejudicial to his freedom. Velasquez, we may be sure, never gave much thought to the theory of kinship nor Bellini to the oligarchic ideals of Venice[107]

The shift of emphasis was to culture, to ideals of 'co-operation ... for intellectual freedom, economic security and the promotion of peace and international understanding.'[108] This

shift was evident in Kenneth Clark's Britain, where the Marxist artist and critic John Berger's attempts to define realism in political terms were vigorously criticised for 'dragging politics into art'.[109] Heartened by what appeared to be an upsurge in realism in the early to mid 1950s, Berger had begun to proclaim a return to social realism, to realist work whose content 'has clear social implications', as distinct from socialist realism which was 'militantly aware of social implications'.[110] He also launched a combative attack on the privileging of abstraction, especially in competitions such as 'The Unknown Political Prisoner', arguing that art should not be above the local, urgent and immediate issues because it was inherently implicated in the everyday politics by which people were imprisoned.[111] The aim of art, he asserted, was not visual experience but significant content. Its intention was to make comment on and express with a sense of humane purpose 'the development of life' contained in 'definite, specific particular experiences'. The shift into formalism and pure aestheticism, exemplified by abstract expressionism, constituted 'a turning away', into 'an entirely contemplative world' which as 'a refuge for the privileged' was representative 'of a culture that was disintegrating into trivia and despair'.[112] But as Geoff Dryer has stressed, Berger was a lone voice campaigning for 'the reintegration of art and society at a time when technological and social changes were causing art to be increasingly self-determining, increasingly grounded in its own logic'.[113]

The fact was the postwar phenomenon of mass reproduction and the new history and criticism had helped to change art's relation to society 'and thereby the character of art itself, past and present'.[114] Reflecting on these developments in 1960, Harold Rosenberg observed that mass reproduction created an imaginary museum of ever increasing global proportions in which art works, detached from their original material and social environments, took on a new value for society and the artist. This new world of art was so overwhelming it needed to be organised by art historians and critics and transformed into illustrations, in order to bring out the critical or cultural concept and explain art in manageable stylistic categories.[115] Instead of working in a single tradition from the past (Greek/Renaissance), artists in the 1950s could fashion the future, the new, from a vast

repertoire of stylistic options and influences including primitive, folk and the whole gamut of non-Western art, even Chinese calligraphy. Within this schema, realism no longer constituted the 'attitude to life' it had in the 1930s and 1940s, but was just one of the numerous stylistic possibilities open to contemporary artists. Plurality and stylistic freedom became the catch phrases as the seemingly unlimited stylistic possibilities fostered the notion of choice which acted as a metaphor for democratic freedom.

John Berger encountered a strong lashback as his critics used his Marxism to discredit his support for social realism as anti-democratic accusing him of reducing art to propaganda.[116] His main opponent was Patrick Heron who used a formalist rhetoric of to reduce what was in reality a conflict of political ideologies to a conflict of styles.[117] He reasoned that realism was 'that noble disciplined straining to register with absolute objectiveness what the eye sees', which was rare in contemporary life.[118] The implication of this hypothesis being that the principle at stake was not partisan politics but the evolution of new art forms, and that realism with its roots in the West's renaissance tradition had been made redundant by modernism's discovery that the universal truth of art was man's 'will to form – and all form as such is abstract'.[119] In reply to Berger, Heron argued that 'Art' was 'in a vital sense autonomous', it was 'a spiritual discovery', the concern of which was 'the aesthetic sensation' which was essentially subjective.[120] Indeed, he extrapolated in The Changing Forms of Art, it was 'an unquestioned tenet of modern art that the major source of creative ideas lies within; that inspiration is mainly subjective.'[121] Therefore it was true that an artist must draw upon 'life' or 'nature' or 'reality' direct because:

> the aesthetic concepts he absorbs from works of art are valueless to him if he cannot use them as tools for grappling with his own, essentially private, experience in the face of nature. The best art in any Western country has, therefore, at once an international and intensely local character.[122]

Realism, it followed, needed to be redefined as the expression of 'the total experience', of the 'aesthetic sensations' of 'significant form' and 'significant essence' experienced when contemplating a particular landscape or object.[123] This demanded the forging of a 'new

formal image', and the recognition that art was a 'pictorial science' in which pictorial means are an end in themselves[124] and technique:

> simply ... the power to materialise a concept, the power to give concrete material form to what was previously an *invisible* complex (within the artist) of thought and feeling, of intellectual abstraction and emotion.[125]

The theory of formalism: 'Feeling and Form'

The notion that the world was embarking on the creation of a totally new formal language for a new age of humanism was further fostered by the phenomenon of theoretical studies [illegible] ynn regularly drew attention to in the NSW Broadsheet. These included V. [illegible] t's Nature of Creative Activity, E. Gombrich's Art and Illusion, E. Panofsky's [illegible] Visual Arts, H. Read's The Psychopathology of Reaction in the Arts, J. [illegible] an's Selected Contributions to Psycho-Analysis, and R. Arnheim's Art and Visual [illegible]rception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye.[126] These studies were dedicated to exploring perception and creativity and the psychology of the artist in objective and scientific terms. They asserted that art was the expression of the 'inner-reality' and deeply connected to the search to understand the psychological make-up of mankind; to the world of thought rather than that of appearance. Thus it is contended that these studies, like Malraux's Voices of Silence, and the new art histories, were part of the West's theorisation of universalism and individualism.

The most influential of the new theoretical texts was the philosopher Suzanne Langer's Feeling and Form. It created a new model for art criticism (the critical evaluation of art) based on the redefinition of words such as 'expression, creation, symbol, import, intuition, vitality and organic form,' in terms of 'the nature of art and its relation to feeling'.[127] Radically, but in keeping with the era's privileging of artistic genius, Langer argued that to understand art one had to begin with the artist's 'studio, not the gallery, auditorium or library'. This approach which gave priority to the act of creation over the object had enormous appeal with artists and artist-critics like Patrick Heron and Elwyn Lynn, for whom

Langer's lucid and rigorously argued definition of the creative process provided the intellectual foundation for their practice of abstract expressionism.

Langer reasoned, in a similar manner to John Anderson and the Realist school of philosophy, that, like philosophy, art was a critical discipline the whole aim of which was 'understanding'. The primary purpose of art was not to be found in representations of appearances and emotions but in the fact that it was a 'discursive logic' concerned with the symbolic expression of 'sentience' which constituted 'the pattern of life itself as it is felt and directly known'.[128] This did not mean, however, that art should or did 'express' feelings and emotions, or the artist's experience of them in the conventional sense. As a true intellectual, the artist approached 'feelings' as a sphere of 'knowledge', and expression as *discourse*; as the articulation and presentation of 'ideas of feelings' clearly and objectively for contemplation.[129] The artist, like the musician was concerned with the imagination of the universal and offered 'the symbolic expression of the forms of sentience as he understands them'. Langer wrote that his work bespeaks:

> his imagination of feelings rather than his own emotional state and expresses what he *knows about* the so-called "inner-life" and this may exceed his personal case, because music is a symbolic form to him through which he may learn as well as utter ideas of human sensibility.[130]

Art, therefore, was inherently related to the understanding of the 'inner-life' which the modernist masters from Matisse to Klee to Chagall argued was 'reality', while the purpose of art was 'the creation of forms symbolic of [these] human feelings' which being invisible could only be expressed symbolically.[131] The 'true power of the image' Langer concluded, lay not in materialism but in the fact it was 'an abstraction, a symbol', a bearer of ideas of deep philosophical significance.[132]

The import of painting, like that of its sister art music, therefore lay in giving expressive form to abstract experience and thought; in making the invisible visible. Like music, painting sought to express the 'verbally ineffable and, therefore, unknown forms of sentience'[133] and to articulate in form and structure 'ideas of something we wish to think about, and until we have a fairly adequate symbolism we cannot think about it'.[134] Langer

explained that in order to express these 'serious and often difficult thoughts' artists used an ever-evolving vocabulary of metaphorically 'significant' and 'expressive' forms which were inherently abstract, communicating aesthetically and intellectually rather than literally.[135] As art was grounded in the study of the 'inner life', its symbolism was derived from a process of abstraction. In painting, for instance, the creation of expressive form involved the application of the real, of canvas and paint, paper and ink, and 'man's utmost technical skill in the service of his conceptual power, imagination', to abstract from the material and create a semblance of sentience.[136]

The process of creation, Langer argued, giving credence to theories of artistic inspiration, involved far 'more than making – more than building a house'. When the artist, with his gifts of intuition and perception, applied his technique, structured and arranged his painting, colour, tone, line, something emerges 'which was not there before, and this 'something' was living form, the 'semblance of sentience' that makes a painting 'a work of art'.[137] A work of art, accordingly, was far more than an 'arrangement of given things, even qualitative things', it was a symbol constituted of 'living form' which expressed 'life; feeling, growth, movement, emotion and everything that characterises vital existence'. The word 'creative', therefore, was not to be merited by the invention of 'new original turns nor the adoption of novel themes', but by the making of any work symbolic of 'feeling', 'living form being the most indubitable product of all good art'.[138]

Langer emphasised, in an argument born of modernism, that art's articulation of 'vital form' existed in 'abstracted form' in every element of a painting, 'in every line, every sound, every gesture'. Thus all forms in art were abstracted forms and a painting, inherently a semblance of a thing or idea, was fundamentally abstract in character. Art, therefore, did not need recognisable imagery and motifs to communicate significant content, it was 'expressive through and through ... one hundred percent symbolic'. It was not sensuously pleasing and *also* symbolic, but symbolic in all its aspects.[139] To illustrate this essential aesthetic characteristic that united all art forms, Langer used the example of music, setting

the nexus between music and abstraction which would featured prominently in Australia's abstract expressionism discourse. The tonal structures we call music:

> bear a close logical similarity to the forms of human feelings – forms of growth and of attenuation, flowing and stowing, conflict and resolution, speed, arrest, terrific excitement, calm and subtle activation and dreamy lapses ... Such is the pattern, or logical form of sentience; and the pattern of music is that same form worked out in pure, measured sound and silence. Music is a tonal language of emotive life.[140]

If music was the tonal language of emotive life painting was its plastic equivalent. Painting too had its own discursive logic, it own logic of form and pattern which metaphorically expressed sentience. The expression of significant content in any art work, representational or not, therefore, did not reside in subject matter, narrative or images. The intent of painting was not the reproduction of appearances or emotion. It was first and foremost the creation of art which meant that it painting was an articulated symbol in which:

> the symbolic import permeates the whole structure because every articulation of that structure is an articulation of the idea it conveys; the meaning is the content of the symbolic form, given with it, as it were, perception.[141]

As the case of abstraction and jazz illustrated 'the emotive import', 'the ideas of vital reality', belonged 'to the form itself, not to anything it represents or suggests'. This form may well be outside the familiar and recognisable because the artist seeks to create new forms to extend our understanding of the inner realm. Langer asserted that for people to fully comprehend the significance of painting as an art form they needed 'to look upon the art object as something in its own right, with properties independent of our prepared reactions ... as an art form that was autonomous and an essential factor of every human culture'.[142] They needed to recognise that art as an autonomous intellectual discipline, dedicated to the creation of expressive form through the process of abstraction, and that the real cultural import of art was the creative expression of the universal experience in forms which transcended time and cultural barriers.

As Malraux reshaped the history of art to the cultural politics of the Cold War, so Langer redefined the philosophy of formalism to inculcate it with the values of international humanism. She drew on the tradition of formalist philosophy, especially the work of

Bergson, Chassier, and Fry, to redefine art for art's sake into a humanist philosophy of life that privileged the artist as genius. Her appeal to Lynn and his contemporaries lay in her objective and rational definition of subjectivity and her definition of the artist as an intellect, a philosopher dedicated to 'understanding' in a critical sense. Furthermore she offered a model of criticism which defined the subjective as philosophical and universal, rather than individual and emotional. In a similar manner Malraux, Arnheim and the psychological theorists converted modern art into a humanist theory of psychology with the artist virtually playing the role of therapist for society. Their writings, many of which were published in the 1950s, popularised a critical method for evaluating art which, based on systematic formal analysis (style), was widely accepted as rational and objective, and thus universal. With their theoretical arguments that supported the notion that art was a pictorial science with its own internal logic, they provided artists with an intellectual framework for the practice of art for art's sake and acted somewhat like manuals for the practice for international modernism with its ideals of universalism and individualism.[143]

The NSW Broadsheet and the intellectualisation of art

The increasing availability of the wide range of art publications mentioned in the NSW Broadsheet throughout the 1950s was indicative not only of a greater ease of access to the world of art but also the expansion of art as a sphere of knowledge.[144] As the appearance of scholars of the calibre of Erwin Panofsky, Ernst Gombrich, Rudolf Arnheim and Suzanne Langer within the pages of the NSW Broadsheet indicates, art was becoming an aspect of intellectual culture. The diaspora of European art historians to London's Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, United States and further afield, had advanced the practice of art history as a humanist discipline which, according to Erwin Panofsky was, dedicated to transforming the record of man into 'a cosmos of culture'.[145]

In 1950s Australia, the intellectualisation of culture was manifested in the government's promotion of art in primary and secondary education and the study of art history and criticism as a university discipline which was advanced by Melbourne University's recently formed Fine Arts Department. The appointment of Joseph Burke, a Warburg and

Courtauld scholar, to the first Chair in Fine Arts in 1945 saw Australia's introduction to the art historian as a cultural leader who would provide 'authoritative, scholarly leadership in public taste and discernment'.[146] Docker, Rowse and Sinfield have asserted that the increasing influence of F.R. Leavis on higher education in Australia and England saw the fostering of a new professional rigour, with art and literature being redefined as universal disciplines that could be systematically taught and examined according to the individual's performance rather than to cultural sensibility.[147] An effect of this was to remove art from the realm of the amateur leisured class and open it up to the new educated middle classes, creating an appetite for art as knowledge and cultural property and an expectation of professionalism.[148] Thus, the relationship between art and culture began to change as the academic study of Australian national culture was promoted as a national priority. This phenomenon was not exclusively Australian, however, but was part of an international trend which deemed the establishment of a national culture as a prerequisite for full and mature membership of the family of Western nations.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, the NSW Broadsheet, played an important role in advancing the intellectualisation of art in Sydney, if not Australia. In an era when there were no specific contemporary art publications, the NSW Broadsheet acted as a significant small magazine which brought polemics and scholarly information to Sydney's abstract discourse. With its mix of local and international material, it encouraged artists to believe they were part of an international art scene dedicated to the avant-garde practice of art as a humanist discipline. Most importantly, it defined this avant-garde according to the specifics of Sydney art, which in turn had implications for the position which Sydney occupied in the production of Australian culture. Lynn achieved this by drawing on the theories of John Anderson, particularly Anderson's thesis that, as art was a philosophical discipline, its value centred on the proposition of the mind in opposition and the act of creativity rather than the art object. He also drew on Anderson's edict that the function of art was to create conflict and disruption, thereby subverting the establishment's attempts to

use art to pacify the minds of the masses. Lynn skilfully extended the intellectual basis of the NSW CAS's avant-garde agenda using the NSW Broadsheet to introduce the latest writings and ideas of thinkers like Malraux and Langer who promoted abstract art as the 'true' art form which rejected the material world for the pursuit of the intellectual realm of the non-visible. The importance of these writers for the NSW CAS abstractionists being, that they established art as an autonomous philosophical discipline and a pictorial science with its logic and intent. Thus they offered the NSW CAS a formalist model of criticism and practice that was ideologically opposed to Sydney's dominant romantic tradition. Lynn and the NSW Broadsheet, were crucial to the re-positioning of the NSW CAS as the avant-garde force in Sydney contemporary art.

1 When Mrs Robin Moore resigned as editor in February 1955 Lynn took over, although he was not officially elected editor until the mid-year elections. Pinson, Abstract Expressionism in Sydney, p. 5, stated that Lynn became editor in April 1955. The evidence disputes this, however. The March 1955 issue thanked Mrs Robin Moore and introduced the book review and a commentary, which are hallmarks of Lynn's editorial approach to the NSW Broadsheet format.

2 E. Lynn, 'Abstract and Kitsch', NSW Broadsheet, April 1955.

3 ibid.

4 Rowse, Australian Liberalism, pp. 165-66.

5 A. Havinden, Advertising and the Artists, London, The Studio Publications, 1956. The Alliance Graphique Internationale was founded in January 1959 to bring together outstanding commercial artists of international importance. Membership by invitation only made this an exclusive body which bestowed artist-like status on the individual designer.

6 ibid., p. 18. Produced for the Advertising Association, this well designed and illustrated publication was freely available in Australia.

7 R. Bluden, 'Art or Advertising?' Architecture and Arts, July 1953, p. 34. The article reviewed the International Exhibition of Advertising which was held in Melbourne in 1953 to coincide with the Queen's visit.

8 H. Read, 'Realism and Superrealism', Coat of Many Colours, London, Routledge, 1945, p 197. For Read's theories on art and anarchy see Thistlewood, 'Anarchy and Order', in Herbert Read, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984, pp. 105-125; and G. Woodcock, 'The Philosopher of Freedom', in R. Skelton, (ed.) Herbert Read: A Memorial Symposium, London, Methuen, 1970, pp. 69-85.

9 H. Read, Art Now, (rev. ed.), London, Faber, 1960, p. 38.

10 ibid., pp. 109-120, also p. 10.

11 H. Read, 'Surrealism and the Romantic Principle', The Philosophy of Modern Art, London, Faber and Faber, 1964, pp. 105-144.

12 Woodcock, 'The Philosopher of Freedom', p. 76, wrote that for Read and his contemporaries 'the only healthy political order is a natural order, sustained by tension between the individual and society'. Read's socio-political writings, which, with minor exceptions appeared between 1938 and 1954, included 'Poetry and Anarchism', 1938; 'The Philosophy of Anarchism', 1940; and 'The Paradox of Anarchism', 1942, which was reprinted in Coat of Many Colours, 1945. All essays were published in Anarchy and Order in 1954.

[13] Read, Art Now, p. 121.

[14] Read, Art Now, p. 38. For the mind in opposition see H. Read, 'What is Revolutionary Art?' in Frascina, Modern Art and Modernism, pp. 123-127; also Read as quoted by Woodcock, 'The Philosopher of Freedom', p. 79.

[15] H. Read, 'From Science to Symbolism', Art Now, pp. 3-68; and 'Towards Abstraction', Art Now, pp. 69-85.

[16] Read, 'Surrealism and the Romantic Principle', Art Now, p. 121.

[17] Read, Art Now, pp. 82-85.

[18] Read, 'What is Revolutionary Art?' pp. 123-127.

[19] Plate, AMPA A347. Plate came in contact with Read and his circle while in London, and recalled being influenced by his ideas in a general manner.

[20] NSW Records. Contemporary Art Society, Second State Exhibition, 26 April, 1946.

[21] Lynn, 'Abstract and Kitsch'.

[22] ibid.

[23] C. Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', Partisan Review, vol. VI, no. 5, 1939, pp. 34-49.

[24] Lynn has been credited with being one of the first Australians to use the term 'abstract expressionism' critically. The nature of his contact with the American discourse has been a theme of writings which seek to establish the authenticity of Australian abstract expressionism, see Pinson, ibid; Elwyn Lynn: Retrospective 1956-1990, Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 26 February - 21 April 1991, 1991; Green, 'Abstract Expressionism in Australia', pp. 485-491; J. Coleman, 'Towards Abstract Expressionism'; P. McCaughey, Elwyn Lynn, Adelaide, Robert Bolton, 1969.

Pinson, Abstract Expressionism in Sydney, p. 5, gives the impression that Lynn's knowledge of the American discourse was rather limited in the 1950s. Pinson suggested that Lynn did not become aware of Greenberg and Rosenberg's writings until about 1960. The evidence in NSW Broadsheet contradicts. Furthermore, Lynn (Interview with author) read Partisan Review from his university years and knew both Greenberg's and Rosenberg's work from this. T.B. Hess was editor of Art News which Lynn read and regarded highly and he no doubt read Rosenberg's The American Action Painters when it was published in Art News in 1952.

[25] Lynn, Interview with the author, September 1988.

[26] It is unlikely that Rosenberg was the influence Lynn's theory of kitsch as it is not a theme of his writing. He was, however (see 'The American Action Painters', pp. 35-39), strongly opposed to

the increasing commercialisation of the 'vanguard' and the trend to turn American abstract expression into the latest 'taste'.

27 L. Trotsky, 'Art and Politics', Partisan Review, vol. V. no. 3, 1938, pp. 3-10.

28 Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', pp. 36, 47. Defining his concept of the avant-garde, Greenberg linked it to a platform of art for art's sake based on extreme formalism. He argued that retiring from public altogether into bohemia, 'the avant-garde poet or artist sought to maintain a high level of his art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute in which all relatives and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point'. 'Art for art's sake' and 'pure poetry' appeared and subject-matter or content became something to be avoided. It had been through its search for the absolute that the avant-garde had arrived at 'abstract' or 'non-objective' art – and poetry too.

29 ibid., p. 47.

30 ibid., pp. 39-40.

31 ibid., p. 40.

32 For discussion of Greenberg's theories and politics see J.D. Herbert, The Political Origins of Abstract-Expressionist Art Criticism: the Early Theoretical and Critical Writings of Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg, California, Stanford Honors Essays in Humanities, XXVIII, 1985; and Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art.

33 Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', p. 47.

34 In 1938, Partisan Review published one essay by Leon Trotsky – 'Art and Politics', vol. V, no. 3, and D. Riveria and A. Breton, 'Manifesto: Towards a Free Revolutionary Art', vol. VI, no. 1, Fall 1938, pp. 49-53 which was ghost written by Trotsky.

35 Lynn, Interview with author, recalled that for him Anderson's legacy was not so much politics as the idea of artistic freedom and culture (art) as autonomous and oppositional. See Docker, 'John Anderson and the Sydney Freethought Tradition', in Cultural Elites, pp. 131-155; Rowse, 'The New Critics and the End of Ideology', in Australian Liberalism, pp. 191-245; D. Horne, 'The Andersonians', Observer, 29 November, 1958; D.M. Armstrong, 'Books: The Andersonians' Observer, 4 October, 1958.

The Andersonians, who included A.D. Hope, J. Passmore, P.H. Partridge, W.H.C. Eddy, D. Horne and P. Coleman, were influential at all levels of Australian political and cultural debate, with their views being widely disseminated in journals such as the Australian Highway (Workers' Educational Association) and the Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy, texts such as W.H.C. Eddy (ed.), Prospects of Democracy, and radio as well.

[36] Anderson and Andersonianism', Australian Highway, September 1958. Special issue on his retirement as Challis Professor of Philosophy at Sydney University, 1958; and D.M. McCallum, 'Anderson and Freethought', Australian Highway, September 1958, pp. 71-75.

[37] J.A. Passmore, 'John Anderson and Twentieth Century Philosophy', in J. Anderson, Studies in Empirical Philosophy, p. xxi.

[38] Docker, Cultural Elites, p. 131; and P.H. Partridge, 'Anderson as Educator', Australian Highway, pp. 50-53.

[39] Anderson, 'The Servile State', in Studies in Empirical Philosophy, pp. 328-339; 'The Meaning of Good', in Studies in Empirical Philosophy, pp 266-268; 'Art and Morality', in Janet Anderson et al., (eds.), Art and Reality, pp. 83-93. For the influence of his essays, especially 'The Servile State' see Docker, Cultural Elites, pp. 131-144.

[40] Docker, Cultural Elites, pp. 138-144.

[41] This differentiates Anderson's and Lynn's thought from those who like Greenberg held that a level of material affluence was essential for the existence of an avant-garde and high culture. Greenberg, 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch', is elitist, arguing that the cause of the crisis of Western culture was not only the crisis of capitalism but also the decline of the ruling class.

Greenberg positioned the artist outside of society – in bohemia – but supported materially by the bourgeoisie (patronage) as part of class elite. For Anderson the autonomy of art and the freedom of choice were of moral and political importance and did not, as in Greenberg's case, constitute a withdrawal from society. Anderson rejected Marxist notions of class struggle – his elitism was not overtly premised on money and property but on the intellect 'the mind' in opposition and morals and this ideally is open to all. However, as Docker, Cultural Elites, p. 146, noted that with the Cold War crisis Anderson's emphasis shifted significantly to uphold privilege and the conservative notion of cultural decline propagated by his ex-pupil James McAuley.

[42] Anderson, 'The Servile State', pp. 329-331. In Anderson's schema real creativity came from struggle and conflict and not a search for harmony as Marx and Trotsky argued. The ideal of harmony and security, he contended, was a paean of the establishment to pacify one into a servile state.

[43] ibid., pp. 332-333. Anderson's essay was partly an attack on the promotion of the corporate power structure by James Burnham's The Managerial Revolution, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1942, which was influential throughout the West during postwar reconstruction.

[44] Anderson, 'The Servile State', pp. 332-333, 338-339; also 'The Meaning of Good', in Studies in Empirical Philosophy, p. 267.

45 'The Servile State', p. 335.

46 'Art and Morality', p. 93.

47 ibid., p. 92.

48 For 'Goods' see Anderson, 'The Meaning of Goods', in Studies in Empirical Philosophy, p. 267; for 'Joyce and the eternal alienation of the human spirit' see Janet Anderson, Art and Reality, pp. 32-36.

49 ibid., p. 267.

50 Anderson, 'Ulysses' in Janet Anderson, Art and Reality, pp. 98-101.

51 Anderson, 'Some Questions in Aesthetics', in Janet Anderson, Art and Reality, p. 38.

52 ibid., p. 29. When arguing his 'art for art's sake' case Anderson quoted Trotsky's Literature and Revolution: 'A work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, by the law of art'. He moved on to argue that the idea that 'art is always a social servant and historically utilitarian' is simply false. Trotsky, Literature and Revolution, argued for the moral and political importance of the autonomy of art and the free choice of theme.

53 Greenberg argued the same thing but Anderson's aesthetic rule was moral and ethical.

54 Anderson, 'Some Questions', Janet Anderson, Art and Reality, pp. 24-25.

55 Anderson, ibid., p. 35.

56 Anderson, 'Ulysses', Janet Anderson, Art and Reality, p. 10[illegible].

57 Anderson, 'Some Questions', Janet Anderson, Art and Reality, p. 45.

58 ibid.

59 ibid., pp. 32-33.

60 Anderson, 'Art and Morality', Janet Anderson, Art and Reality, p. 93.

61 Anderson, 'Some Questions', Janet Anderson, Art and Reality, p. 30; and J. Mackie, 'Anderson's Theory of Education', Australian Highway, September 1958, pp. 17-20.

62 While Anderson preached extreme caution against anything institutional or dogmatic, he also argued that the existence of conflicting and cooperating groups – that is a plurality of opinions – was essential to a healthy high culture; plurality being necessary for struggle and conflict. Groups were to actively promote and defend their areas of interest, otherwise another social group would suppress them in the name of the common good.

63 Lynn, 'Abstract and Kitsch'.

64 Victorian Broadsheet, September 1954. While John Reed and his associates formed a parental presence in Melbourne a feature of the rejuvenated branch was the promotion of abstraction and its practitioners, who included Ian Sime, Erica McGilchrist and Clifford Last. See Erica McGilchrist, Personal Statement, Kit 1, pp. 7-9, Women's Arts Register, Carringbush Library, for an account of the tension in the Melbourne branch between John Reed's group and the non-objective group which was led by Ian and Dawn Sime.

In the first issue of the Victorian Broadsheet Ian Sime announced that 'Life in Forms', an exhibition of abstract and non-objective painting, was being organised for December 1954.

65 Harris, 'New Directions in Painting', p. 9.

66 Smith Papers. Correspondence, Lynn to Smith, 13 June, 1955.

67 'Books', NSW Broadsheet, March 1955; also Smith Papers. Correspondence to Smith in 26 October, 1954. Lynn wrote that he had finished reading Malraux's The Voices of Silence. He was critical of his fellow CAS members for being only interested in contemporary work and not 'the tradition of art' and described them as theoretically weak.

68 Victorian Broadsheet. The articles included 'Three Views on Arthur Boyd' by Ian Sime, Julius Kuhn and Barrie Reid, October 1954. When new publications were mentioned, February 1955, they tended to be local eg. Architecture and Arts, Canona, Em Malley's Journal, Mary's Own Paper, Overland, The Free Spirit, (ACCF). The tone of the rhetoric can be gleaned from Barrie Reid 'The CAS Facts and Follies', April 1955: 'One amusing objection was one that one of my Toorak friends said to me: "The C.A.S. is not really respectable is it? I mean to say".' Ian Sime writing on 'Animism', November 1956, did not refer to critical literature but relied predominantly on anecdote:

> And because my dreaming soul must communicate, I, as a painter, must create the form and language in which, firstly, it can speak freely and fluently, and secondly, which can touch those outside the closed circuit of myself.

The South Aust. Broadsheet was closer in kind to Melbourne's than NSW.

69 E. Lynn, 'Aesthetics Theorists', NSW Broadsheet, August 1955.

70 Ibid.

71 ibid.; also J. Hospers (ed.), Introductory Readings in Aesthetics, New York, The Fress Press, 1969, Introduction, pp. 1-12; J. Stolnitz, 'The Aesthetic Attitude', pp. 17-27; G. Dickie, 'The Myth of the Aesthetic Attitude', pp, 28-41, for a coverage of this issue.

72 E. Lynn 'Criticism', NSW Broadsheet, September 1955.

73 ibid.

[74] ibid.

[75] H. Weaver Hawkins, 'Art Criticism', NSW Broadsheet, January 1956; R. Cummings, 'Criticism continued (Ad Infinitum ?)', NSW Broadsheet, March 56); M. Feuerring, 'More on Criticism', NSW Broadsheet, October 1955; Oscar Edwards, NSW Broadsheet, February 1956.

[76] Feuerring, 'More on Criticism', NSW Broadsheet, October 1955.

[77] Weaver Hawkins, 'Art Criticism', NSW Broadsheet, January 1956.

[78] Cummings, 'Criticism continued (Ad Infinitum ?)', NSW Broadsheet, March 1956.

[79] Weaver Hawkins, 'Art Criticism'.

[80] Feuerring, 'More on Criticism'.

[81] ibid.

[82] Weaver Hawkins, 'Art Criticism'.

[83] All these publications were reviewed or mentioned by Lynn in the NSW Broadsheets between 1955-1960.

[84] ibid.

[85] A. Malraux, The Voices of Silence, S. Gilbert (trans.), Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1978, pp. 13-127.

[86] ibid., p. 16.

[87] ibid., pp. 13-20

[88] ibid., p. 44.

[89] ibid., p. 30.

[90] ibid., p. 44.

[91] See W. Sypher, 'Art as Metamorphosis, *The Voices of Silence*', Partisan Review, vol. XXI, no. 2, 1954, pp. 204-209; and M. Harrington, 'André Malraux: Metamorphosis of the Hero', Partisan Review, vol XXI, no. 6, 1954, pp. 654-663 for a discussion of Malraux's humanism.

[92] Malraux, Voices of Silence, p. 46.

[93] ibid., p. 127.

[94] ibid., p. 631.

[95] ibid., p. 101.

[96] ibid., p. 112.

[97] ibid., p. 635.

[98] The term 'express' does not refer here to self-expression, or emotions, but as Suzanne Langer defined artistic expression as the articulation of ideas as occur in language.

[99] ibid., p. 639.

[100] Harrington, 'Metamorphosis of the Hero', p. 662.

[101] Malraux, Voices of Silence, p. 640.

[102] H. Missingham, 'The Visual Arts', Meanjin, Winter, vol. XIII, no. 2, 1959, p. 288. Missingham's article was one of a series on UNESCO and Australia which promoted the advantages of UNESCO's cultural program.

[103] Harrington, 'Metamorphosis of the Hero'.

[104] K. Clark, 'Is the Artist Ever Free?' Listener, 12 May, 1955, p. 836.

[105] ibid., p. 835. This was a shortened version of a talk given to Columbia University at its bicentennial celebrations earlier in 1955.

[106] ibid., p. 836.

[107] Clark, 'Is the Artists Ever Free?' p. 835.

[108] R. Radford, Art for a Purpose: The Artists International Association 1935-1953, p. 7. An example of the impact which Cold War politics had on artistic practice was the change that the Artists International Association made to its charter in 1953. Formed in 1933 as an alliance of artists specifically committed to a socialist political programme the AIA's original charter was 'To take part in political activity, to organize or collaborate in any meeting or demonstration in sympathy with the aims of the Association where actions seem desirable and possible'. In response to Cold War anxieties they removed all mention of politics and set the new ideals of 'co-operation ... for intellectual freedom, economic security and the promotion of peace and international understanding'. See also L. Morris and R. Radford, The Story of the AIA, Artists International Association 1933-1953, Oxford, The Museum of Modern Art, 1983; and G. Dyer, Ways of Telling: The Work of John Berger, London, Pluto Press, 1986, pp. 3-28, for a comprehensive coverage of this period of British art politics.

[109] See Dyer, Ways of Telling, p. 17.

[110] ibid., p. 21.

[111] ibid., p. 16.

[112] ibid., p. 18.

[113] ibid., pp. 25–26.

[114] H. Rosenberg, 'Art Books, Book Art, Art', Partisan Review, vol. XXVII, no. I, 1960, p. 141.

[115] ibid., p. 139.

[116] Dyer, Ways of Telling, p. 17.

[117] ibid., pp. 14-15.

[118] ibid., p. 15.

[119] P. Heron, The Changing Forms of Art, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955, p. 65. Lynn recommended Changing Forms in NSW Broadsheet, December 1955.

[120] Dyer, Ways of Telling, p. 17.

[121] Heron, 'Hills and Faces', in Changing Forms, p. 26.

[122] ibid., pp. 29, 65.

[123] ibid., pp. 33-38.

[124] ibid., p. 157.

[125] ibid., p. 62.

[126] All these publications were reviewed or mentioned in the NSW Broadsheet between 1955 and 1960.

[127] S. Langer, Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953, pp. viii-ix. Widely reviewed and debated, Feeling and Form became a key text in art education. See Arthur Berendtson 'Semblance, Symbol, and Expressionism in the Aesthetics of S. Langer', Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, vol. XIV, no. 4, June 1956, pp. 489-502, for a contemporary response to her work.

[128] ibid., pp. 31-40 passism.

[129] ibid., p. 21-22; 'Here the crucial problem obviously is to present feelings not to enjoyment ... but to conception, not experience of feeling ... but knowledge of them is difficult to achieve ... Art works contain feelings but do not feel them.'

[130] ibid., p. 28.

[131] ibid., p. 82.

[132] ibid., p. 47.

[133] ibid., p. 39.

[134] ibid., p. 28.

[135] ibid., p. ix; 'the vocabulary of artists is metaphorical because it has to be plastic and powerful to let them speak their serious and often difficult thoughts'.

[136] ibid., p. 40.

[137] ibid., pp. 40, 59.

[138] ibid., p. 82. All forms in art 'are abstracted forms, their content is only semblance, a pure appearance, an abstraction from material existence.'

[139] ibid., p. 59.

[140] ibid., p. 28.

[141] ibid., p. 52. For the definition of symbol see p. 28.

[142] ibid., p. 39.

[143] Malraux's The Voices of Silence was originally titled the Psychology of Art.

[144] Sutton, 'The First International Congress of Art Critics', pp. 129-135.

[145] E. Panofsky, 'The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline', in (1955) Meaning in the Visual Arts, Middlesex, Penguin, 1970, p. 29.

[146] Haese, Rebels and Precursors, p. 215.

[147] Sinfield, Literature, Politics and Culture, pp. 53-57, 108.

[148] ibid.; also Docker, Cultural Elites; and Docker, A Critical Condition, pp. 40-54.

Chapter 4

Abstract Expressionism in Australia 1955-1958

As contemporary art became ensconced as the mainstream of Sydney art, the production and consumption of abstract art became increasingly complex and contested. This chapter focuses on the controversy, which began to surround abstract expressionism when Paul Haefliger in late 1956 promoted it as the new mainstream of Australian contemporary art. It argues that the avant-garde position of abstract expressionism now came under attack from all directions. The promotional infrastructure of corporate, media and institutional sponsored art prizes and competitions was popularising abstract expressionism throughout the nation creating competitive tensions between artists and pressuring them to conform to the demands of public taste. Contemporary art was fashionable, and abstraction expression was drawn into the fashion cycle by Paul Haefliger who represented it as the latest art trend to arrive from overseas. The task of this chapter is to investigate the nature of the market tensions and how they intruded into the production of abstract expressionism, and, more specifically, the NSW CAS's positioning of it as avant-garde.

Part I accordingly takes an overview of developments in mid to late 1950s in order to identify the key issues that concerned artists, and most especially the NSW CAS, as they adapted their practice and rhetoric to demands of the new arts infrastructure. As the prizes and competitions began to drive the arts calender and establish trends, concern was expressed that the prizes and their sponsors were dictating the nature of contemporary art practice. The growth in public interest brought abstract art under scrutiny and thus the demand that abstraction should communicate intelligibly strengthened. The artists resisted these intrusions into their practice by using the Blake Prize as the public forum in which to contest the autonomy of art and the validity of abstraction as a significant art form. The focus of the artists' grievances was the judging panels and critics who, they contended, set the standards for art according to the rule of public taste rather than the laws of art.

The NSW CAS launched a concerted attack on the tyranny of public taste. Lynn set the premise for the challenge arguing that the history of true art, more specifically contemporary art, was the history of the struggle to establish the autonomy of art by liberating it from the restrictions of state and institutional patronage. Furthermore, contemporary art was a distinctive artistic tradition involving oppositional art movements whose aim was to disrupt the establishment's efforts to conflate art into taste and use it as a means of social control. Thus, Lynn emphasised it was the responsibility of the NSW CAS to uphold this tradition by maintaining its opposition to the fashionability and commercialisation of contemporary art.

The NSW CAS's campaign was largely directed at Paul Haefliger whose influence on Sydney contemporary art was creating conflict. Part II centres on Haefliger and the controversy he triggered when he used the Pacific Loans and 'Direction 1' exhibitions to announce flamboyantly that Sydney was now the leader of Australia's abstract expressionist movement. Haefliger's reviews indicate that his interest in abstract expressionism was not predicated on genuine understanding but on a desire to predict trends and shape careers, and revitalise the romantic ideal of art to which he was deeply committed. Thus he misleadingly defined abstract expressionism as the individualist expression of emotions and feelings. He also created confusion and controversy by firstly announcing the triumphant arrival of the movement and then by sowing the seeds of doubt by asking whether the young abstract expressionists could fulfil their promise and communicate subjective experience without resorting to symbolic imagery.

Lynn countered Haefliger's and the public's demands that abstract art communicate intelligibly by directing an assault on the motif in painting with two seminal essays, 'The Motif in Painting' and 'Tachism, Abstract Expressionism and the Baroque'. Here he forcibly set the oppositional stance for abstract expressionists by arguing that the true concern of art was not the art object but the act of creativity itself. He explained that internationally avant-garde artists such as Pollock and the French tachists were experimenting with non-conventional material, forms and techniques in order to explore the expressive potential of

the act of painting. Their art, which was intentionally unpremeditated, explored the forbidden orders of the irrational and chaotic in order to disrupt the whimsical and charming classical order of the modernist establishment and its new academy of geometric abstraction. The contention of this chapter, therefore, is that Lynn, the NSW CAS and Paul Haefliger set the battle lines for the clash between the contemporary art establishment and the abstract expressionists.

Part I

The NSW CAS: The Tyranny of Public Taste

The absorption of contemporary art into the mainstream of Australian culture saw the growth of a new art market and patronage system whose impact on artistic practice was being felt by the mid-1950s. There was an expansion of exhibition opportunities, especially in Sydney, where a new group of galleries, including the Bissietta, Terry Clune's, and Farmers revitalised Blaxland, emerged alongside a proliferation of municipal council and industry competitions and prizes and government-endorsed survey shows.[1] There was wide spread public enthusiasm for contemporary art, with people happily 'sleeping the night on the pavement ... in The Name of Art', hopeful of securing a bargain from the Macquarie Galleries' Guinea Show to add to their collection.[2] As a SMH journalist playfully reported, 'Collecting painting [was] fashionable ... For art [was] smart.' What was smart was youth and abstraction,[3] so smart in fact that it was good copy for the press, who enjoyed deriding municipal councillors when they did not accept the judges' decision to award their city art prize to semi-abstract and contemporary works, or revealed their lack of cultural awareness with comments like 'I am frankly puzzled by the watercolour ... It does not make sense to me'.[4] Art was indeed fashionable, and exhibitions, if a touch controversial, drew large attendances, with more than 500 flocking to see Ronald Kirk's drawing that had won the 1957 Wagga Art Society Prize only to be rejected by the councillors as too contemporary.[5]

The prospects for contemporary artists had never been so promising. Art competitions with substantial prize money abounded, and if artists were to compete in all the competitions as

well as exhibit with Sydney's numerous artists' societies and have a solo show, they faced a busy year which began with the prestigious Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Prizes. Following the controversial Blake Prize came the Easter season with the Royal Easter Show and the Macquarie's Easter Group Show. The autumn season brought the art societies' exhibitions including the NSW CAS autumn show. During winter and spring there were municipal and industry prizes which included the Mosman and Bathurst City Art Prizes along with the Caltex and Women's Weekly Prizes and the Helena Rubenstein Travelling Scholarship. The year came to a grand end with the well publicised annual CAS interstate exhibition and the Macquarie's extremely popular Guinea Shows. If fortunate an artist might have a solo or group show in Melbourne, because by the late 1950s interstate exhibitions were more common, with Arthur Boyd, Clifton Pugh, John Perceval, Albert Tucker and Leonard French showing in Sydney and Elwyn Lynn, Carl Plate and Robert Dickerson doing likewise in Melbourne. It was a good time to be an artist in Australia with plentiful exhibition opportunities and a dynamically expanding market as municipalities, industry, institutions and private patrons began building contemporary collections and state galleries joined the trend. The art scene was not without tension and conflict, however, for as the second generation of contemporary artists was reaching maturity and beginning to challenge the old, an increasing number of younger artists were emerging from art schools. Accordingly competition for the new opportunities was quite fierce not only between individuals but also between the different factions that characterised modernist practice.

By the late 1950s the fashionability of culture, and more specifically art, became the brunt of satirical articles and cartoons in journals such as the Observer which liked to ridicule the middle class as they flocked to exhibition openings to rub shoulders with bohemia and talk art and collecting. The new competition for sales and pursuit of patronage, the argument went, were forcing artists to become more aggressively engaged in self promotion and publicity seeking. They were being forced to become celebrities, sip sherry, be polite and appeal to the market by being 'recognisably modern but not too modern' and painting 'vigorously and not too intelligently'. If the artist had enough integrity and critical acclaim he

could, perhaps, avoid much of this by getting an agent.[6] The art world was changing dramatically and the issue of interest is how the NSW CAS fitted into this new infrastructure that offered young abstract artists unprecedented opportunities for solo and group shows. What is particularly interesting is why the younger painters, faced by the success of contemporary art, struggled to keep the NSW CAS alive and why the NSW CAS did not become redundant like the Society of Artists and the Sydney Group.

Art prizes and competitions

The increased competitiveness of the market was largely stimulated by the phenomenon of art prizes and competitions which offered the type of lucrative prize money and publicity that could launch or consolidate an artist's career. Extensive in size and number and dedicated to contemporary art, they quickly became the focus of artists' energies. Their appeal was huge. They offered the artistic community unprecedented financial rewards and public endorsement, including opportunities for overseas travel and Australia-wide exposure through the press and touring survey shows. They also, Alan McCulloch noted, encouraged patronage from 'the most unexpected quarters and greatly increased the number of viewing public'.[7] As they increasingly endorsed abstract expressionism, they became a public site for debate about the role of art and its relationship to society and the place of abstraction in Australia's cultural discourse.

For the general public the awarding of the prizes and the accompanying spectacles fostered a climate of cultural involvement. There was a sense of the democratisation of culture involved as one read about the awards and the artists in the newspapers and popular magazines like the Women's Weekly and Walkabout or listened to the prizes' merits being debated on radio. Australia's new professional middle class began collecting Australian contemporary art — guided by the example of the prizes, which had become integrated into the nationalist discourse as signifiers of Australia's growing cultural sophistication. The growing interest in cultural sophistication was evident in the SMH's attack on the Wagga City Council for refusing to pay the £100 prize for a semi-abstract

prize-winning drawing, in which the editor emphasised the importance of such prizes observing:

> all over the country art contests are being held in towns with pride in their history and confidence in their future ... they excite discussion and sometimes stormy controversy in places where the cultural atmosphere could easily become stagnant.[8]

It was not the existence of the competitions alone that was important therefore but the debate and controversy they stimulated, for this was a sign of the growth of a genuine and mature culture that was self critical and concerned with standards rather than parochial issues of nationalism.

The artists' involvement in the competitions was far from straightforward. Apart from travelling scholarships there were prizes monies ranging from 40 guineas to £500. The competitions attracted entries from all, including Australia's leading contemporary artists for whom the prizes were a significant source of revenue and a means to critical acclaim and marketability.[9] It was not the prize money alone that made competitions such as the Blake Prize popular and earned some, the Royal Easter Show and the Caltex Prize, for example, severe criticism from artists.[10] The nature of the judging panel and the potential for controversy also contributed to how well leading artists supported different prizes. The quality of a judging panel was particularly important because the prizes attracted a considerable range of high quality work and were expected to set the criteria of the day. They did this by offering Australia-wide survey shows which identified Australia's most successful and promising artistic talents. Many, like the critic Alan McCulloch, believed that a good competition, rigorously selected, would raise standards and set trends and, as in the case of the Blake Prize, pose an argument about the direction of contemporary art. A bad exhibition, however, which clung to the past like the prestigious Archibald, as McCulloch put it, had the potential to be 'the largest of the many red herrings drawn across the trail leading to a rise in public taste' and a powerful threat to the progress of contemporary art.[11]

It was the Blake Prize with its liberal judging panels, formed from leading contemporary artists, critics and members of the theological world, which set the ideal for art prizes. In NSW this model was widely followed by the country municipalities which included artists of the calibre of Fizelle, Dobell, Orban, Weaver Hawkins and Gleeson on their judging panels.[12] The inclusion of the contemporary and artistically minded constituted a marked shift away from the 'any important person can judge good art' academic model of the Archibald prize. It reflected the seriousness with which the new competitions were regarded and the growing acknowledgment that judgements of artistic merit, particularly when it came to non-representational art, should not be made according to taste and personal preference but according to educated and informed consideration of the laws of art.

While the judges' decisions were frequently at odds with the taste of the competition organisers, this conflict created valuable controversy and stimulated heated debate about contemporary art, which was publicly manifested in lengthy letters to newspaper editors. The public was not always happy with the judges' selection of what were seen as 'unintelligible' 'self indulgent' paintings that spoke only to an aesthetic elite. The artistic community, in turn, railed against what it saw as the injustice of being judged by their inferiors whose taste was unsympathetic to the real concern of art. The Caltex Prize was particularly criticised for using the company's advertising manager as a judge, and this led to a call by the NSW CAS that judging panels for major competitions be announced well before submission date so that artists could decide whether or not to compete. The artists argued that the inclusion of advertising executives or the clergy on judging panels led, as in the case of many of the Blake Prize awards, to compromised decisions, which did little to advance the quality of art.[13]

As the prizes grew increasingly impressive and popular, they began to replace the artists' societies as the major promotional machine for contemporary art. The repercussions of this change became an issue of grave concern amongst the artistic community. Hal Missingham, writing in Studio in February 1957, noted that the development of young

Australian painters was being 'jeopardised' by the 'sensation-seeking press and the smart set' that make the artist 'front page news' and by the:

> enormous increase in the last five years in the number of art prizes offered by all and sundry. State and provincial galleries, local councils in the city and country and big business now have so many competitions that serious painters (if they once get on the band-wagon) have little time left in which to paint! This year I would think that some 60/80 competitions will be held, with cash prizes in the vicinity of £12,000.[14]

Many of the prizes, including the Blake, Rural Bank, Women's Weekly and Caltex, stipulated the subject matter and this also impacted on practice, as artists, with little genuine commitment to the ideologies underpinning the prizes, produced work to fit the criteria. Religious images, portraits, scenes of rural progress, and depictions of 'Our Changing City' with titles such as Kurnell Oil Refinery, Industrial Port, Eastern City, Tenements, Aerial View, Seaports and Moods of the City, began to dominate the artistic repertoire.[15] As even the most prominent artists sought ways to fit the criteria, frequently using total abstraction and an appropriate title as a strategy, concern grew that the lure of commerce was dictating the course of art and compromising its integrity.

The Art Gallery Society of NSW held a public forum where artists and architects expressed concern that the contests were creating false values and fostering a climate in which artists were becoming professional prize winners, painting for the prizes instead of painting for the perfection of their art.[16] A very real fear, as James Gleeson explained on ABC radio, was that rather than patronising the arts the prizes were 'commissioning' work and thus shaping the nature of contemporary art.[17] Not only were they threatening the existence of societies like the NSW CAS which had 'done the most to encourage those who have broken away from the confines of conventional painting', they were threatening the very ideology of contemporary art.[18] With their dictates on subject matter and endorsement of certain styles and artists, they were undermining the ideal at the heart of contemporary art: the freedom of the artist to freely choose what and how he paints and not be accountable to the dictates of the establishment and public taste.

This anxiety about the power of art prizes was not peculiar to the late 1950s, but had been a concern since the Mosman City Council, horrified at award winning work by Roy Fluke, banned contemporary art from its Art Prize in 1954 and the NSW CAS retaliated by blacklisting their art prize.[19] Similarly from its inception in 1950, the Blake Prize for Religious Art had created considerable conflict between the artistic community and the public as to whom art was accountable — to the public or to art itself. As the Blake Prize was awarded to a series of semi-abstract works and artists flooded the competition with their experimentations in abstract expressionism, considerable concern was expressed that those modern artists, those 'advocates of pure subjectivism ... [were] the greatest menace to the raising of the standards of religious art'.[20]

Father Kenny, the Blake's staunchest critic and voice of the common man, asserted that modern artists were totally self indulgent in their pursuit of the 'unbridled liberty of self expression'. They:

> want to level down religious art to the sort of profane art they practice and preach. They regard profane art as an end in itself, something utterly subjective, something to be addressed to, applauded by, the little coterie of their own admirers

The modernist philosophy of self expression, he argued, was totally unsuited to religious art 'because religion is not just for an esoteric group of aesthetes, but for all men' and accordingly religious art should 'teach and give pleasure — be intelligible'. Thus if modern religious art were:

> allowed to fall into the clutches of modern artists who glory in the unintelligibility and bigoted subjectivism of their effusion's. ... [it] will become as vapid and inconsequential as is much of modern profane art

The Christian artist, he argued in the letter to the SMH, had an obligation to serve the needs of the Church and the common man.[21] The artistic community replied in letters to the editor with Lynn arguing that to demand that art appeal to the common man and make the moral demands of religion a little more palatable was tantamount to totalitarianism and the reduction of art to propaganda and the mediocre.[22] Drysdale stated great art had never been produced by pandering to popular taste and this was evidenced by the fact that 'The

average man was not asked his opinions of the aesthetic values of the possessions of the Medicis'.[23]

Viewed within this context the revitalisation of the NSW CAS in 1955 appears to be complex in motivation and involve a section of the artistic community seeking to arm itself with the weaponry of the avant-garde in order to maintain ideological integrity and autonomy in an increasingly institutionalised and commercialised art infrastructure. The competitions presented the NSW CAS with the archetypal avant-garde contest of innovation versus conservatism, of radical art versus popular taste. As signifiers of the new corporate establishment, the contests and their judges constituted the new enemy of advanced art, and replaced, in NSW at least, old opponents like the trustees of the Art Gallery of NSW who had become largely paper tigers by the mid to late 1950s. For the heirs of Sydney's Andersonian liberalism, who believed that art was not about the end but the creative process, the prizes posed a threat to artistic freedom and to the right of the artist to define and control the nature and merit of art. They were the latest manifestation of the establishment's desire to appropriate and transform sophisticated art into kitsch for the masses. Accordingly the artists never missed an opportunity to convert the competitions into a battle site, creating controversy whenever possible by either attacking the conservativeness of the judges or converting the competition into an artistic duel over the relative values of total abstraction (abstract expressionism) and semi-abstraction (figurative and motif). As Trotsky and Anderson taught, the challenge for revolutionary art was not to win a desired outcome but to maintain the constant state of opposition and conflict which is necessary for cultural criticism and on-going change. Thus the continuance of the NSW CAS was essential to the progress of contemporary art.

The tyranny of public taste

Lynn's essay 'Abstract and Kitsch' had set the agenda for a new manifestation of avant-gardism, by calling on members to take subversive action against the tyranny of public taste. Lynn continued this theme in 'Out of the Mouths ...', May 1955, explaining that public

taste had always been used by the establishment to repress creativity and change.[24] The history of art as a history of liberty was, in fact, the history of man's universal struggle against this control mechanism which had plagued artists since the time of the Renaissance. Indeed artists from Michelangelo, Rosso and Veronese to Renoir, Gauguin, Boccioni, D.H. Lawrence, Wyndham Lewis, Cézanne and Camus had all had to struggle against the repressive manoeuvres of their establishments which conflated art with taste in order to control the populace. Lynn set out to illustrate that the ignorant responses of the public officials and priests that prizes such as the Blake and Mosman were stimulating were not new but the continuance of the eternal conflict from which great art was spawned. They echoed the same tension between state and artist that had led Carl Milles to reply to King Gustave's question 'Why did you make your sculptures of Rudeck so ugly?' 'To the artist nothing is ugly — but stupidity'.

Lynn warned that the growth of the institutional patronage and popularity of contemporary art was not to be mistaken for confirmation that contemporary art had achieved its goal of aesthetic excellence. Rather Hazlitt's observation that 'The diffusion of taste is not the same thing as the improvement of taste' was a reminder that popular taste had little to do with the quest for excellence, but was promoted by public institutions for their own ends. Veronese's clash with the Inquisition also illustrated that when art is controlled by the state or church, artistic creativity and the individual's freedom of thought and action are curbed. The Veronese incident, Lynn implied, proved the eternal nature of the artist's struggle with authority. As Courbet warned in 1870:

> The State is incompetent in matters of art. When it undertakes to reward it usurps the public taste. Its intervention is altogether demoralising, disastrous to the artist whom it deceives concerning his own merits; disastrous to art which it encloses in official rules and condemns to the most sterile mediocrity; it would be better for it to abstain.

Lynn cleverly used his historical narrative to suggest that the problems with the establishment which Australian artists were encountering were not an isolated phenomenon but part and parcel of the universal history of art. Indeed the NSW CAS

abstractionists formed part of the modernist avant-garde tradition which, Lynn moved on to illustrate, was born of opposition to state patronage which stifled innovation. It was the state's diffusion of representational and imitative art as public taste, he suggested, that led modernists like Redon to adopt a subversive platform of aesthetic experiment and abstraction and dismiss representational painters as 'parasites of the object'. As a strategy of resistance they had turned to formalism — to art for art's sake — arguing as did George Braque that: 'One must not imitate what one wants to create. One does not imitate appearances. The appearance is the result'. Following the lead of Cézanne, modern artists struggled to free art from the object and from demands that it serve the common good. They established art as a discipline in its own right with its own rules, the first of which was total dedication to the creative process, which Cézanne stressed when he wrote: 'Do not be an art critic, but paint: therein lies salvation.' Finally Lynn concluded his piece by recalling the Society's origins just in case CAS members should think that avant-gardism belonged only to books and foreign shores, by quoting the words of R.G. Menzies, who said in 1937:

> I find nothing but absurdity in much of so called "modern art" with its evasions of real problems and its cross-eyed drawings ... It is perhaps unnecessary for me to point out that I have not been offering my views as Attorney-General or as a politician, but as a lover of art.[25]

As the NSW CAS was born out of opposition to Menzies so its heritage was that of the modernist avant-garde and its charter was to be critical and subversive.

To spur members into action, the NSW Broadsheet proceeded during the following months to foster a sense of collectivity by adding to the usual CAS news, reports of public controversies, local and international, that illustrated on-going struggle and achievements of radical art. The Art Gallery of NSW and its trustees were constantly in the limelight but contextualised within the politics of world art by reports of the establishment's misdemeanours in other countries. News of fellow avant-gardists and significant events; of the critical response to Sidney Nolan's 1955-56 London and New York exhibitions and the 1956 American abstract expressionist show in London; of the film 'Picasso' which 'revealed

a great artist being used for the propaganda of peace and social realism'; of activities in Melbourne and Adelaide including the poetry and music performance of Barrett Reid and associates, and the antics of Barry Humphries; of the deaths of de Staël, Pollock, Rouault, and Charles Doutney, combined to foster a sense of being part of an international community of artists. On the local front the prizes, together with the CAS exhibitions, featured prominently as the focus of strategic activity with details of prize monies and the judges being published to encourage participation. When members won the prizes congratulations were triumphantly announced, with each win being celebrated as a victory against the forces of conservatism. Any hint of controversy was also reported with relish, for controversy was part of the game.

It was in 'Contemporary Art', November 1955, that Lynn argued the case for the continuing necessity for contemporary art societies. It was important that contemporary art, which he identified as formalism, did not rest on its laurels and allow itself to be absorbed into the mainstream infrastructure of galleries and museums. Its difference which was evident in its historical origins demanded that it have its own infrastructure, because:

> No one seriously says that art that goes on contemporaneously is contemporary art and in past ages it was never necessary to use this label ... there was never such a break in the long history of representationism as the modern cleavage which has produced an art that has now concerned itself with formal values for fifty years.

Contemporary art no longer meant 'art of the moment' but the tradition of avant-garde and this demanded that it have its own societies and museums. The old art galleries and museums, Lynn explained in a mini-history lesson, were ideologically unsuitable for modern art because they had been founded by governments in the golden moment of Victorian capitalism:

> when all art had became official, when art reflected the ideals and outlook of the large bourgeois sections and had a healing effect on social discord. The art movement, the Victorian ethos and idealogies [sic] of the principal political parties were not at variance. Art was safe and 'Royal' became common.[26]

They were essentially agencies of bourgeois power established to promote academic art and create a false sense of well being in the community.

Things had changed, however, Lynn announced with a definite touch of Andersonianism. Power now rested with 'the opposed art movements' who were 'so little related to the masses (cheers!)' that they defied political support and created bewilderment and hostility amongst the 'old guard'. Nevertheless, he warned, this should not be grounds for complacency; the battle for contemporary art was still young. The old guard was still powerfully positioned to continue worshiping Australian early Impressionists and pandering to the tastes of the 'inartistic multitudes'. One only had to remember that the trustees of the Art Gallery of NSW continued to privilege the academic in the Archibald, Wynne and Sulman prizes, and read in the daily press of their lamentable waste of five hundred guineas on yet another Lambert to know that this was true.[27] Not unlike Hitler in their anti-modernism and dedication to academic kitsch, the trustees were the enemies of true art and artistic freedom. Perhaps reflecting the fragility of freedom in the climate of the Petrov affair, Lynn asserted:

> it was not alarmist to recall Hitler's attack on 'degenerate' art and the tours of such art for the mockery of the populace, which flocked to the shows to thoroughly enjoy itself, nor to contemplate just how easily a hostile business and educational world could close our exhibitions.

Lynn proceeded to stress that while contemporary art was in a position of considerable power, it needed to be remembered that power did not come from stability and security but from subversion and opposition. Radical art groups such as CAS, therefore, had a responsibility:

> to take social action, as has all true art, which is disruptive, which seeks to disturb, and is produced not by simple recorders of nature, but by discontented people who don't always like the world as they see it.

For contemporary art to maintain its integrity it was essential that it create a network of groups and an institutional infrastructure, especially since, while the old guard might have problems recognising contemporary art, there was now an informed audience who:

> Faced with mass kitsch culture and entrenched academicism that is always sucking up (Wyndham Lewis) to nature, ... should have no difficulty in recognising what contemporary art was and the conditions for its extension and even survival.[28]

This was not to suggest, however, that the NSW CAS should become part of the new commercial infrastructure for contemporary art. Quite the contrary, Lynn informed NSW Broadsheet readers when, in late 1955, the usual complaints about the selection and hanging of the annual exhibition took on a fresh slant as members' concerns centred on sales and the pricing of work.[29] Lynn firmly reminded members that the CAS was more than a hanging society, and that the intention of its exhibitions was aesthetic radicalism, not sales which necessitated the continuance of its open exhibition policy. It was only at the CAS exhibitions that established notions of artistic excellence were suspended and mainstream taste was challenged as the young and inexperienced got an opportunity to show their work. At a CAS exhibition one might encounter over-crowding and a confusion of styles but one was also reminded that an art exhibition was not a piece of interior decoration, where the principal aim was to iron out the impact of works and reduce everything to tame harmony.

Neither sales nor the promotion of successful artists nor adherence to established artistic standards were the concern of the CAS. Indeed, Lynn warned, when it came to contemporary art the 'success of exhibitions cannot be judged on sales' although it was heartening to see the increase in sales which was contributing to the rise in prices which some thought 'excessive'. Essentially the role of the CAS, within the infrastructure of contemporary art, was not to promote individuals but ideals and to provide opportunities for the unfettered emergence of the new which meant holding shows that were 'vigorous, adventurous, full of zest, and, praise the Muse, sometimes erratic'.[30] In the increasingly institutionalised and commercial art world of Australia, the need for the CAS and the avant-garde was greater than ever.

Part II

The Arrival of Abstract Expressionism: Paul Haefliger and the Critical Response

The arrival of abstract expressionism to Australia was announced by Paul Haefliger in the SMH when, on 6 February, 1957, he wrote with considerable theatricality, 'A New Movement "Arrives" in Australia. A new art form has suddenly "hit" Sydney. It calls itself abstract expressionism'.[31] Contrary to the timbre of Haefliger's rhetoric, however, the arrival of abstract expressionism was not a sudden event. The Australian response to this international movement had been a concern since early 1955 when Desiderius Orban returning from the Venice Biennale announced to the press that Australia had been mistaken in sending the work of Dobell, Drysdale and Nolan because 'Ours did not fit into the general trend'.[32] He reported that in Italy and France the general trend was toward abstract art, and although surrealism was strong it was abstract art that had become popular with art galleries and private collectors. The International Congress of Plastic Arts was sending an exhibition of Italian abstract and modern art to Australia within the year and had asked for an Australian exhibition in return. Orban emphasised it was important to respond to these latest developments by including examples of abstract art and surrealism amongst the works chosen to represent Australia overseas.[33]

The 1954 Venice Biennale was significant for several reasons, not the least of which was that it was the first time Australian art was represented at this international showcase for modern art.[34] Recent history has made much of the Cold War politics of the American pavilion at this Biennale. However, on the day the interest was not with the United States but the wide trend towards abstract expressionism which was evident across the board; in Riopelle in the Canadian section, de Kooning in the American pavilion and Matta Moreni in the Palazzo Centrale.[35] The size and sumptuous energy of the new work was reported as impressive by Robert Melville whose review in the Listener engenders something of the excitement that many felt:

> They are impressive and disturbing painters: one senses the inordinate, vertiginous pleasures that painting affords them, and when one looks round, one sees that

> many more painters are in no mood for self denial. The abstractionists in the French pavilion, Appel from Holland, the Israeli painter Ardon linger without appetite over the remains of structure, and when Francis Bacon – exhibiting in the British pavilion - allows a ' of flesh to appear in amidst the scrumble of paint at the centre of his canvases, it has the look of a contrived accident. It is difficult to condemn this point of arrival without condemning the Fauves and the Surrealists and, above all, the great Expressionists, who have prepared the way.[36]

There was shared excitement that radical change was occurring in contemporary practice but this was tempered with caution. There were the implications of the Cold War politics involved in the American's promotion of abstract expressionism to be considered, and concerns about the impact which the new abstraction would have on the strong trend in Europe and England towards new realism and expressive figuration.[37]

The international emergence of abstract expressionism was accompanied by controversy and a mix of confidence and scepticism about the future, and in Australia, where the interest in contemporary art was high, the situation was no different. In Sydney, Orban's statement stimulated an exchange of letters in the SMH with Sali Herman branding abstraction the new fashionable academy and warning of the strong reaction against it in London and Paris. Others came to its defence in the name of artistic freedom arguing against the charge that abstract expressionism was self-indulgent. Somewhat uncertain about the exact nature of the changes occurring as abstraction embraced expressionism, all agreed that as the latest trend it was attracting the younger generation.[38] Overall there was an air of hopeful expectation that the Australian response would be of international standard, but in some quarters this was mingled with anxiety about where these developments might ultimately lead Australian art.

The critical response to abstract expressionism

This mixed response was initially fed by Paul Haefliger, who conscious of his role as a power broker, set out to predict the course of this latest trend in contemporary art. Accordingly, a key theme of his SMH reviews in 1955-56 was the detection of the new movement and the assessment of the younger generation in terms of their evolving

mastery of it. He praised the trend for offering 'our young a splendid means to master the art of composition' while warning that it could lead to 'embroideries for modern chair covers'.[39] He detected the first signs of 'the movement', in March 1955, noting in a review of Roy Fluke and Gordon McAuslan that 'The problem of abstract art as a means of expression for the younger generation seems formidable. ... [it] has conquered the world'.[40] The challenge for the young, he explained, would be whether they could create something original and vital from the world trend or simply restate it. In October 1955 he detected 'indications for the future' in the expressiveness of some abstracts by Margo Lewers, William Rose and Carl Plate at the annual interstate CAS show. Haefliger described these works as being 'in a most interesting state of transition where a certain emotional element leads the forms away from the classicism of the Picasso era' and named this 'recent expressionism within abstract art', 'abstract expressionism'.[41] It was not until October 1956, and the Pacific Loans exhibition, however, that Haefliger's predictions came true. Then he was able to announce confidently that a revolution had occurred naming John Olsen, John Passmore, William Rose and Eric Smith as 'the leaders of a new movement' which explored a 'new land whose full exploration has not been achieved anywhere in the world.'[42] However, as prematurely as he celebrated the arrival of abstract expressionism, he began to predict its failure ending 1956 by accusing the abstractionists in the Annual Interstate CAS Exhibition and 'Direction 1' exhibition of contriving to follow fashion and indulge in emotion and chaos for their own sake.[43]

Haefliger's championing of abstract expressionism came as a mixed blessing. While there is no dispute that he helped to popularise it as the young energetic art of the future, it is equally true that he helped to shape the negative view that it was no more than the latest overseas fashion, hence his support was somewhat two-edged, if not duplicitous. As a critic his intention was to identify the best artists (the leaders) of the movement and so shape and control the public profile of the movement and the careers of those involved. Judy Cassab recalled that Haefliger even went so far as to actively encourage some artists to adopt abstraction and ostracise those, like James Gleeson, who did not, fostering a

climate of expectation in which even John Passmore felt pressured to follow abstract expressionism.[44] His reviews reveal little knowledge of or interest in the ideological and theoretical issues involved. His use of the term 'abstract expressionism' to describe painters as disparate as Michael Kmit, John Passmore, John Olsen, Eric Smith, W. Rose, Margo Lewers, Carl Plate, Judy Cassab, George Olszanski, John Stockdale and Donald Laycock was superficial and misleading. Not only did it misrepresent their intentions: it also gathered all European and American manifestations under one generalised heading. Intentional or not, this worked to removed any suggestion of ideological difference and complexity and enabled Haefliger to promote the new developments as a general popular trend, rather than a complex oppositional movement with many splinter groups. This vacuity of definition was compounded by the tone of Haefliger's writing, which was often playfully disparaging. Thus while he might write with relative positiveness about the transition in abstraction detected in the work at the CAS's 1955 annual show, he would also open this review with the damning observations:

> All those youthful enthusiasts who were going to shock and delight with their daring find their pictures hung next to other enthusiasts also shocking and daring. Indeed there is not a single painting which seems really outstanding.[45]

Haefliger's was a subtle strategy which used praise and generalisation to popularise abstraction as the new, young and experimental while stripping it of serious intent by insidiously promoting it as an international trend. Haefliger's concern, however, was not the genuine understanding of abstract expressionism as a new ideology, but his aesthetic ideal of excellence and he evaluated the new movement according to his criteria of artistic standards. Typically his support was tinged with European elitism and he cynically promoted new abstraction, not as a means for great and serious art, but as the latest art fashion to sweep Australia. Haefliger informed the public that serious art was to be found in the quality semi-figurative contemporary work which The Blake Prize for Religious Art attracted. Abstract expressionism, he implied time and again, was not capable of significant content but was the art trend which Australian painters, still too culturally immature to hold firm and evolve their own contemporary art, were abandoning all to join.[46]

However, Haefliger was never outrightly dismissive. He cultivated a rhetoric of seemingly fulsome yet negative praise, which he used to great effect when reviewing the 'Pacific Loans Exhibition of Contemporary Art' which the Orient Line toured through the Pacific to the West coast of America on the SS Orcades in October 1956. In this instance, having praised the high quality of the exhibition for revealing that 'Our painters may not compare with the best that Europe may offer, but generally they are much better than one has a right to expect', Haefliger placed himself at 'the cutting edge' enthusiastically pronouncing the abstract work to be the 'most exciting aspect' in which a revolution had:

> taken place among a section of painters who have suddenly become aware of the post-Picassian trends which have preoccupied the post-war world. Painters with diverging interests have suddenly cast aside their former manner of expression and, so to speak, jumped into the maelstrom of abstract expressionism.
>
> This action which might be viewed by the sophisticated foreigner with a certain superior indulgence, nevertheless lends an enthusiasm to this show which is not only refreshing but whose effect cannot be overestimated. Once again one sees a change, equalled only by the revolt in Australia Art in 1938-39.[47]

It is easy to be critical of Haefliger and forget that his criticism, which was intended to stimulate controversy and public awareness, did a great deal to advance Sydney's engagement in cosmopolitanism. Indeed, the extent of Haefliger's and the SMH's contribution to the creation of a sympathetic climate for international abstraction cannot be underestimated, as their promotion of this exhibition illustrates.[48] Timed to coincide with the Melbourne Olympics Games, the Pacific Loans exhibition, with its focus on postwar contemporary Australian art and an America audience, formed something of a challenge to Melbourne and the establishment's Olympic Arts Festival. So it was with a fine sense of timing that Haefliger seized this moment to promote Sydney's artistic superiority and predict that abstract expressionism would see Sydney replace Melbourne as the new centre of contemporary practice.

The 1956 Olympic Games Arts Festival and the Pacific Loans Exhibition

1956, the year of the Melbourne Olympics, was an important year for cultural propaganda in Australia. The Pacific Loans exhibition was well promoted by the SMH amid pages filled with news about the coming games and about the Suez Canal and Hungarian crises. The questions posed by the press headlines were 'Will the Russians come?' 'Will the games be peaceful?'[49] The eyes of the world were focused on Australia at this crucial moment in international and colonial politics as the Hungarian crisis and the problems surrounding Suez saw Britain defeated as an imperial power and USSR and United States emerge as the new world superpowers. For Australia the need to be positioned internationally as a middle power in the Asia Pacific and break its ties with Britain was acute as the foreigner minister Mr Casey argued. Prime Minister Menzies, however, clung with determined loyalty to the motherland, much to the chagrin of those concerned with Australia's international reputation.[50] As Australia questioned where its future might lie, the rhetoric of new beginnings and national maturity became pervasive at all levels of its cultural discourse forming the theme of the Melbourne Olympics Arts Festival.

The Olympics Arts Festival was the official display of Australian culture and accordingly it was designed to 'complement' Australia's maturity as a competitive sporting nation. The Festival's catalogue formed a compendium of Australian culture, with essays on the arts, architecture, commercial art, literature, ceramics, opera and theatre, which sought to argue that Australia had mature and distinguishable cultural tradition.[51] A huge 'Painting and Drawings' show was constructed to illustrate the birth of a cultural tradition and nationhood and offer an art historical survey of Australian art from colonial times to the present day. Its supporting essay was written by Bernard Smith who drew on Australia's radical nationalist tradition to weave a tale of the birth of a unique Australian painting style and subject matter wrested from the mother culture through rebellion and isolation.[52] Smith suggested that the question facing Australia in 1956 was whether this unique cultural identity, which was only just shaping into maturity, could withstand the pressures of internationalism as science was breaking down the barriers of isolation and distance and Australia was entering 'the family of nations'. Would Australia, he asked, be able to achieve 'an identity of her own' and 'see

the emergence of an Australian artistic tradition?' Would the family of nations allow its young members to mature and retain their own personalities, regional differences and self-respect?

The Pacific Loans exhibition, which was organised by Hanne Fairfax and James Gleeson under the auspices of the Art Gallery Society of NSW, offered a sharply contrasting ideal of Australian culture as once again it was commerce and business, rather than government, that funded and promoted contemporary art in Australia.[53] Cleverly organised to tour Sydney, Auckland, Honolulu, Vancouver and San Francisco on the Orient Line's SS Orcades, which had been extensively refurbished by British and Australian designers, it showcased the most recent and best of Australian painting and design.[54] Its intention was to promote Australia as an exemplary modern culture, and accordingly, in contrast to the Olympic Festival's historical perspective, it focused on Australia's leading contemporary artists and the very latest in abstract expressionism. With the huge, bold abstracts as its highlight, the exhibition's promotional rhetoric was firmly on the new as signified by modernism, and the modern world as signified by the Asia Pacific and America.[55]

Gleeson emphasised in the catalogue that the show's concern was not with the creation of traditions that must be upheld and protected, but 'with a group of artists involved in the experiment of creating a new kind of pictorial language that will explain and typify our own age.' Australia, he explained, was an archetypal modern culture driven by 'a restless visual curiosity and a dynamic "nature" that changes constantly'. Rather than being isolated it was sophisticated and pluralist. Further its art was 'Janus-headed' as some artists looked to 'life and landscape that seem most significant in the contemporary age' and others to the 'contemplation of the complex surge of International Art that has its source in Paris, London, and New York.' Thus, Gleeson explained, one group called:

> upon the past, not in the spirit of imitation, but in order to take from it those vital elements that can be adapted to the need of our time. Changed and altered, these qualities form a link with past traditions while serving as a scaffolding for new ideas. The second type of artist breaks almost completely with the past and seeks to

> devise an entirely new language of his own. They are explorers investigating an unknown land.[56]

Gleeson announced triumphantly on its return to Sydney the Orcades exhibition was 'a honey of a show'.[57] It had 'startled' the Americans, who were mystified that 'such a country would have so much art' and that many (Passmore, Olsen, Rose, Eric Smith, Daws and French) used the international idiom with 'unencumbered' 'freshness' while maintaining 'accents that were personal and Australian'.[58] With its strong showing of the experimentations of the young and 'little knowns', it fired memories of the CAS's golden years of opposition to Menzies' Academy which led Australia's most influential critics, Paul Haefliger and Alan McCulloch, to enthusiastically predict that 'once again Australia in art has sprung to life'.[59] On a more general front, its focus on the new world and its success stimulated the hope that Australia was in on the ground floor of the creation of the a truly international art movement.

The energy and new direction in the Pacific Loans exhibition came largely from the younger generation, who together with Nancy Borlase remember being caught up in a climate of experimentation. Excited by the certainty that the West was embarking on the creation of a new humanist art movement, they set out on a search for new modes of expression, conventions and formal devices.[60] Change was in the air, and the most exciting element was that the horizons were undefined. Not surprisingly, the tone of Sydney's art reviews for 1956 moved from confidence to uncertainty to transition, as mature artists like Carl Plate, Margo Lewers and John Passmore experimented with expressive processes including collage and calligraphic drawing, and a new set of names from Olsen, Hodgkinson, Fluke, Daws, Gleghorn, Rapotec to Grieve, began to 'lend an air of experimentation' and make their mark as 'the promises for the future'.[61] The dominant theme was exploration, and this was most apparent in the Watercolour Institute's Show in August, where the artists in their push towards non-objective abstraction set about exploring drawing and watercolour and less-orthodox materials and techniques searching for unfettered and spontaneous, automatist, modes of expression.[62]

The confidence in abstract expressionism was accompanied by a heightened sense of internationalism, and as Lynn and Rapotec recalled, of being swept up and along by the first movement of their generation, the potential of which was as yet unknown.[63] The idea of participating in an international movement was fed by many factors, including the expanding world of art theory and publications and the phenomenon of travelling exhibitions. In 1956, Sydney, for example, saw not only 'Contemporary Italian Painting',[64] but also a German graphic design show,[65] and a French tapestry exhibition which Gleeson described as 'unsettling'.[66] As part of the West's cultural propaganda program these shows came couched in the rhetoric of new humanism. In the Italians' case this rhetoric positioned the artist at the forefront of a change into a more expressive art which would 'speak to all mankind' and give priority to the 'creative imagination with its need for absolute freedom and the conditioning of the individual which modern progress has brought.'[67]

American 'abstract expressionism'

A distinguishing feature of the new internationalism, as the different focus of the Pacific Loans and the Olympic Arts Festival exhibitions suggest, was the tension wrought by America's assertive challenge for political and cultural leadership of the West. As Helen M. Franc's study of MOMA and its International Program has established, 1956-7 was the critical period when the United States began to aggressively promote abstract expressionism in its claim for ownership of the avant-garde.[68] Thomas Hess marked the fifty-fifth anniversary of Art News by devoting the issue to the promotion of the notion of an American avant-garde tradition, using articles by Clement Greenberg and Meyer Schapiro to define it in historical and theoretical terms.[69] From here on, Art News resolutely promoted abstract expressionism as American and the movement of international avant-gardism, contextualising it as such with reviews and news of its manifestation in America and throughout the world.

The International Program's 'Modern Art in the United States' exhibition did most to stimulate a wide awareness of abstract expressionism and create conflict. As it toured Europe and England in 1956, the work of the New York School artist, Rothko, de Kooning,

Pollock and Kline, was singled out as evidence of the 'mood of adventure and exhilaration, freshness and vigour ... and freedom' which characterised America's practice of avant-gardism. Heated debate accompanied the exhibition and, as in the case of London, this more frequently than not was more about politics than about art. The thinly disguised chauvinism of the Americans' promotional material, including Meyer Schapiro's article in the Listener, fuelled political tensions, especially when bold claims were made that American artists believed:

> the centre of art has shifted from Paris to New York; not simply because they believe that the newest ideas and energies are there and that America shows the way. ... But, in the last years, the Americans have been recognised in Europe as an original school and their work has in fact won some followers abroad.
>
> It is easy to suppose that this new confidence of American artists is merely a reflex of national economic and political strength but the artists in question are not at all chauvinist or concerned with politics. They would reject any proposal that they use their brushes for a political end ... many government officials and congressmen disapprove of their work ...[70]

The artists' intentions may not have been political but the promotion of them was uncompromisingly so, as the United States claimed to have produced a new breed of artists whose individualism, born from the tradition of avant-gardism and American democratic freedom, held the key the future.[71] Schapiro concluded, that with the avant-garde now firmly established in New York, the ownership of the centre of avant-gardism was resolved. As in politics and economics, it was America and not England and Europe, that would lead modernism into its next phase.

Not all were seduced by the Americans' propaganda and the British were particularly wary viewing abstract expressionism as a signifier of American totalitarianism rather than genuine internationalism. Its left press, exemplified by John Berger and Nation, was openly hostile, dismissing abstract expressionism as evidence of American capitalism's decline and the reduction of art to self-indulgent individualism. Berger was not alone in his concern that the Americans' persuasive propaganda was a threat to the new realism of Paris and London and to the integrity of regional differences and he had allies as far afield as

Australia. For Australia, caught between the fading light of Britain and the might of America in the Pacific, the question of whether the world would succumb to the advance of American cultural imperialism was particularly significant for the new nationalists like Bernard Smith.[72]

'The business of keeping informed'

The breaking down of the barriers of distance fostered a heightened sense of internationalism and belonging for Australians. However, the tussle between Europe and the United States for leadership of world art also fostered an unease in cultural loyalties which was compounded by an urgency to be part of the play: to be not left behind. There were also the problems of how to engage in this international movement without being accused of 'jumping on the bandwagon' of fashion, and how to avoid the accusation that the abstract expressionist's pursuit of subjectivity and the inner realm was self indulgent and devoid of serious intent. For the avant-garde of abstract expressionism a degree of intellectual credibility became crucial for a sense of artistic integrity. Nancy Borlase recalled, the NSW CAS abstractionists were dedicated to the 'business of keeping informed'; to reading, travelling and exchanging information about the latest developments overseas and throughout Australia.[73] The NSW CAS membership swelled as the younger generation, including Tom Gleghorn, Stan Rapotec, Henry Salkauskas, John Coburn, Tony Tuckson and William Rose, turned to it as a forum for the exchange of information and a 'clearing house of ideas'.[74] The lecture program developed a practical bent as Peter Dodd and Tom Gleghorn spoke on new techniques in contemporary drawing and painting and F.D. McCarthy introduced the topic of Aboriginal art to the Society. The focus of the NSW CAS was now firmly on ideas and whether this was because there was a shortage of visual material as history has argued is highly debatable. It is more likely, as Lynn's key essays 'The Motif in Painting' and 'Tachism and Abstract Expressionism and the Baroque' indicate, that the theoretical debate of ideas was integral to the practice of abstract expressionism, especially its dedication to the 'act' rather than the object and its use of the creative process to challenge convention.[75]

Written as Haefliger was promoting abstract expressionism as the latest market trend, Lynn's essays were designed to explain the oppositional nature of abstract expressionism while providing the theoretical underpinning necessary for its practice. Beginning with 'The Motif in Painting' in March 1956, Lynn set out to dispel any myths by explaining the intricacies of the new movement, and to distance its practice from politics and fashion by clarifying, once and for all, its formalist ideology.[76] Lynn attacked the historians of 'abstract impressionists' (Rewald and Norah) for their eagerness to explain Cézanne, Van Gogh and Gauguin in terms of their dedication to the plein air and the capturing of 'their experience – their perception of the motif – olive trees, mountains or 'dusky beauties on beaches'. They had overlooked 'the fact that once a picture is launched the stimulation will then come from the work already commenced'. As the theories supporting American abstract expressionism and action painting had established, Lynn stressed, it was not the motif that was the raison d'être of art but the creative act itself. Thus he explained the abstract expressionists 'approach painting without aesthetic preoccupations or extra-canvas references'. Jackson Pollock had made this quite definite when he said:

> "On the floor I am more at ease ... When I am in my painting, I'm not aware of what I am doing, It is only after a short 'get acquainted' period that I see what I have been about."

The meaning of a painting, therefore, was in the creative act, in that 'stage' when 'the painting takes charge of the painter and ... its motif is redundant'. The problem with the Impressionists, Lynn continued, was that they:

> obscured the fact that what the artist finally does is to separate the painting from its motif ... Perhaps it was only by eschewing direct reference to real subjects that Americans, by showing that the picture results from the action of painting itself, were able to reinstate expressionism.[77]

Having established that abstract expressionism was not concerned with emotion and self-expression, Lynn proceeded to explain that action painting was leading to a situation where 'the accident, the whirlwind and dripping quality of the paint have become the painting: technique and subject are really one'. It was this 'casual and accidental nature of works by Pollock, Ferren, Rothko etc,' that 'aroused the ire of critics.'[78] However, rather than being

'a fashionable innovation of contemporary art', the 'exploitation of the accident' was pivotal to all truly creative processes, Lynn argued drawing attention to Anton Ehrenzweig's 'The Modern Artists and the Creative Accident'.[79] It was a formal device which 'had its forerunners in those traditional art forms where wilfulness and caprice play a dominant part – in particular like 'the irrational operas of Mozart, whose plots often defy logical analysis, yet whose musical cohesion laughs at logicians.'[80] However, always an Andersonian formalist, Lynn dismissed Ehrenzweig's psychological explanations of the irrational to ask instead:

> Is it not a fact that in all art the process is one of accepting and exploiting the accidents, the not-intended, that artists are always choosing and selecting not so much from nature, but from what is already on his canvas. This intuitive acceptance of the unpremeditated and use of wilful shapes has no relation to the irrational juxtaposing of unassociated objects in some forms of surrealism, which had a spurious coherence if one was ill-read in Freud and Jones.

In Lynn's opinion the surrealist works were 'all motif and no painting' explained in terms of 'some emasculated psychological theories' while 'with most abstractionists ... one has to be content with the picture and get one's literature and psychology elsewhere – and better literature and psychology will always be found elsewhere, anyway.' Just to make certain that his formalist argument was understood, Lynn suggested that those who said the aim of the abstract impressionists was to express a particular emotion refer to previous NSW Broadsheets and remember that 'emotions are in the mind and not in painting.'[81]

Lynn's fundamental formalism was most apparent in his rejection of surrealism and his apolitical readings of the Americans, who were blatantly chauvinistic as any reading of Rosenberg, Greenberg, Sam Hunter or Art News reveals.[82] For Lynn, expressive abstraction belonged to no one nation, no one political or cultural group, rather it was the ultimate art for art's sake movement which, in the theses of his mentors, Anderson, Malraux and Langer, was universal in its autonomy and politically apolitical. As an avant-garde movement it constituted a multiplicity of co-existing splinter groups which competed in the universal struggle to create the new and original.

Lynn took up this theme in his August 1956 essay, 'Tachism, Abstract Expressionism and the Baroque', a lively, adventurous piece which was a theoretical breakthrough for Lynn.[83] In it he made a daring attempt to explain, in simple yet innovative terms, the dominant characteristics of abstract expressionism, while formulating an interpretation that explained the new movement in formalist terms. He opened with praise for 'refugee European scholars' for having introduced universal stylistic categories, such as Mannerism and the Baroque, to the analysis of English literature. He then sought to apply these categorisations to the analysis of the two dominant stylistic tendencies in the new abstraction. That Lynn should perceive a connection between Mannerism, the Baroque and expressive abstraction is strange but not inexplicable. These marginalised post-Renaissance styles were experiencing a revival of interest in blockbuster exhibitions in Amsterdam and Rome which were attracting a great deal of attention, coming, at a time when many modernists were advocating the end of the Renaissance tradition.[84] As the exhibitions reviews brought the art historical binary of classicism and expressionism to public awareness, they also advanced the notion of a long tradition of anti-Renaissance values. For Lynn this offered the means to contextualise abstract expressionism into the greater schema of art history, and thus extend Malraux's and Langer's theories that abstraction evolved from a long tradition of art as creative opposition.

Lynn used a theoretical framework inspired by the third book of the Penguin series on English Literature which demonstrated 'the change from Mannerism to Baroque in contemporary literature', to identify tachism with Mannerism, explaining:

> Mannerism in literature is an interest in words almost for the sake of words (Finnegan's Wake) and in paint almost for the sake of paint, as in tachism, Tache – blot, blemish, bruise on fruit – was first applied to painting in 1950 by a French critic to denote an irregular patchiness, usually accompanied by impasto and quite unlinear. Dubuffet, de Stael (middle period) Adler and sometimes Sydney's Eric Smith are examples – a rich roughness of pigment is accompanied by solidity of form which is free of the whimsical, charming and ready-made.[85]

As Mannerism was the first stage in the revolt against the Renaissance so tachism was the first stage in the revolt against the renaissance phase of modernism, indeed:

> Just as Mannerism was a revolt against the strict, linear architectural style of the early Renaissance, so is tachism the enemy of the geometric abstractionists who are obsessed with placement and charm. The earliest examples of abstract expressionism was closely related to tachism, but were more restless, explosive, uncontrolled and rich. The painting took place before our eyes. The drip become the guitar of the modern movement. Tachist painters have a predilection for the horizontal and the vertical, for forms parallel to the frame.

Tachism therefore had grown from the early renaissance of Cézanne and the Cubists. Like Mannerism it rejected geometric order with its flat abstraction and imprisonment of forms to create new forms that 'begin to melt and flow in pearly lusciousness or shallow flatness' so that 'mass and line become one'.

Clearly pleased by the analogy, Lynn moved on to hypothesise that perhaps abstract expressionism might be:

> called Baroque abstraction, for it is Baroque in its avoidance of the vertical and horizontal, in its vigorous, emphatic and exuberant fluidity, in its explosiveness and involution of form, in its coherent incoherence. Its wildness is contained; its flamboyant vigour has an aesthetic serenity. Early Jackson Pollocks seems [sic] as if they could go on for yards. The later ones cohere like the walking patterns of newly captured tigers in a cage. In some pictures, like Rothko, he is pure tachist, in others he is pure Baroque.

Lest one read this theory as support for America's leadership of abstract expression, Lynn quickly pointed out that 'Tachism and Baroque expressionism tend to become mixed', stressing that they were primarily formal devices to be used in the quest to evolve new art forms. He explained, that this was 'best exemplified in two artists recently shown in Paris and New York – Riopelle, the French Canadian and Lanskoy, Russian-born Parisian. Lanskoy's 'art of the violent gesture, luxurious, tumultuous and barbaric [combined] Baroque and tachism' while Riopelle 'was a mannerist linear, abstract-expressionist' after 1950 had 'resorted to building a painting by tachist patches that were running counter to horizontal and vertical forces' so that now his work was 'like a whirlwind of coloured dominoes: It looks as though an electric wire fell upon the careful squares of cubist abstraction and shocked them into violent movement'. Lynn concluded:

> These two painters combine the two important post-war developments – tachism and abstract expressionism, ... movements that somewhat reflect the unease of the times, that give contemporary support to Malraux's dictum that art develops by the metamorphosis of forms.[86]

The remarkable aspect of this essay is Lynn's effort to shape a formalist framework that offers direction and discipline to the NSW CAS's participation in abstract expressionism and a critical model to counter the unsuitability of that of its critics. Working imaginatively, largely from reproductions and a well informed reading of the discourse, Lynn crafted eloquent analyses of Lanskoy and Riopelle's work that never resort to the emotions or inner realms for explanation. They are, instead, models of what formalist criticism should be.[87] As he sought to create the appropriate analytical and descriptive language he experimented with words; isolating 'irregular patches', 'palette knife', 'impasto', 'wildness', 'lusciousness', 'vertical and horizontal', 'flamboyant vigour', 'fluidity', 'tumultuousness', 'explosiveness', 'coherent incoherence', 'involution of form', 'violent gesture', 'explosions of colour', 'barbaric', 'violent movement', 'uncontrolled', 'rich', in a search for terms suited to the graphic description of abstract expressionism as 'painting'. When he came to Lanskoy he evoked the energy of the work as process describing how:

> From the top of the canvas there is a rush of red, orange and pale green irregular patches, tumbling into and over one another, applied with the palette knife, like autumn leaves hurled in one direction, checked in their cataclysmic descent by a black tusk of paint.[88]

Thus Lynn shaped a historical and theoretical framework for the practice of abstract expressionism and a critical model that made constructive and informed debate possible. While this framework had it roots in international theory, it was an amalgam of influences blended specifically for Australian circumstances as Lynn's handling of the irrational suggests. Lynn's intention, however, was not to establish a dogma. On the contrary; as always with Lynn and the NSW CAS the intention was to create debate and controversy.

In true Lynn style, 'Tachism, Abstract Expressionism and the Baroque' was polemical and designed to set the parameters of the Australian debate by drawing the battle lines between the established tradition of geometric abstraction and the new gutsy abstract

expressionism. His snipes at the 'geometrical abstractionists' and the 'whimsical, charming and ready-made' took on a decidedly local and controversial flavour when, in concluding his essay, he attacked Eric Westbrook, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, who, at a recent opening of the Society of Artists, issued grave warnings:

> calling the new movement in Paris and New York, catastrophic and a snare for the eighteen-year-olds who are too easily distracted by the fashions in art, for we all know that success usually comes only at fifty.[89]

This, countered Lynn, was a fine example of the custodians of public taste who, having only just become reconciled to geometric abstraction, were totally bewildered by the new movement. As for Westbrook's claim that the new work lacked humanity, Lynn wrote:

> It is simply naive to imagine that humanity can only exist in works that depict humans in their scenic environment. If early German expressionism was presenting human feeling symbolically, surely the abstractionist expressionists could be doing the same thing.[90]

With the battle lines well drawn, Lynn dismissed Westbrook's reservations about youth and fashion in true CAS rhetoric, retorting:

> we may only say that it is often craft, not art, that comes with age; that the aged are too often the defenders of outworn tradition and that it is necessary to distinguish fashion from genuine movements.[91]

The 'bandwagon of abstract expressionism'

By August 1956 abstract expressionism was clearly a force to be reckoned with and the battle to control and direct its position in Australian art was beginning to form. As the year progressed, abstract expressionism was the highlight of the Pacific Loans exhibition, where the boldness of John Olsen's Views of the Western World and William Rose's No 18[92] signified a confident shift into totally non-objective art. It also dominated the Annual Interstate CAS exhibition in November 1956.[93] There, the strong showing of abstract expressionist work by Sydney and interstate artists, as varied as Olszanski, Kmit, Rapotec, Roy Fluke, Margo Lewers, Coburn, Plate, Gleghorn, Ken Hood, Erica McGilchrist, Judy Cassab, Ian Sime, Dawn Sime, Feuerring, John Stockdale, Sue Buckley, John Howley and Lawrence Daws, led Haefliger to announce 'That the bandwagon of abstract expressionism

is filling nicely,' and warn of the dangers of the contrived pursuit of fashionable art movements.[94] To make his point Haefliger, not insignificantly singled out Lynn's experiment with tachism, Torrid Day at Tachismo for a vehement attack, criticising Lynn as an artist who:

> tries to assault his senses and take by rape what does not come in answer to his call. Here obviously is a painter who should think more, feel more and paint less for in his frenzied work he has time for neither thought nor subtlety of feeling.[95]

As the presence of the Simes and Erica McGilchrist in the CAS exhibition indicates, the practice of abstract expressionism was not restricted to Sydney. Its future was being fiercely debated in Melbourne as the CAS there vacillated in its support.[96] Meanwhile, 'The Adelaide Group' of Ostoja Kotkowski, Wladyslow Dutkiewicz, Ludwik Dutkiewicz, Douglas Roberts, Pamela Cleland and Jacqueline Hicks announced its participation in the movement with a Sydney exhibition in January 1957. This show Haefliger cynically remarked, established for all for to see that abstract expressionism was busily revealing its soul in every nook and cranny.[97] It was in Sydney, however, that the presence of a well established group of abstract expressionists was most apparent, and where the 'Direction 1' exhibition, which has been heralded as signifying Australia's breakthrough into abstract expressionism, occurred.[98]

Cleverly titled to exploit Haefliger's positive review of the Pacific Loans exhibition, 'Direction 1' was a group exhibition with John Passmore, William Rose, John Olsen, Eric Smith and Robert Klippel, held at the Macquarie Galleries in December 1956. Much has been written about 'Direction 1', with it, rather than the earlier Annual Interstate CAS Exhibition, being credited as the first manifestation of the American inspired abstract expressionism movement in Australia. This is despite the fact that the group lacked a cohesive stylistic ideology and owed little to abstract expressionism in the American sense. One has to question why the members of 'Direction 1' have been privileged as 'the leaders of abstract expressionism' when their interest in it was quite perfunctory, and only Olsen and Rose

continued with their commitment to the movement? Why has 'Direction 1' and not the CAS show been thus critically acclaimed and mythologised?

'Direction 1' was a shrewd piece of market positioning, especially as Passmore, Olsen, Rose and Smith had been singled out by Haefliger in his Pacific Loans review as the leaders of the new movement. Held at the prestigious and relatively conservatively contemporary Macquarie Galleries, the exhibition was seemingly radical in its inclusion of heroic-size, non-objective abstracts, which suggested that the Macquarie was being unusually adventurous in promoting the young and new.[99] However, none of these artists were without reputation. All but Klippel had shown with the prestigious Sydney Group and the Society of Artists. Passmore had long been acclaimed, as Sydney's 'best', while Eric Smith's recent success in the Blake Prize gave him market credibility. Klippel had the kudos of his overseas experience. Olsen, after the Pacific Loans exhibition and the sale of his View of the Western World no. 3 to the Art Gallery of Western Australia, was riding a wave of success which gained him Robert Shaw's patronage for his overseas education.[100] Olsen, who had lead the student protest against the Archibald Prize in 1953 and provided the polemics for Sydney's Nine's controversial Melbourne show in 1961, had an acutely developed sense of publicity and positioning which suggests is possible that 'Direction 1' consisted of a group of individuals using the pretence of a new movement to exploit the moment.[101]

Haefliger alluded to this possibility in his review of 'Direction 1' when he accused it of being pretentiously titled and lamented that while 'The Orcades exhibition led one to hope for further direction (Direction 2 perhaps)', this exhibition does 'not quite attain the standard for which one hoped'. Sceptical of the potential of the new movement to produce true art, he criticised Passmore and Smith as 'the weak link among these leaders of abstract expressionism', for while Passmore might be 'our best painter', 'this new expressionism does not suit his temperament.' As for Smith he was 'not strong either. Despite the heroic size – and nearly all canvases here are heroic in size – the gesture [was] brave but thin'.[102]

The problem, Haefliger explained, turning to his criteria of artistic excellence, was one of structure and emotion, for:

> However much an artist may claim his right to express what he feels, to convey the reality which resides within him, to express chaos when chaos is all he feels ... art requires a certain structure within its own idiom which gives concrete evidence of its aims ... Emotion alone cannot carry a work; emotional intensity requires structure, it is through structure and spatial relationship that it gains its intensity.

Olsen, however, was 'outstanding', projecting:

> himself with an urge of confession. Certainly the forms are personal – part of a subconscious symbolism – yet nevertheless he conveys a desire to reach the universal aspect of things...for basic emotions are shared even if the vehicle of expression seems strange at first.[103]

For Haefliger, therefore, Olsen was a manifestation of Sydney's romantic ideal of the artist as hero, whose role it was to express the timeless realm of feelings and emotions. This raises the possibility that Haefliger's promotion of abstract expressionism and the 'Direction 1' group was connected with a bid to revitalise Sydney's romantic tradition of art.

Haefliger's review of 'Direction 1' and his misinformed promotion of abstract expressionism have been criticised by art historians and critics, however, his signalling of the 'Direction 1' group as the inspiration for 'a new attitude to art' has seldom been questioned. Indeed John Passmore's and Godfrey Miller's teaching, together with Klippel's return from overseas, have been credited with providing the inspiration for abstract expressionism in Sydney, which is odd, given that not one of them had any genuine interest in abstract expressionism. Rather than being united by any ideological commitment to abstract expressionism, the 'Direction 1' group, Klippel recollected, were united by 'friendship', by 'being able to throw ideas around. Nothing about abstract expressionism, just about art.'[104] The factors that united and distinguished this group, were their scant relationship with the NSW CAS, and their connection with Sydney's contemporary mainstream for which Haefliger's Sydney Group was the main showcase.[105] Except for Klippel, all had shown in the last Sydney Group show in September 1955, together with Bellette, Miller, Haefliger, Drysdale, Kmit, Plate, Lyndon Dadswell and Balson.[106] The antithesis of the NSW CAS,

with its commitment to avant-gardism and aesthetic radicalism, the Sydney Group was essentially the contemporary branch of Sydney's romantic tradition. James Cook highlighted this in his review of the Sydney Group's 1955 show, when he observed that, 'The romantic attitude prevailing, painting is pursued here with emphasis on the artist as an adventuring spirit or unique personality', and concluded with the poetic observation that, with the art of Smith, Plate, Dadswell, Passmore and Olsen, one moved 'abruptly to German mysticism and expressionism – to a moody groping for the marvellous but unknown.'[107] The uniting element of the Sydney Group, as Haefliger liked to emphasise with Elie Faure idealism, was 'good' artists, individuals, whose aim it was to create good art, and good art was that which metaphorically expressed the personal experience; that is the true reality of the emotions.

The romantic ideal

There was obviously much in the rhetoric of abstract expressionism and new humanism, which was sympathetic to Sydney's romantic tradition with its belief in individualism and 'the creative effort'. It is not unreasonable to suggest that Haefliger's promotion of abstract expressionism was an attempt to use its inherent romanticism to inject his circle with new blood and reposition it as the leader of the new. Haefliger went even so far as to take up the trend himself and encouraged his friends to do likewise. As abstraction was in the air so too, one might argue, was a revival of Sydney romanticism with its roots in neo-platonism.[108] Patrick White's novels were bringing a new metaphysical interpretation of Australian culture to the fore, together with the ideal of the alienated artist dedicated to the intuitive expression of the mystery and poetry of life, or, to put it another way, to the experiences of the mind. Coincidentally Passmore, Balson, Miller and Fairweather, all archetypical troubled artists, were increasingly fêted as the new genie of Sydney art; as the heroes of an abstract expressionism which Gleeson would describe in mystical terms as 'at once the most personal and the most universal of the Visible Voices of Art.'[109] Coincidently as Ann Coombs has established, the Sydney Libertarian Push emerged in the mid 1950s to promote a highly romantic, bohemian lifestyle dedicated to anti-intellectualism and a

characteristically Sydney withdrawal from social conventions and expectations for the elitist engagement in ideas for meaning's sake.[110]

While there is slight connection between the new abstractionists and the Push their co-existence was symptomatic of the peculiar cultural climate which saw young artists like Olsen, enchanted by Passmore's ideal of art as a 'mystic vocation', turn to T.S. Eliot's Tradition and the Individual, and the old favourites, Paul Klee and Kandinsky, for inspiration concerning the spiritual in art. [111] While on one level these artists adopted the speech of the new formalism talking about 'new ways of seeing things' and 'new theories about painting', on another level they couched their formalist practice in mystical terms as their statements in the Pacific Loans catalogue illustrated.[112] Olsen, for example, wrote:

> My painting takes on its particular abstract quality because it is only in this way that I can express my search for direct mystical experience. There is the feeling of the abyss and a void between oneself and everything outside and one has the impulse to bridge it. The thing I always endeavour to express is an animistic quality – a certain mystical throbbing throughout nature.[113]

In reality, 'Direction 1' was but a small faction of Australia's manifestation of abstract expressionism, which was diverse and complex in its orientations and manifestations, with its avant-garde manifestation emanating with considerable force from the NSW CAS. As abstract expressionism grew in popularity dominating group shows and the art prize scene, Haefliger not surprisingly cautioned against it and sought to position it as the enemy. His writings became smattered with statements such as 'It is reasonable to suppose that abstract expressionism will triumph,' and 'Abstract painting and abstract expressionism have taken our youth by storm'. Thus he evoked a sense of siege and suggested that as the latest art fashion abstract expressionism was seducing all in its path.[114]

With customary acumen Haefliger selected the Blake Prize, which since its inception had been a showcase for his circle, to set the battle lines on 6 February 1957, with an article that sought to explain and define the 'New Art Movement' to the general populace.[115] In this SMH article, Haefliger named Leonardo, Klee, Kandinsky and Mondrian, as the

forefathers of the movement, revealing his insubstantial knowledge of its ideological intent and ignorance of its key players. His concern, however, was not with new ideology but with the continuance of 'good art'. Thus he began his article with the reassurance that while abstract expressionism was part of modern art's obsession with progress and change, it was not about 'fashion and novelty': rather it was concerned with 'new standards' in abstraction. It was, he explained, different from abstract art, different from:

> that of Picasso ... in that it does not abstract from nature and reassemble into pattern ... rather does it attempt to create world as a projection of the painter's 'inner reality' which includes his nature, his feelings, his experiences visual and spiritual.

Indeed, what abstract expressionism was 'trying to do' was to reveal the 'whole' of the painter, and it was here that the subjective man revealed himself 'unencumbered' by external objects. The problem, as Haefliger saw it, was whether 'this projection from within', this attempt to give visual evidence to things which are most 'real' to the artists, could be achieved without recourse to nature and imagery. While it was 'far too early to judge' whether painting could be 'Like Music' or 'how lasting an effect abstract expressionism may achieve', there was no doubt that:

> Its final stature will surely depend on the artist's ability to communicate, so that the personal symbolism of the painter becomes accepted as a universal symbolism through the power of its expression.[116]

With the parameters set it was not long before Haefliger launched the full offensive, in February 1957 using the award of the Blake Prize to Lynn's Betrayal to expose the dangers posed by the wide acceptance of abstract expressionism.[117] Having accused the Blake jury of following fashion and endorsing novelty when selecting the prize-winners, he went on to praise Kmit for being the only artist able to withstand 'the onslaught of abstract expressionism'. All others, including Eric Smith, John Stockdale, Leonard French, Stan Rapotec and Frank Hodgkinson had succumbed, that Lynn and Smith were awarded first and second prizes and that there were no awards for Kmit was scandalous. Indeed, Haefliger argued:

> Not only is this year's Blake Prize award to Elwyn Lynn's "Betrayal" quite inexplicable but the non-award of third place serves to deepen the mystery ... This reviewer places Kmit's "Apostle Creed" far above any other entry here, while his "Supreme Being" is only second to this work. ... does the choice argue an interest in novelty – novelty, that is, for Australia, for the crowing cock of Lynn's "Betrayal" is certainly eclectic, while, in the opinion of this reviewer, Eric Smith's otherwise interesting "The Scourging of Christ" is scarcely eligible for a religious prize. In all except title, it is an abstract work with so little religious spirit that, taken out of its present surroundings, one could not identify it as a religious painting.

While abstract expressionism as the most vital of:

> contemporary art forms must take its place in this competition ... the problem remains can [it] ... convey the religious spirit and is it a valid form for the purpose of decorating afresh our churches and cathedrals which is the ultimate purpose of this prize.[118]

Definitely not – the Blake jury had got it wrong. Abstract expressionism, as 'an art form', Haefliger explained damningly, 'developed "for its own sake", whereas the onus of painting for the church is on its attributes as a vehicle to "illustrate" the religious theme. These two aims appear incompatible.' While amongst the best at the Blake Prize, the abstract works, he concluded, could nevertheless only 'be used in a restricted manner ... in stained glass windows for instance'.[119]

Designed to provoke, Haefliger's outpouring drew a flurry of heated letters to the editor. Hal Missingham led the counter-attack by accusing him of having overstepped the mark: no longer content to tell artists what and how to paint 'if they are to measure up to his required standard' Haefliger was now trying to control judging panels.[120] As the letters kept coming in, some agreeing that the panel was incorrect, others questioning abstraction's suitability for religious art, the SMH took pleasure in reporting abstraction's latest controversial success as Lynn won the Bathurst Festival Show Prize and Roy Fluke won the Maitland.[121] These were bittersweet victories for Lynn and the NSW CAS exponents of avant-gardism, who had been working to introduce a level of intellectualism through their practice and debate of abstract expressionism. The press' interest was in trivialisation and popularisation, and this was reducing abstract expressionism to the latest novelty which

Haefliger and its enemies were able to exploit to great effect. By making no concessions to new formalist criticism in his reviews, Haefliger was able to present the movement as the latest fashion within the mainstream of establishment modernism. Without an accurate context and its supporting theoretical discourse, the new abstraction was effectively politically desensitised and reduced to decoration and 'stained glass windows' and, more debilitatingly, to that lowest common denominator, art for art's sake self expression.

'Dogmatic Opinions'

In formulating the NSW Broadsheet reply to Haefliger in 'Some Notes on the New Expressionism – or Dogmatic Opinions', Lynn set out in May 1957 to make it clear that the abstract expressionism practised by the NSW CAS was very different from that promoted by Haefliger and his fellow critics in the popular press. Lynn to chose his language carefully avoiding the ambiguity of the critics' romantic rhetoric which immediately shrouded any discussion of abstract expressionism with quasi-mystic generalisations and led to an understandable scepticism about its seriousness.[122] In contrast, he used the objective language of Anderson and Langer to state the facts in terse point form, the first being that genuine abstract expressionism was not taking Australia by storm. On the contrary, Lynn argued:

> In this country there have only been a handful of true abstract expressionist works exhibited – Three by John Passmore, several by John Howley, Via Cracis [sic] by Stan Rapotec, parts of John Olsen and drawings by Frank Hodgkinson. Looseness of technique is not expressionism.[123]

For those confused by Haefliger's superficialities and inaccuracies, Lynn stressed that the real abstract expressionists 'are de Kooning, Rothko, Pollock, Gottlieb, Soulages, Davie, Lanskoy, Mathieu; not Manessier, Singier or Bazaine'. Furthermore there were 'no pure abstract impressionists in Australia; though parts of Grace Cossington Smith and John Laycock approach this definition – Philip Guston is the main American exponent'. In answer to Haefliger's question 'What are they trying to do?' Lynn stated that it certainly was not to be yet another version of self expression. He emphasised that abstract

expressionism was a new movement with its own distinctive goals, which were – 'a) Symbolically expressing the more violent or anguished emotions, b) not abstracting from real life but finding forms and shapes analagous [sic] to situations, feelings and sound in experience'. Its artists were not concerned with old standards but creating an entirely new artistic vocabulary and therefore 'Some try to emulate in paint the sounds - never heard before – Musique Concrete, where tape-recorded sounds are prolonged, stretched or compressed'. Thus, Lynn concluded with deliberate dogmatism, 'if abstract expressionism is not a subjective welter, it can deal symbolically with the emotions involved with religion; it does not automatically exclude itself from such subjects.'[124]

The tussle for the control of the meaning of abstract expressionism is revealing of the enormous appeal which contemporary art, and more specifically abstract expressionism, had with both the artists and the public. There was substance to Haefliger's claims that everyone, including himself, was 'jumping on the bandwagon'. As Australia and the rest of the world were being pressured to position themselves within the international family structure of the United Nations abstract expressionism was becoming popular. To be part of the new international culture was highly desirable, and this was impacting not only on art practice but also on Australia's cultural discourse. Accordingly, Hal Missingham, in a promotional account of 'Recent Australian Painting' in Studio, February 1957, made much of Australia's development of a more international character, offering as evidence the archetypical colonial combination of the 'return of important local painters from overseas', 'the enormous influx of New Australians' and the 'increase in exhibition of modern paintings from overseas'. The real evidence, however, was Australian engagement along with the rest of the world in the new abstract movement:

> In Australia, as elsewhere, there is now a wider variety of painting styles and directions within the main development, popularly called 'abstract-expressionist' which is in effect a direct attack upon the visual problem of reconciling the painterly qualities of all picture making, the formal business of line, tone, colour and predominantly space, into pictorial terms; a fresh attack upon visual reality, forever being restated by the artists.[125]

Australia, Missingham asserted was breaking with its colonial past; it now had 'a diet as rich, varied and visually satisfying as any continental's' and abstract expressionism was part of this new diet. The problem posed by these developments for the NSW CAS, therefore, was not the lack of acceptance of abstraction but the effects of its new popularity on the integrity of their avant-garde practice of abstract expressionism.

Conclusion

This chapter has established that the changes in Sydney's arts infrastructure encouraged the fashionability of abstract art with the result that the NSW CAS's role as an oppositional art group took on a new significance. A side effect of the popularity of contemporary art was the increasing pressure that was placed on artists to conform to the demands of public taste by making their work intelligible. The avant-garde practice of abstraction in particular came under threat as Paul Haefliger sought to convert abstract expressionism into the new contemporary art mainstream by announcing its arrival as a 'movement' and naming the 'Direction 1' group as its leaders. By misleadingly defining abstract expressionism as modernism's latest fashionable mode of self-expression, Haefliger effectively created doubts about its ideological integrity. The NSW CAS, with the able assistance of Elwyn Lynn, retaliated by asserting its leadership of the tradition of the avant-garde and, drew the battle lines for an assault on the contemporary art establishment by aggressively asserting the redundancy of the motif in art. They effectively countered Haefliger's attempts to define abstract expressionism according to the dominant taste of Sydney art, by contending that the true concern of art was not about appearances, emotions or psychology. They stressed that the true concern of art was the act of creativity itself. The ideological intent of the abstract expressionists was to destroy the establishment's rule by taste by challenging the centrality of the motif in painting and experimenting with creative processes in order to create irrationally confronting art that disrupted the social order. The effect of the popularity of contemporary art, therefore, was not the demise of the NSW CAS. Quite the contrary, it contributed to the Society's re-invigoration as a necessary avant-garde force in Sydney art.

1 See 'How to Get on in Culture', Observer, 14 November, 1959, for an overview of the changes to the art scene.

2 'In the Name of the Game', SMH, 27 October, 1957, p. 85; and ' "Show of Eights" Opens Today', SMH, 12 February, 1958, which announced 'The formation of dawn and even overnight queues has put its mark on the popularity of the Macquarie Gallery's yearly "Show of Eights" ', while p. 7, featured a piece with a photo titled 'Art Enthusiasts All-night Queue for Art Show'.

3 George Berger, 'Notes on Sydney's Art Life-1956', Meanjin, vol. XVI, no. 1, pp. 74-76; also Robert Hughes 'At the Gallery, "Not in Terms of Money", ' Observer, 18 October, 1958, for a scathing critique of the social scene.

4 The mixed public response to the new abstraction was expressed by the Mayor of Bathurst, who, when commenting on Carl Plate's winning watercolour Noah's Dove, said 'I am frankly puzzled by the watercolour. It does not make sense to me'. SMH, 5 March, 1956.

5 SMH, 7 September, 1957. The SMH gave the story extensive coverage, reporting that Alderman Jack stated 'As long as I'm on this council I'm going to oppose that kind of thing happening here', while a more enlightened Alderman, J.J. Sullivan, stated 'the finest piece of contemporary abstract I have seen in a long time ... We are the laughing stock of the state.' It was a front page story on 9 September, and the topic of an editorial 'Alderman Versus Artist', 10 September. This report gives an idea the climate of controversy that surrounded the prizes and that would flare up again when, on 17 September, Elwyn Lynn won the Mosman prize with an 'abstract impressionist subject'.

6 'How to Get on in Culture', Observer.

7 A. McCulloch, 'The Competitive Spirit and Art Prizes', Meanjin, vol. XVI, no. I, 1957, p. 77.

8 Editorial, 'Alderman Versus Artist', SMH, 10 September, 1957,

9 Details about the prizes were gleaned from the newspapers.

10 NSW Broadsheet, December 1957.

11 McCulloch, 'The Competitive Spirit', p. 78.

12 The NSW CAS provided support to country art societies. Mrs Weaver Hawkins' AMPA A287, recalled that Weaver Hawkins travelled extensively throughout NSW to act as a judge for municipal and art society competitions. Others who were regular judges included Russell Drysdale, Bernard Smith and Lloyd Rees.

13 Lynn reported in NSW Broadsheet, December 1957, that art works at the Adelaide Agricultural Art Show were poorly hung in the gloom, on chicken fencing wire, and at the same time attacked the

conduct of the Caltex Prize. McCulloch, 'The Competitive Spirit', also expressed concern about the quality of the judging panels and presentation of work.

14 H. Missingham, 'Recent Australian Painting', Studio, February 1957, pp. 38-39.

15 Roy Fluke, Kurnell Oil Refinery, Elwyn Lynn, Industrial Port, John Coburn Eastern City, Carl Plate, Office of Glass, Margo Lewers, Aerial Views, John Olsen Seaports, View of the Western World, Lawrence Daws, Forces of a City, John Howley, City Force, Don Laycock, Iridescent City.

D. Hart, John Olsen, Sydney, Craftsman House, 1991, p. 23, attributed this subject matter to the fact that artists were living in Woolloomooloo overlooking the harbour and factories and were responding to the changing nature of their urban environment- to the sea ports etc; see also B. Pearce, Introduction; and L. Klepac (ed.), Hodgkinson, Sydney, Beagle Press, 1995, p. 33.

16 'Art Competitions and Prizes Debate', SMH, 19 July, 1957. The panel consisted of Dr F.R. Arnott, Warden of St Paul's College, Sydney University, Tony Tuckson, Deputy Director of the Gallery, and Professor Wilkinson who was Chairman. The discussion also involved architecture competitions, most specifically that for the Opera House.

17 Gleeson as reported by Lynn in NSW Broadsheet, December 1957.

18 'Art Society's Annual Show in Attractive Setting', SMH, 15 October, 1958.

19 NSW Broadsheet, February 1956, contained news of the debate in SMH over the Blake Prize; 'Is it,' asks Lynn, 'to become conservative like the Archibald ... ?'

20 Father J.P. Kenny, Letter to editor, 'Religion and Art', SMH, 20 February, 1956.

21 ibid.

22 E. Lynn, Letter to the editor, SMH, 23 February, 1956, p. 2.

23 R. Drysdale, Letter to the editor, 'Religious Art and the Blake Prize', SMH, 22 February, 1956.

24 E. Lynn, 'Out of the Mouths of ---', NSW Broadsheet, May 1955.

25 ibid.

26 E. Lynn, 'Contemporary Art', NSW Broadsheet, November 1955.

27 ibid. There was a great deal of controversy at this time over the trustees' embarrassing refusal to change the misattribution of the 'Gauguin' La Cabaretiere in face of overwhelming evidence that it was by Charles Camion.

28 ibid.

29 E. Lynn 'Exhibitions', NSW Broadsheet, December 1955. Lynn reported that at the recent annual interstate exhibition thirteen pictures were sold and about £20 was lost on the exhibition as compared to £2 in 1954. If artists charge excessive prices, he answered the critics:

it should be noted that prices are generally a compromise between prevailing prices and the amount at which artists are willing to part with their work. At Macquarie Gallery's Christmas Show 1, about 10 of 29 moderately priced pictures sold and about 5 in Show 11. At the recent CAS South Australian Show 4 were sold, two avant-garde works to Adelaide Gallery.

30 ibid.

31 P. Haefliger, 'A New Movement "Arrives" in Australia. A new art form has suddenly "hit" Sydney', SMH, 6 February, 1957. The significance of this article has been discussed in P. Pinson, 'Abstract Expressionism in Sydney 1956-1964', pp. 75-91; J. Coleman, 'Towards Abstract Expressionism', pp. 10-15; and T. Green, 'Abstract Expressionism in Australia', pp. 485-491.

32 '"Mistake" in choice of painting for abroad', SMH, 5 February, 1955. Orban represented Australia at Venice and at the International Congress of Plastic Arts as Chairman of the National Committee of Visual Art in Australia.

33 ibid.

34 The significance of the international biennales is well illustrated by Missingham, 'Recent Australian Painting', Studio, February 1957, pp. 35-36, which uses the 1954 Venice Biennale to give a measure of the hierarchical status and international credibility of Dobell, Nolan and Drysdale.

35 H. Franc, 'The Early Years of the International Program and Council', pp. 108-149, in J. Elderfield, The Museum of Modern Art at Mid Century; at home and abroad, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1994. The pavilion was purchased by MOMA in March 1954 and this gave the Americans the only privately owned pavilion at Venice.

36 R. Melville 'The Venice Biennale', Listener, 29 July, 1954.

37 ibid.

38 SMH; Letters to the editor, S. Herman, 9 February, 1955, M. Ingram, 14 February, 1955, O. Edwards, 17 February, 1955. Ingram and Edwards countered Herman with arguments, not so much about the actual nature of abstraction as about the nature of artistic freedom and self-expression.

39 P. Haefliger, 'Two Styles in Abstract Painting', SMH, 10 March, 1955.

40 ibid.

41 P. Haefliger, 'Contemporary Art Society's Exhibition', SMH, 20 October, 1955. The works which he singled out were Number 9, by W. Rose, Forest by M. Lewers and Encased in Glass by C. Plate. In an attempt to differentiate 'recent abstraction' from geometric abstraction he explained

that it sought ' to "humanize" abstraction without surrendering the abstract attitude to realism'. He concluded that 'abstract expressionism perhaps would best define this attitude which may be also found in The Crucifixion by J. Stockdale'.

42 P. Haefliger, 'Art of Australia for United States Display', SMH, 3 October, 1956.

43 P. Haefliger, 'An Exhibition of Work by Five Leading Artists' SMH, 4 December, 1956. (Direction 1); and 'Much Contrived Art in Contemporary Exhibition'. SMH, 12 November, 1956 (Annual CAS Interstate); see also E. Lynn, Correspondence to B. Smith, 26 February 1957, Smith Papers who was quite scathing in his account of Haefliger's review of the 1956 Annual Interstate CAS Exhibition calling him the Minister for Abstract Expressionist Propaganda when pointing out his ignorance of the movement to Smith.

44 Cassab, Diaries, p. 65.

45 Haefliger, 'Contemporary Art Society Exhibition'.

46 P. Haefliger, 'Contemporary Art in Australia or Australian Contemporary Art', Voice, January 1956.

47 Haefliger, 'Art of Australia for United States Display'. He revealed his ignorance of abstract expressionism at this early stage by stating that the new art form emerged out of the heritage of Picasso, Klee, Kandinsky and Mondrian.

48 J.D. Pringle, 'Intellectuals and the Press', Meanjin, vol. XVI, no. 3, 1957, pp. 299-300. When Pringle was editor of the SMH contemporary art received excellent coverage; in weekly reviews on page two and in the editorials and letters. This was in contrast to the Sydney Sun, where reviews appeared in the back pages, anywhere from page 40 to page 60. In Meanjin Pringle pointed out that 'My own paper ... gives rather more space to literature and art criticism than either the Manchester Guardian or The Times'.

49 During October and November 1956 the crises in Suez and Hungary and preparations for the Olympics featured prominently in the SMH, with one article being titled 'Will Russia come?'. Sun, 5 November, 1956, reported the defeat of Hungary and the landing of the Allies in Suez. On the 6 November Russia warned of a third world war, and cautioned USA to 'Keep Out' of Suez. The front page on 4 December, 1956 reported the British withdrawal from Suez and that Casey had been the first Minister to speak in favour of British withdrawal.

50 Ward, A Nation for a Continent, pp. 326-327.

51 The Arts Festival of the Olympic Games, Melbourne, The Olympic Organising Committee, 1956.

52 B. Smith, 'Paintings and Drawings', The Arts Festival of the Olympic Games, pp. 18-25. Smith's essay was appropriately couched in the language of internationalism but with the peculiar

inflections of the period, and, in particular, the obsession with notions of national identity; see p. 18.

53 Contemporary Australian Painting: Pacific Loans Exhibition, On Board the Orient Line SS Orcades. 'An Exhibition arranged by the Orient Line in collaboration with the National Gallery Society of New South Wales.' The exhibition toured throughout October 1956 and was accompanied by James Gleeson, who wrote the foreword.

54 For responses to the exhibition, see Cassab, Diaries, pp. 71-72, who gives an insightful account of the impact of the new abstractions; also Hart, John Olsen, pp. 25-31, who gives a good account of the artists' response and the importance of the exhibition to the careers of Olsen and the members of 'Direction 1'.

55 Gleeson, Contemporary Australian Painting: Pacific Loans Exhibition, used a conversational rhetoric for his foreword, and when posing the question of 'What is recognisably Australian?' answered that Australian art did not have the balance or ease of French Art, nor the good taste of English Painting nor the highly charged emotionalism of Central Europe. Rather it had a unique sense of urgency, directness and bluntness and did not stand on ceremony or niceties.

56 ibid. See also J. Gleeson, 'Post War Paintings: Art Show on Tour', Sun, 3 October, 1956. In this promotional review Gleeson described the exhibition as the most exciting and comprehensive resume of postwar painting we have yet seen, pictures borrowed from national collections in NSW and Victoria, from the universities of Brisbane and Sydney and private owners and artists. Many works were also painted especially for the show.

57 J. Gleeson, 'Australian Art Impressed United States Viewers', SMH, 1 December, 1956. On his return Gleeson reported that the Americans: were not prepared for what they saw, however, they knew Namatjira. They asked: "Is there extensive State or municipal patronage?"- No. "Widespread private or commercial encouragement?" - No. "Why so may religious subjects?" - The influence of the Blake Prize is explained.- "Why the almost complete absence of good portraits?" - The influence of the Archibald Prize is explained. Gleeson continued that "They [the abstract expressionist] were understood (by those who had learnt the language, and in San Francisco it seemed to be almost everyone who came to see them) and appreciated, because what the had to say was fresh and unencumbered'.

58 ibid.

59 Heathcote, A Quiet Revolution, pp. 52-53.

60 In their AMPA Collection SLV interviews: Borlase A 290; Lynn A 77; Rapotec A 64; Hodgkinson A 212; Hessing A 94; and Ostoja-Kotkowski A 524, all recalled the period as an exciting time devoted to experimentation and exploration.

61 Haefliger, SMH, August 1956, reviewing the Society of Artist's annual exhibition at the Education Department Gallery. These reviews contained in the Carl Plate Papers were not dated beyond the details given here.

The use of experimentation to discover a new style was also a feature of Carl Plate's Macquarie Show, see the SMH, October 1956, where Haefliger reported on the,

> number of pretty collages cut from magazines and dexterously assembled with the help of glue, one sees the artist's struggle to wrest from his chaotic emotions a valid form, a synthesis of all he feels, observes and believes in. Here the painter stands alone.

James Cook in the Daily Mirror, 1 November, 1956, was less complimentary about Plate's experimentation with collages, stating his 'amazement that any normal adult could possibly bring himself to fiddle ... suggest a form of sedative occupational therapy.'

62 Haefliger, SMH, 9 August, 1956, commented on the presence of a 'mild flirtation with tachism, 2 or 3 abstracts and abstract expressionist paintings' at the Watercolour Institute's Show at David Jones. Reviewing the same exhibition, Gleeson, Sun., 13 August, 1956, noted that 'With few exceptions the more experimental works are unsuccessful, or make little impact'. While praising Roy Fluke and Margo Lewers, a panel of five lively paintings by Carl Plate and Composition no. 10 by Stan Rapotec, he noted 'they are not strong enough or numerous enough to impose a contemporary idiom upon the exhibition.'

63 Lynn AMPA A77; and Rapotec AMPA A64.

64 Contemporary Italian Painting. Government of Italy and The Museum of Modern Art and Design of Australia, March-May 1956; see P. Haefliger, 'The Modern Italian Art Exhibition at the National Art Gallery', SMH 16 October, 1956; Missingham, They Will Kill You, p. 56; also Hart, John Olsen, p. 29, who argued that the Italian exhibition had its strongest influence in Melbourne.

65 P. Pinson, Elwyn Lynn: Two Decades, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education, 1977, p. 4. Shown in Sydney in May 1956 the German exhibition included the expressionists Winter and Nay whose work influenced Lynn's Torrid Day at Tachismo 1956.

66 Missingham, 'They Will Kill You', p. 56, the large French Exhibition was held as part of the huge Trade Fair in Sydney; Gleeson, Sun, April 1956, made reference to this show while reviewing the Macquarie Easter Exhibition, commenting that 'the current exhibition of French Tapestries makes all at Macquarie look staid.'

67 Contemporary Italian Painting, introduction Fortunato Bellonzi.

68 Franc, 'The Early Years of the International Program and Council', p. 127 and passim, for further details of the United States' promotion of abstract expressionism at international festivals and exhibitions throughout the late 1950s.

69 T.B. Hess, 'Editorial', Art News, vol. 56, no. 4, Summer 1956.

70 M. Schapiro, 'The Younger American Painters of Today', Listener, 26 January, 1956, p. 146.

71 ibid.

72 See Dyer, Ways of Telling, pp. 19-20, for an account of Berger's response to abstract expressionism; also B. Smith, 'Paintings and Drawings', Arts Festival of the Olympic Games.

73 Borlase, AMPA A290.

74 ibid. Borlase emphasised the importance of the NSW CAS as an educational body recounting that she learnt a great deal from the lectures and the NSW Broadsheet. Borlase was impressed by Lynn's 'tremendous appetite and curiosity'. In her opinion, he was the most well informed in Sydney on international developments. See also Pinson, 'Abstract Expressionism in Sydney', p. 6; NSW Records. The 1956 committee elections attracted high quality nominations including Gleghorn, Hinder, Rapotec, Salkauskas, and Tuckson. In accordance with the interest in materials and experimentation the lecture program for 1956 involved: Peter Dodd on 'Drawings and Vision', 'Colour', and 'Tone'. Gerry Lewers gave 'Some Observations on Chinese Art', while F.D. McCarthy of the Australian Museum lectured 'On Aboriginal Cave Art as compared to European', and Tom Gleghorn on 'Some European techniques and Australian Techniques in Contemporary Painting'.

75 Borlase, AMPA A 290.

76 Lynn, 'The Motif in Painting', NSW Broadsheet, March 1956.

77 ibid. Rosenberg's 'The American Action Painters' was published in Art News no. 8, 1952, and therefore despite claims to the contrary (Pinson, Green, J. Coleman) Lynn would have had knowledge of it. Lynn's use of the term 'American action painting' suggests he did, and while the timbre of his rhetoric has little in common with Rosenberg's several of Lynn's ideas about the act of painting echo those in Rosenberg's article.

78 ibid.

79 A. Ehrenzweig, 'The Modern Artists and the Creative Accident', Listener, 12 January, 1956.

80 Lynn, 'The Motif in Painting'.

81 ibid.

82 Lynn, 'Publications', NSW Broadsheet, October 1956.

83 E. Lynn, 'Tachism, Abstract Expressionism and the Baroque', NSW Broadsheet, August 1956.

84 See the reviews: 'The Triumph of Mannerism', (Amsterdam) Art News, September 1955; and 'Rome and Baroque Europe', Art News, April 1957.

85 Lynn, 'Tachism, Abstract Expressionism and the Baroque'.

86 ibid.

87 Lynn, interview with the author, Sydney, September 1988. He had seen a colour reproduction of Lanskoy in L'Oeil; Pinson, 'Abstract Expressionism in Sydney', p. 6, noted that Robert Klippel owned two small Riopelles which he showed to anyone interested, including Lynn.

88 Lynn, 'Tachism, Abstract Expressionism and the Baroque'.

89 ibid. Eric Westbrook was appointed Director in early 1956 and was having quite an impact on the art scene. This event stimulated not only Lynn's response but also one from Ian Sime whose letter published in early 1957 in the Victoria Broadsheet set off a lengthy exchange between Westbrook and apologists for expressive abstraction. In 'A Reply to Tachism', Victorian Broadsheet, April 1957, Westbrook argued that abstractions were winning the prizes and competitions on the basis of their difference and controversial value and this presented a danger for mature and established art.

90 Lynn 'Tachism, Abstract Expressionism and the Baroque'.

91 ibid.

92 Rose's no. 18 and Olsen's View of the Western World no. 1- 3 were total abstracts which took their structural inspiration from the harbour and dockyards. See D. Hart, John Olsen, Encounters with Drawing, Collingwood, Australian Galleries, 1988, p. 23; Hart, John Olsen, pp. 26-27; and L. Thomas ,The Most Noble of Them All: The Selected Writings of Laurie Thomas, Brisbane, Queensland University Press, 1976, specifically the chapters, 'John Olsen' , pp. 149-152; and 'William Rose', pp. 156-161.

93 E. Lynn, 'Mirror Mirror on the Wall, Who are the Only Abstractionists of Them All', NSW Broadsheet, June 1961; 'Avant-Garde Painting in Sydney', Meanjin, vol. XX, no. 3, 1961, pp. 302-306; Pinson, 'Abstract Expressionism in Sydney', p. 6, named this CAS exhibition as the first 'when the presence of an established group of abstract expressionists- became apparent. It was the exhibition in which the shift into total abstraction became most apparent'.

94 P. Haefliger, 'Much Contrived Art in Contemporary Exhibition', SMH, 1 November, 1956.

95 ibid.

96 See Heathcote, A Quiet Revolution, for a coverage of the practice of abstraction in Melbourne.

[97] P. Haefliger, 'Art Exhibition by The Adelaide Group', SMH, 16 January, 1957; see also the South Australian CAS Broadsheet, February, 1957, which derided Haefliger's rhetoric and Sydney's announcement of the sudden arrival of abstract expressionism, arguing that expressive abstraction had been dominating CAS shows in Adelaide for the last eight years, since the arrival of the Dutkiewicz brothers.

[98] See J. Coleman, 'Towards Abstract Expressionism', pp. 10-11; Green, 'Abstract Expressionism in Australia, pp. 486-487; Hart, John Olsen, pp. 27-31; B. Pearce, 'Direction 1', Art and Australia, vol. 24, no. 4, 1987, pp. 497-504; and Pinson, Abstract Expressionism in Sydney, pp. 5-6, for the historical positioning of 'Direction 1'.

[99] The Macquarie Galleries' catalogues of their group shows throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s indicate that their stable consisted of Jean Appleton, Drysdale, Friend, Kenneth Hood, Gleghorn, Rees, Smart, Strachan and Wakelin. 1958 saw the inclusion of Coburn, Hodgkinson, Olsen, Pugh, and Rose, but the dominance of establishment modernism was still very strong. Coburn AMPA A72; and Hodgkinson AMPA A212 emphasised the importance of a solo at Macquarie Galleries to the establishment of a professional career. Indications are that if a young artist had won one of the more prestigious prizes this helped secure a show at Macquarie. Together with Borlase AMPA A290, Coburn and Hodgkinson stressed the importance of CAS as a venue for the inexperienced and unestablished to show.

[100] Hart, John Olsen, pp. 27-31.

[101] ibid., p. 60.

[102] P. Haefliger, 'An Exhibition of Work by Five Leading Artists', SMH, 4 December, 1956.

[103] ibid.

[104] J. Coleman, 'Towards Abstract Expressionism', p. 11; also Pearce, John Passmore, p. 17; and Pearce, 'Direction 1'.

[105] Much has been made in Hart, John Olsen: Encounters, pp. 12-13; Coleman, 'Towards Abstract Expressionism', pp. 10-11; Pearce, 'Direction 1'; and Thomas, The Most Noble of Them All, of Olsen's study and to a lesser extent Rose's with Passmore and Miller. The process of their education and Passmore's and Meninsky's emphasis on form and process has been credited with creating the spontaneity necessary for abstract expression.

[106] The Sydney Group catalogues were seldom dated. As the 1953 show, which included Nolan, Boyd, Drysdale, Balson, Bellette, Crowley, Haefliger, Kmit, Miller, Orban, O'Brien, Passmore, Eric Smith and Thornton, indicates, its members were more aligned in sympathies to the Society of Artists tradition than to the CAS.

[107] J. Cook, 'From Autumn into Spring', Daily Telegraph, 21 September 1955. The final Sydney Group show, it involved 14 artists.

[108] For discussion on this aspect of Sydney art and culture see, R. Free, James Gleeson: Images from the Shadows, Sydney, Craftsman House, 1993, pp. 38-39; Pearce, John Passmore, p. 18; Pearce, 'Direction 1', p. 448; Hart, John Olsen, pp. 5-17; Jill Roe, 'Theosophy and the Ascendancy' in J. Davidson, (ed.), The Sydney-Melbourne Book, pp. 208-217; and B. Smith, 'Notes on Abstract Art', in Catalogue of Abstract Art in Australia, pp. 29-36.

[109] Gleeson, 'Painting in Australia Since 1945', p. 7. Gleeson isolated Eric Smith and Passmore as the leaders of abstract expressionism. Gleeson's second set of leaders, Ian Fairweather and Godfrey Miller, are mythologised for their loneliness and therefore individualism; 'They share nothing in common beyond the fact that they are both unique.'

[110] A. Coombs, Sex and Anarchy: The Life and Death of the Sydney Push, Sydney, Viking, 1996, p. 43, noted a connection to painting through Richard Appleton, who in 1955, while editing Sydney University Arts Magazines Arena, devoted a section to 'Young Artists in Sydney' and reproduced the work of Lorraine Trebilcock, Roy Fluke, John Coburn and John Olsen. However, essentially 'Art to the Libertarians was soft, lacking in intellectual rigour'. Coombs mentioned that Olsen was known to the Push but gives little detail.

[111] Hart, John Olsen, p. 13.

[112] Pearce, John Passmore, p. 17.

[113] Contemporary Australian Painting Pacific Loans Exhibition, no pagination.

[114] Haefliger, 'Contemporary Art in Australia is not Contemporary Australian Art'.

[115] Haefliger, 'A New Art Movement "Arrives" in Australia'.

[116] ibid.

[117] P. Haefliger, 'A Mystery in the Blake Prize', SMH, 22 February, 1957, this article was a concentrated attack on the jury and abstraction.

[118] P. Haefliger, 'New Art Movement Enters Blake Contest', SMH, 20 February, 1957.

[119] Haefliger, 'A Mystery in the Blake Prize'.

[120] SMH, Letters to the editor, G. Berger and H. Missingham on 23 February, 1957; F.R. Arnott, 27 February, explained the jury decided not to award a third prize because they could not reach a unanimous decision.

[121] 'Controversial Artist Wins Another Prize', SMH, 26 February 1957; and 'Contemporary Art Wins at Bathurst', SMH, 5 March, 1957.

[122] E. Lynn, 'Some Notes on the New Expressionism – or Dogmatic Opinions', NSW Broadsheet, March 1957. Haefliger's Blake Prize attack on abstraction clearly had an impact on the CAS whose 1957 lecture program took up several of the issues raised in his argument and reviews. The topics included, 'Is Modern art for the artist only?' 'Realism versus Abstraction', 'Is Modern Art dehumanised art?' and 'Is Art useful?

[123] Lynn, 'Some Notes on the New Expressionism'.

[124] ibid.

[125] Missingham, 'Recent Australian Painting', pp. 33-34.

Chapter 5

Internationalism 1957-58

This chapter argues that the enthusiasm for abstraction came at a time when Australia's confidence in its potential to become an independent nation in the Asia Pacific region was high. This confidence had its economic basis in the postwar expansion of foreign investment, specifically American, and the increased presence of multi-national corporations. Politically the confidence came from Australia's new diplomatic status as it independently negotiated trade and security treaties with its Asia Pacific neighbours and the United States. International recognition meant that Australia's geographical position made it strategically important to the West in its fight against communism. As Australia approached independence, it was frequently asserted that the nation needed a new cultural agenda. This chapter focuses on the influence of the group of intellectuals known as 'new right', who were instrumental in re-orientating Australian cultural discourse to support its new alliances and to be more sympathetic to the politics of Cold War internationalism. This group, which included James McAuley, John Douglas Pringle and Vincent Buckley, changed the nature of the contemporary art discourse by linking the discussion of the future of Australian contemporary art with the debate about Australia's international future. The task of the chapter is to explore the impact of Australia's shift into a discourse of Cold War internationalism on the production and consumption of contemporary art and, more specifically, abstract expressionism.

Part I considers the emergence of the 'new right' which used its journals Quadrant and the Observer to promote the importance of writers and artists as public intellectuals whose function was to interpret critically Australia's past and present in relation to a new national agenda. Australian society was changing, manifesting both a confidence in intellectualism and an enthusiasm for Australian contemporary art and culture. Thus when Elwyn Lynn wrote the first definitive survey of the abstract movement in Sydney in September 1957, abstract expressionism was firmly established as the new contemporary mainstream of a prosperous art scene. Lynn's survey was significant because, while it identified Sydney's

different abstract expressionist splinter groups, it also differentiated the avant-garde from the conservative thereby consolidating the NSW CAS's oppositional positioning. Stating that a revolution was occurring in abstract art, Lynn named its leaders as 'the expressionists' who explored the darker and uglier realms of the Baroque imagination. In the series of seminal essays that followed, Lynn constructed the NSW CAS's critique of Sydney's contemporary art establishment by articulating the theory of 'charm-school' taste. Lynn asserted that the establishment's demand for classical, charming and orderly art had little to do with art but was motivated by psychological fears and anxieties.

The discussion of psychology, metaphysics and abstraction was becoming prominent in Australian art discourse at a time when artists were under increasing pressure to disassociate themselves from any form of socialist agenda. Pressure came particularly from the 'new right' which attacked the Australia's left-inspired radical nationalist tradition asserting that writers and artists could no longer afford to be concerned with the issue of 'Australianity' or the critique of class politics. Rather the political climate necessitated that they direct their energies towards the international struggle to protect Western democratic culture, which included capitalism, from the advance of communism. Furthermore, the 'new right' asserted, it was time to let go of Australian realist traditions because abstraction was ideally suited to the expression of the human mind and spirit, and the metaphysical experience that united all mankind. The emergence of the 'new right', placed a new set of politically-inspired public demands before the abstract expressionists.

For Sydney artists 1957-58 was a period of travel: inspired by the belief they were participating in the first truly international art movement, they travelled widely, studying and contrasting the art of Paris and New York. Part II focuses on the artists' response to international developments and, most especially, to the changing fortunes of Paris as the New York School was confidently claiming ownership of the modernist avant-garde. The evidence indicates that while the Sydney artists were responsive to all forms of art, figurative and abstract, their focus was firmly on process and materials. While they all agreed that abstract art was in decline in Paris, they were wary of transferring their

allegiances to the New York School even though they admired their work. In a manner that supported the NSW Broadsheet's campaign against the psychology of conservative 'charm-school' taste, they looked instead to European anti-culture artists, to Dubuffet and Art Brut, to Cobra, Burri and Tapies and their exploration of the primitive and the irrational in art. Internationalism was now an integral part of Sydney's production of abstract expressionism.

Part I

'Australia and the Modern World'[1]: The 'New Right' and Cold War Internationalism

Australia's enthusiasm for abstract expressionism grew considerably during 1957 and 1958 as the country became increasingly interested in art and culture. It was a period of vigorous activity, which saw the magazine Quadrant published for the first time and Jorn Utzon's design announced as the winner of the Opera House prize.[2] Art featured prominently in the press and, as controversy raged over the Opera House and the 1957 Blake Prize, 12,000 people flocked to the opening weekend of the Archibald Prize to view William Dargie's winning portrait of Albert Namatjira.[3] Namatjira, together with Aboriginal art, was attracting interest nationally and internationally.[4] Juxtaposed against the internationalism of Sydney's abstract expressionism and the Opera House, Namatjira and his Westernised art stood as a symbol of a triumphant Australia which had brought civilisation to a country which its original inhabitants had failed to tame.[5] Australia was confident that its days as a colony were over and that it was reaching maturity as an independent nation with a progressive culture, the roots of which reached back to the beginning of time, thus linking Australia into the universal story of the advance of civilisation.[6]

The 'new right' and internationalism

Cold War politics together with Australia's new economic and political circumstances created a demand for the restructuring of Australia's cultural discourse. Funded by the American Congress of Cultural Freedom, Quadrant, for instance, was a manifestation of

right wing liberalism and of the intense anti-communism which emerged in Australia in the aftermath of the Suez and Hungarian crises and Britain's demise as a world power.[7] Together with the spate of new cultural publications which quickly followed it, Quadrant has been hailed as marking the shift into the Cold War, end-of-ideology discourse. This shift in discourse occurred as differing right factions of liberalism argued that Australia needed to construct a new national identity or be destroyed by the collapse of colonialism and the advance of communism. The sentiments of the new 'Cold War Warriors' were encapsulated by James McAuley's first Quadrant editorial which announced:

> Faith in Democratic Socialism has died leaving a word, which is used only for sentimental rhetoric or as a false front in fractional manoeuvres. Meanwhile, ... the ending of colonialism has brought about the fragmentation of the free world and the *reductio ad absurdum* of nationalism. All ... goes under threat, not only of obliteration of nuclear war, but also of the advance of the world domination of Communism.[8]

With the Asia Pacific region in a state of flux, McAuley argued, Australia needed to defend itself by creating a new national discourse that looked at its people and its institutions critically, in terms of modern international standards and, more specifically, those of the American-inspired world of democratic free enterprise.

The public manifestation of the end-of-ideology discourse was shaped by the 'new right', which included Peter Coleman, Donald Horne, James McAuley, A.D. Hope and Robert Hughes. In their journals, Quadrant and the Observer, this Sydney group set out to activate John Anderson's principle of cultural criticism as social activism as a means of 'interpreting Australian society and world politics in ... general Cold War terms'.[9] Ideologically opposed to the intellectual left, to Marxism and Freud, they discarded the apolitical and anti-establishment ideals of Anderson's 'The Servile State' to argue that true freedom, true liberalism, could only be maintained by the individual's respect for civic duty and the nation's best interests.[10] While their journals were literary and cultural, they resounded with the political rhetoric of national good as they extolled the virtues of nuclear technology and warned of the threats of communism and unionism. They also fostered a

neurotic notion of isolationism which they used to great effect to feed Cold War anxieties and a need for internationalism, which Peter Hastings illustrated when he wrote:

> The precise danger to this continent and its white, Western civilisation lies in its rapidly growing isolation ... in its new, implacable, mid-century sense of being separated from the rest of the Western world, alone, friendless and beyond help.[11]

A popular theme with the 'new right' was that as Australia was no longer safely isolated and protected by Britain, it had no choice but to stand alone and restructure its identity to the vagaries of the new world order. James McAuley asserted that this identity would need to be international because Australia was entering 'the first age in which all men exist in a single inter-communicating world' the major problem of which, would be the creation 'of a truly universal free intellectual order in which all can participate.'[12] As an independent nation in a world threatened by communism, Australia could not afford to hold to its radical nationalist tradition which Russel Ward, The Australian Legend, and A.A. Philips, The Australian Tradition, asserted shaped the unique character and psyche of Australians.[13] The 'new right' argued that Australia's bushman tradition, with its roots in radical working-class politics, mateship and unionism, and its egalitarian anti-authoritarianism and anti-capitalism was detrimental to Australia's future as a modern nation in an increasingly international world. Thus it was time to reject such 'Australianisms' as provincial regionalism and develop a cultural identity which was 'progressive' – progressive in terms of being international, middle class, pluralist and supportive of the individualistic, free-enterprise values of big business and democratic capitalism.[14] As socialism had been totally discredited by the Hungarian uprising and Krushchev's exposure of the crimes of Stalinism, there was no dispute that Western capitalism was the friend of the people and held the key to freedom and a better quality of life. This could only be achieved, McAuley stressed, if one obeyed the institutions of the country 'for to be a good Australian [was] to be a local variety of that 'free and lawful man' who epitomised 'the traditional ideal of Western civilization.'[15] A new relationship between the individual and the state was required, based on responsible citizenship and support for Australia's move into democratic capitalism.[16]

The notion that Australia had a pressing need to develop a new foreign policy with a greater international perspective and consideration of the USA had been well promoted by the Minister for External Affairs, R.G. Casey. He had long argued that the new international structure of world politics demanded that Australia break its dependency on Britain and independently forge its own foreign relationships which by necessity included a close relationship with the USA, 'As an ally and neighbour in the Pacific'. Australia, he explained, was faced with the challenge of how to strategically position itself as a lone Western nation in the Asia Pacific region.[17] The best option, he argued, was for Australia to align itself with the USA in the defence of Western democracy, especially as both nations shared the same 'love of freedom and personal liberty'.[18] Casey's aim was not to place Australia in a new position of dependency: it was to position Australia as an independent Western nation prepared to 'play a full part in any world system of collective security' and to act as 'a link in the world-wide chain of democratic countries that comprise the grand alliance against inter-national Communism.' Australia's survival, he emphasised depended 'on all the links in the chain'.[19]

However, behind the political rhetoric of world security were the economic realities born of the entanglement of American business interests and Cold War politics. Michael Dunn argued that while the United States' postwar restructuring of the West's monetary market was conducted under the guise of unselfish internationalism, the advantages for American business were great. Countries like Australia were pressured by the USA into unfavourable loan agreements and to open their doors to American investment and industry.[20] It was in America's interests to foster self-governing states in the Asia Pacific region. Consequently it encouraged the new nations, including Australia and Japan, to form new trade and defence alliances that would create a form of dependency, be it economic or military. Dunn argued that as Australia broke its ties with Britain, making its own defence treaties and its own trade agreement with Japan in 1956, its relationship with the USA began to change. Not only did Australia begin to borrow proportionally more from the United States, it also began to attract more American investment. As multi-national

companies like General Motors Holden increased the size of their operations, they affected a change not only to the ideology and nature of Australia's management and labour force, but also to its social structure.[21]

The Australian Accent

Australia's political and cultural situation in the late 1950s is aptly described in John Pringle's best selling Australia Accent which explained to the British that having long repaid its debt, Australia's future was as an independent nation:

> ... British in language, tradition and culture, European in race, white in colour, but remote and alone between the Pacific and Indian Oceans, her nearest neighbours the peoples of South-East Asia, and the Melanesians and Polynesians of the Pacific Islands. It is not a comfortable position.[22]

Pringle explained that while nothing could alter the fact that Australia was 'fundamentally a Western Nation which must stand or fall with Western Powers', as a small nation 'huddled into the south east corner of her vast continent' it was not in a 'position to defend [itself] against a determined attack from the north (China)'. Its best guarantee for the future, therefore, was:

> the reasonable hope that in the present state of the world the United States could not afford to see so valuable a base in the South Pacific over-run by Asian Communism.
>
> Logic therefore forces the Australians to see in the US their natural ally or protector.[23]

Faced with these circumstances, Australia could not afford to be anti-American or, for that matter, unquestioningly loyal to Britain; to be either would be dangerously naive. While the Suez crisis might have revealed a surprising amount of anti-American feeling and loyalty to Britain, the hard logic of the circumstances inclined 'Australian thought and policy towards the United States'.[24] Australia and America had a great in deal in common with their frontier histories, immigrant populations, climate and geography. However, Pringle emphasised, Australia was its own country, 'an independent nation with her own separate economic and political agenda' and 'way of life' that distinguished it from other nations including Britain and America.[25] Indeed, he told the British it was high time that they took

'this young and vigorous nation' seriously and recognised that as a new nationality Australians 'think, feel and react quite differently from Englishmen'.[26] The fact was, Australia was a new Western nation with a distinctive society and culture.

Pringle can be regarded as a member of the 'new right', and a striking but much criticised feature of his Australian Accent was its focus on Australia's 'sub-urban civilisation of the coastal fringe', and the thinking and behaviour of its inhabitants as typifying the Australian 'way of life'. Not only did he analyse Australian religious and political attitudes, housing, class relationships and leisure activities, reading and conversational habits, but he also sought to critically evaluate them according to international standards of desirable civility, claiming that Australia was now mature enough to welcome criticism. This cultural maturity, he argued, was a result of James McAuley's and A.D. Hope's cultural counter-revolution, which rejected radical nationalism's literal obsession with Australian themes in order to focus on 'universal themes' and 'the plight of man in the modern world, of love, of God and humanity'.[27]

As Australia required a new foreign policy, it also required a cultural discourse that supported its place in the new international order of Western politics. Under the influence of the 'new right', there was a shift to an ideology that defined culture as a 'way of life' and sought to link Australia into the West's discourse of universal humanism. This cultural shift, Richard White noted, permeated all levels of Australian society in the late 1950s, and saw universities and education reinterpreting history and restructuring the nature of knowledge to support the notion of a universal civilisation.[28] The teaching of Australian history in schools, shifted from dates and heroic events to the history of 'Australia and the Modern World' and a sociological study of its society, its people and their lives as viewed from a world perspective. Within this view of history, Australian agricultural, industrial and scientific achievements and defence of democratic values attested to the fact that it was now part of the Modern World.[29] Further, Australia's role as a small nation was promoted in terms of the spread of 'International Understanding' and the need for cooperation between nations to uphold the four freedoms – freedom from want, freedom from fear, freedom of

religion and freedom of speech. Internationalism stressed, as Australian school children learnt, that small nations like Australia were crucial to the survival of the Western super powers and defence of democracy. Accordingly the United Nations was of crucial importance to the survival of small nations in the world of super powers. The question that follows is, how was this shift in Australia's cultural discourse reflected in Australia's promotion of contemporary art and, more specifically, abstract expressionism?

Progress and change

The intertwining of Cold War politics and the expansion of capitalism into a rhetoric of internationalism had considerable impact on cultural practice. Quadrant was essentially funded by American business and its contents were highly political, carrying warnings that 'the survival of Australia as a free nation' was at stake and it was the duty of all intellectuals to join the fight against communism. Accompanying these warnings were articles such as 'Reflections on History', which drew attention to the similarities between the frontier cultures of Australia and America and called for the contributions of capitalism and the middle class to Australian history to be acknowledged.[30] Not insignificantly, Quadrant's articles were interspersed with advertisements for international companies which, like GMH, claimed to be 'A link in the chain of Australia's progress ... a partner in Australia's future'.[31] While Shell promised satellites at Woomera, and Ampol and Victa Mowers proclaimed the virtues of free enterprise, MLC promoted its new international style office building in Sydney as evidence of the world's confidence that 'The Future is Australia':

> The progressive development and economic stability of Australia, have evoked the admiration of the world. As the 'crossroads of the South Pacific' so, too, is its strategic geographical position appreciated by all. Contributing to this position of eminence are speedier travel, democratic thought and full encouragement of private endeavour; all of which determine our prosperity and high living standard...[32]

The message conveyed by this rhetoric was that the defence of democracy involved not only the four freedoms but also a capitalist way of life.

Australia, as Rowse has explained, was undergoing change because for the first time its economic growth was being led by an acceleration of capital investment and not by an expansion of the labour supply. Multinational companies were investing heavily in manufacturing and creating a large, capital-intensive urban industrial sector, and this was affecting both the fabric of Australian society and its cultural discourse.[33] Pringle observed that the big businesses – Mutual Life and Citizens Assurance Company Limited, Imperial Chemical Industries, Unilever – were changing the city skylines with their 'tall new office blocks of steel and glass and aluminium which acknowledge[d] the advances which have been made in other parts of the world'.[34] These developments, Pringle and Robin Boyd argued, were creating a 'revolution' that marked the passing of the colonial era and Australia's entry into the urban landscape of International modernism.[35] Pringle predicted that it would not be long before the new cities of Melbourne and Sydney with their 'soaring skyscrapers and dazzling glass curtain walls' would 'rival the cities of South America in their contemporary air'.[36] However, the ultimate symbol of Australia's new institutional façade, Pringle predicted, would be the Opera House which if built, would be not only 'one of the most beautiful modern buildings in the world,' but one of its greatest technological triumphs.[37]

The corporate world was also having an impact on the infrastructure and practice of Sydney art, with its sponsorship of art prizes and competitions, many of which, like the new Caltex Prize, celebrated 'Our Changing Cities' or like the Helena Rubenstein Prize encouraged international travel.[38] There was a noticeable change during 1957-58 in the nature of Sydney art practice. The number of art competitions and solo shows increased dramatically, with those of Ian Fairweather, Cliff Pugh, William Rose, Carl Plate, John Coburn, Arthur Boyd, Elwyn Lynn, Frank Hodgkinson and John Olsen being the most highly praised. Solo exhibitions were often impressive in size; Carl Plate for example included sixty-seven works in his critically acclaimed David Jones' exhibition in September 1958.[39] Following 'Direction 1' there was an increase in small group shows, and an emergence of recent painting surveys and thematic shows which, in the case of 'Musical

Interpretations' at Terry Clune's, sought to illustrate something of the peculiar intent and experimental processes of abstract expressionism.[40] The 'sheer quantity' of contemporary paintings and exhibitions ('on average at least one and sometimes two new exhibitions a week') led Pringle to observe that while 'This may not seem very much when compared with London or Paris; it is staggering when compared with Glasgow or Manchester'. Sydney, if not Australia, the inference followed, was a provincial centre of international import.[41] As Pringle put it; 'Painting, ... had acquired a certain social glamour...'. The boom in the art market, however, he emphasised did not result from a depth of cultural awareness and education. It came from a new urban society for whom 'it [was] fashionable to buy contemporary paintings – there are no others - ' and wealthy businessmen [who] feel that they have a social obligation to buy a Nolan or a Kmit even if they do not particularly like them.[42]

Kmit and Nolan might have been market favourites but it was abstract expressionism which was dominating the scene and winning the prizes.[43] When Elwyn Lynn won the Mosman City Council Art Prize in September 1957, having earlier won the Blake and Bathurst prizes, the feeling amongst Sydney abstractionists was one of confidence. As Lynn asserted in the NSW Broadsheet they were no longer on the edge but 'in the midst of [an] abstract revolution'.[44] This revolution was affecting public taste, with conservative city aldermen 'being educated despite themselves' to tolerate contemporary painting in the contests even though they did not like it.[45] The nature of the new confidence in contemporary art was illustrated by the 1957 Mosman Prize which was a huge exhibition of 248 works, many of which were abstracts. It also had the kudos of being judged by Professor Dorothy Cogswell, an American Fullbright scholar, who delighted the press with her judgement that the work compared very favourably with that of the United States. In the excellent press coverage, Lynn was able to explain that his winning Spring Still Life was an 'abstract impressionist subject depicting symbols of spring'.[46] Wallace Thornton praised the show, uncritically, for revealing something of the 'excitement, vigour and ambition' of

the younger artists who now 'had new opportunities to dominate the local scene,' because of 'the exodus of many leading artists'.[47]

In late 1957 several of Sydney's senior artists including Kmit, Haefliger and Bellette departed for overseas and while this opened opportunities for the young it also marked a change in the nature of Sydney art. Without Paul Haefliger, the bite went out Sydney's press art coverage, especially as his departure coincided with the return to London of John Pringle, editor of the SMH.[48] The departure of these two influential culture brokers, who shared the same European ideal of high culture, was not without significance. It brought a change to the nature of Sydney's artistic discourse, if not practice, for without Haefliger and Pringle, the quality of the SMH's coverage of contemporary art and that of the Sydney press in general was never the same. Without Haefliger's cynical intellect and criteria of excellence to play against, Sydney's newspaper critics, James Gleeson, Laurie Thomas and Wallace Thornton, indulged in the uncritical, and even blatantly partisan support of abstract expressionism, which they described in terms of the subjective experience. While they helped to promote the popularity of abstract expressionism, they also helped to create the impression that Sydney's acceptance of it was indiscriminate.

The attack on artistic standards and abstraction would now emanate from the journals of the 'new right', and most specifically from the Observer, whose publication Lynn announced in the March 1958 NSW Broadsheet. Within these journals, art reviews and criticism was contextualised within the Cold War discourse of cultural identity and civic responsibility. The impact of this on contemporary art and abstraction needs to be explored.

'Abstract Painting in Sydney Today'

The oppressive conservatism of the Cold War produced a new enemy for the NSWCAS when four members of the Vice Squad, acting as the protectors of public virtue, checked the Annual Interstate NSW CAS Show in October 1957 for obscene works. They were responding to a complaint about Robert Dickerson's Man in the Sun (in bathers, and sold

before the show) and Cliff Pugh's A Woman and a Cat, proving that contemporary art was still controversial.[49] This was the type of publicity that the CAS craved and it undoubtedly contributed to the exhibition's overwhelming success, as 1,130 catalogues were bought and a record nineteen works were sold for £375.[50] However, scandal was not the only reason for the exhibition's success. Prior to the vice squad visit, 500 people had attended the opening and the Art Gallery of NSW had purchased abstract works by Sheila McDonald and Leonard Hessing. Abstract painting was popular, and as the establishment now gave it its support, confidence in it was high.

By the end of 1957, the majority of Sydney's contemporary artists had abandoned figuration to participate in the abstract movement to such an extent that even Lynn lamented 'the decline of the figure motif' in the NSW Broadsheet.[51] There was another problem emerging in that the wide range of different styles of abstract expressionism was creating confusion for both the artists and the public.[52] In an effort to ease the confusion, and distinguish the authentic from the fashionable, Lynn published 'Abstract Painting in Sydney Today', as a supplement to the September 1957 NSW Broadsheet.[53] Written within the context of the large Mosman exhibition, it gave a definitive view of Sydney's abstract movement grouping the artists into distinctive although sometime overlapping stylistic trends. Bravely attempting to fashion a formal language specifically for the Sydney experience, Lynn did not resort to European and American definitions such as tachism and action painting but sought instead to define the Sydney movement as a specific entity. Lynn's play with descriptive formalist language and his Andersonian model of a non-dogmatic movement, whose dynamic came from a plurality of factions and thus the differences and tensions between individuals and groups, makes this an important essay.

Using the rhetoric of the avant-garde, Lynn explained that the dynamic of Sydney's abstract movement came from:

> mild underground contest ... being waged between those who consider that abstract painting must be abstracted from nature, ... and those who aver that the non-figurative makes no formal reference to nature and only attempts to evoke a mood of an aspect of nature, express mental states symbolically, present vague

> metaphors of animistic archaism and totemism, or, in action painting, reveal the springs of creation on the canvas without aesthetic or formal preoccupations.

There were, he continued, the 'geometric abstractionists', Frank Hinder, early Ralph Balson, Grace Crowley, Michael Doyle, and Dahl Collings, who with:

> Egyptian sternness and dignity create a somewhat square world with incisive line, flat shape and uncompromising severity, social and religious overtone are exorcised; feelings are involved, but these are of a cerebrally refined kind, for this is the world of the clean column and wind-washed tile, far from the decaying rococo pilaster and weed-breeding brick.

Then there were Tom Gleghorn, William Rose, Allan Henderson and Roy Fluke, who sometimes borrowed 'the bayonets and spears of these regiments' from the geometric group 'but rarely borrowed their uniformity'. They brought an energy and restless vitality 'to the struggle between line and mass' introducing, in Gleghorn's case, a violence of colour and baroque form that invades and destroys space, while his restless vitality disturbs the classical refinement of his work and brings his 'non-euclidian geometry close to expressionism.' Fluke, 'the wielder of the roller, brought the excitement of new techniques which gave lines an independent life and allowed 'form to look through forms to create a vibration, recently made more poetic with more painterly colour; but little is implied-much remains plain statement in superimposed mosaic.'

The inference of Lynn's descriptions was that abstract abstraction was first and foremost a formalist pursuit that sought to 'express' the inexpressible; the invisible patterns and rhythms Langer termed sentience. This was the uniting element of the movement and it could be found not only in the geometrists but also their allies 'the mosaicists'; in Godfrey Miller and Michael Kmit, and to a lesser extent Frank Hinder and John Passmore. Lynn's description of Miller's work is worthy for its Langer inspired formalism:

> rectilinear areas ... can suddenly increase in density and intensity and then float into important nothingness. Drama takes place on unpremeditated stages and movement is not controlled but is ordered with a mysterious discipline. In fighting a linear encounter with impressionism, his planes of light are commanded to stand still, but his works quivers like light in a fish-bowl, shimmering, yet captive.

Lynn argued that the revolution in abstraction was being led by 'the expressionists' who, as the avant-garde ventured into the darker realms, turned their backs on classical refinement to explore the imagination of the baroque. The largest of groups, the expressionists varied from 'the very mild in John Coburn and Balson to the thunderstorms of Stanislaus Rapotec, wondering at whose territory the gentle, dry whispers of Douglas Watson are directed.' Coburn, Carl Plate and Mary Rooney were 'concerned more with ephemeral suffused shapes – the free-floating areas of the avalanche of snow or of the unpredictable fall of the snowflake.' In their work, and that of Nancy Borlase, and Sheila McDonald:

> the mood is somewhat light opera in its lyrical wilfulness, but with Passmore's ashy volcanoes of Direction 1 and Rapotec's black daggers of torture, we have Wagnerian tragedy (with a soupcon of musique concrete?) where paint, mass and line combine in a throbbing violence that scorns charm-school subtlety ... as the initial impact reinforces itself in slashing colour, insolently affronting old techniques and materials ... The moods are replete with the intangible darkness of "Macbeth".

'Here is drama' wrote Lynn. This drama was not contained in the subject matter, however, but in the process and materials; in the violence of Eric Smith's 'coagulated impasto of dull colours that smother dangerous red and green fires, peering like wounds from the creased and matted flesh', in the 'pastel staccato impasto' of John Stockdale and the fluid liberal, polite gestures of Frank Hodgkinson. While 'Loose and sharp, daubed and vibrant, sweet and coarse, John Olsen ... [combined] a baroque off-balance with intensive order – a sweetness with vehemence, gloom with light-heartedness, a complex of emotions, indeed: deployment in excelcis.'

The final group comprised 'the romantic abstractionists', Leonard Hessing, (recalling the paint quality of Klee and Leger) Paul Haefliger, (the pulse is slight like that of a too fashionable lady) and Margo Lewers whose 'molten and cracked stained windows shimmering, in veils of fire, all indicating a happy ending' and were marred by their tendency to fashionability. Thus, Lynn concluded triumphantly, art was 'in the midst of [a] ... abstract revolution'; it was emerging as an independent movement with its own trends and inner dynamic and had the potential to become the mainstream of contemporary art with its own avant-garde.[54]

Puritanism: the tyranny of public taste

Lynn claimed that 'Abstract Painting in Sydney Today' was not intended as an evaluation but as a definitive account. However, if one had been reading the NSW Broadsheets one would have recognised his attempt to bring a new dimension to the abstract debate. 'Abstract Painting in Sydney Today' had been preceded in July by 'Puritanism and So On', which was the first of several essays that introduced the 'charm' school-taste argument bringing fresh focus to the NSW CAS's avant-garde agenda.[55] Inspired by Marlow's The Puritan Tradition in English Life and Hoggart's The Uses of Literacy, Lynn commenced with the bold statement that, 'Anglo-Saxons divide artists into two kinds: violent bohemians whom you buy when they are dead and sweet painters, charming chaps, who have never been alive'. He asserted that the British Puritan tradition had contributed to the colony's disregard for art that was not useful and once insisted that art be comforting. Disdain for art was impregnated in the English education system which drew on puritanism for the discipline and responsibility necessary 'to administer the nineteenth-century empire'. Art, Lynn emphasised, had no place in this system which bred a rugged individualism:

> led to philistinism-of a particularly weak and insipid kind, for art is not an essential mechanism of life, like sex or politics or commerce or religion; in fact, art is wasting time. In a pioneer country it is generally assumed that there is no time for art: may it not be that the best pioneers had that sense of strict endeavour that necessarily excluded art?

The leaders of the empire accordingly regarded art as effeminate or so:

> deeply involved with the world of imagination that it could not be assessed by any moral scale of values. To the puritan art is not so much immoral as amoral. ... If there was to be art, it must be charming or bare, austere and inexpressive of tragic emotion. ... Above all there must be order. This is the demand of today.

In an obvious attack on Haefliger and his fellow critics, Lynn argued that the Puritan tradition was alive and well. It was to be found in conservative critics' obsession with order, in their dreadful fear of accidents and demand that all new notions 'from action painting to music concrete' be shaped to fit 'traditional forms and orders.' 'Egyptian rigidity and vaporous Romanticism', he stressed, were no longer valid criteria for assessing modern art because the new emerging 'forms and orders of art' bore no relation to them and were, in

fact, opposed to their very existence. Therefore, Lynn warned, opposition to avant-garde movements was not always due to ignorance, rather it was due to the 'puritan suspicion' that lurks in us all.[56]

Lynn further developed his argument about the psychological sources of conservatism in the aftermath of the NSW CAS's tangle with the Vice Squad in 'The Customer is Wrong' where he raised the nature of ugliness as a creative impulse and suggested it was a means for aesthetic subversion.[57] Drawing on John Rickman's Selected Contributions to Psycho-Analysis, Lynn explained that 'to declare works ugly is a purely emotional response in no way related to aesthetic judgement.' Rather, people reacted to art subconsciously and their responses were related to deep-seated fears and desires. Those who reacted with revulsion to mutilations (as in ancient statuary) for instance, did so because 'their unconscious phantasies of mutilations [were] re-awakened' and these were more disturbing than the work itself. Aesthetic judgement, therefore, was grounded in the unconscious, and while beauty might be psychologically comforting, so:

> Distortion arouses opposition because the artist is regarded as an aggressor who deforms and, as such, is a menacing figure in unconscious phantasies. (How often critics of contemporary art attack the mind of the painter and not the work itself!). Work that appears incomplete arouses discomfort ... (Some critics of recent abstraction are concerned about 'order' and 'discipline' to a point of obsession.)

Some opponents of revolutionary art, Lynn continued, sought comfort in fixations about certain periods that were 'associated with phantasies of a golden age, when all was bathed with celestial glory'. One needed, therefore, to be wary of those who could see nothing in the most vital work of their time and who oppose anything that was not comforting. Furthermore given the current climate it was especially important to look past the surface to find real reasons for conservatism and biases in the art world and the public.[58]

Abstract expressionism, Cold War politics and metaphysics

Lynn's referencing of psychology was something of a turnaround perhaps activated by the 'new right's' discrediting of anything vaguely leftist. Like many of his generation, Lynn became a committed anti-communist in the late 1950s and had affiliations with Quadrant.[59]

However, it must be emphasised that his politics were those of 'art' and formalism and he remained firmly committed to the liberal idealism of early Andersonianism, unlike those at the Observer who adopted the conservative dogmatism of late Andersonianism.[60] Nevertheless echoes of Lynn's interest in psychology can be found in Vincent Buckley and the 'new right' who, in their bid to redefine Australian culture, were asserting that it was time to look beyond the externals of man into 'the psychological intricacies of human life'. Australians, reasoned Buckley, were reaching a point in their cultural development:

> where it becomes both possible and imperative for the poet to search out the spiritual realities behind the social and historical ones, to speak of misery and of joy alike as spiritual things, having an intimate connection with our daily life, yet having at the same time an archetypal quality, and fitting even into the dimensions of heaven and hell.[61]

Australians were recognising that their pioneer upbringing had relegated 'the life of the mind' to the 'back number' and that this anti-intellectualism was a liability in their new position as 'European society in Asia'.[62]

Docker and Rowse have argued that Buckley with Manning Clark advocated the reshaping of Australia's cultural discourse around the metaphysical themes of universal humanism in a bid to break the bonds of European cultural imperialism.[63] They believed, as Buckley phrased it, that it was tremendously:

> important, now of all times, to ask the right questions. Australianness is certainly no longer our dominant literary issue if indeed it ever was. ... The issue is one of spiritual development, of the social and cultural manners which express that development, and of the poetic forms in which to contain and advance it.[64]

In the search for a new Australian identity the most important question, Buckley asserted, was not 'What is an Australian?' but 'Who am I?'[65] For Australia to progress, it was essential that it overcame its suspicion of abstract ideas and encouraged the growth of an intellectual culture devoted to the exploration of the higher realms of human experience. Australians needed to convince the world that they were interested in more than 'the study of the racing guide' and were capable of producing Ortega y Gasset's 'truly cultured man'.[66]

This, explained Buckley in 'The Image of Man in Australian Poetry', 1957, using a most illuminating simile, necessitated the rejection of realism and description; because the:

> central human concern of poetry is not, as it is in painting, the external actions of man, or the physical disposition of the human face and figure; it is not, as it is with fiction, the social relationships of the psychological intricacies of human life ... Poetry deals with man at a metaphysical level – but with man's metaphysical status reflected in his actual state, localised in his actual physical surroundings, embodied in his sensuous and spiritual reactions to his world.[67]

The internationalism of the Cold War politics thus brought a cultural shift towards metaphysics and universalism, and the promotion of abstraction was integral to this new cultural ideology. In Australia it saw Patrick White lauded as a literary hero because he did not deal with the literal externals of Australian life but sought instead 'to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable the lives' of ordinary men and women'. When one reads White, one hears the echoes of the abstract painters, especially when he likens his writing process to that of music and painting explaining that:

> I wanted to give my book the texture of music, the sensuousness of paint ... to prove that the Australian novel is not necessarily the dreary dun-coloured off-spring of journalistic realism.[68]

The 'new right' asserted that as Western democratic capitalism had delivered a classless society and material affluence, the issue for avant-garde art could no longer be class conflict or opposition to the bourgeois establishment. Conflict now centred on the formation of a consensus about the 'Australian way of life' which, explained in the most simplistic binary terms, meant conflict between the anti-intellectualism of the working class tradition and the suburban masses, and the intellectualism of the 'new right's' preferred educated, professional urban middle class. The discrediting of the left saw the politics of Trotsky's avant-garde desensitised as the 'new right' joined in advocating the rejection of the Renaissance tradition of imitation. Unlike modernism's rejection of imitation as a capitalist power ploy, the 'new right' rejected realism because its lack of humanness and

uncriticalness were features that, by implication, could be linked to communism, the USSR, the working class and the spiritual crisis caused by the advance of socialist ideals.[69]

The implications of these developments for the production of abstraction were made clear by the Blake Prize warrior Rev. J.P. Kenny when he argued that the Renaissance tradition and not modernism had led to the dehumanisation of art, and that for art to be truly human it had to be abstract.[70] A member of the Blake Prize committee and Professor of Dogmatic Theology, Kenny argued in Meanjin, September 1957, that the issue for art was not whether to be figurative and have a human subject because the:

> more the work of art expresses the significantly human, the more humanized it is; the less it stresses this, the more dehumanized it is. Hence, the portraitist that skips over the man's physique in order to accentuate his character and mind, his cherished ideals and aspirations produces a more 'humanized' work than that of a mere photographer. Likewise with religious art.[71]

Modern art also had the capacity to be humanising because it pursued:

> symbolism and abstraction. Often it is highly intellectual; often it loves to slough off inessentials and address us through a stark simplicity of form. Such tendencies, wisely handled are humanizing; they are compatible with the highest flights of inspiration. Modern art, therefore, when it turns its back on realism and strives after symbolism is to be commended rather than condemned. The pursuit of symbolism can give triumphantly humanized art.[72]

However, when modern art was degradingly subjective and self-indulgent, when it rejected its social responsibility and scornfully refused 'to give intelligible symbols and clues', then it was dehumanising. Kenny asked whether this had occurred:

> because the artist lacks a sufficient grand concept of his status as an artist, of his vocation? He is endowed with a rare, God-given talent; he is appointed to be the minister of truth and beauty, of truth in beauty ... But whether or not the artist sets out expressly to teach, he is, by his very creative gifts, the supreme and most universal of individual teachers. He makes his impact on the soul through the eye: and no mightier impact can be made than so.

Kenny's support for abstraction was definitely not the kind that the NSW CAS radicals desired. Lynn's attack on the those who wanted art to be comforting was undoubtedly directed at Kenny and those like him, who dismissed modern art's use of 'inexcusable

distortions' and its 'cult of the ugly' as dehumanising. What is significant here is the support for symbolic abstraction and the promotion of the artist as a spiritual hero, as a 'priest and dispenser of beauty for his fellow-men'.[73]

The Cold War artist hero

The romantic ideal of the artist as saviour was being revived by Cold War politics especially after the Hungarian uprising. The uprising had also brought hope that communist Russia could be attacked from within, and this thought, Buckley recalled, introduced the idea that true activism lay not with Marxism, but in unity with USSR dissidents and their struggle for intellectual freedom.[74] The Russian dissident became the West's cultural hero with novels celebrating his plight. Attitudes towards art in Russia, especially modernism, became the barometer of 'the thaw'. Art News, Apollo, the Listener and the NSW Broadsheet all carried reports of underground abstract movements in Russia together with accounts of advanced artists living in abject poverty and the tense reception of modern art exhibitions.[75] Perhaps the most widely publicised incident was Picasso's 1956 Russian exhibition, which generated unprecedented cultural excitement as queues formed around the block and fights broke out amongst the viewing public. However, while the public was stimulated the officials were not; Picasso's work was declared decadent art and in Moscow his pictures were taken down after a week.[76]

These reports of advances in modern art under the communist regime were only possible because Russia was beginning to open its doors to Western intellectuals. Amongst the first Australians to visit were Manning Clark and Eric Westbrook. On his return, Westbrook expressed a typical Western reaction telling the Australian press that while there were signs of some intellectual freedom in Russia, its art was outdated and backward because it was not encouraged for its own sake but for political benefit. Abstract art, which gave the artist freedom of self-expression and interpretation, he explained, was not encouraged at all.[77] Within the Cold War cultural discourse, true liberty became equated with art that transcended politics, and the unfettered engagement in abstract thought and art was seen to be a symbol of a free and just civilisation. The 'new right's' introduction of Cold War

politics to Australia's cultural discourse brought new challenges for the abstract expressionists as the definition of the meaning and value of abstract art and realism became drawn into the politics of an international ideological war.

Part II

Sydney Abstractionists and the International Avant-garde

The threat of charm and decoration

When Elwyn Lynn proclaimed revolution was occurring in abstract art, tension surfaced in the NSW CAS with vice president Max Feuerring launching a counter attack by arguing that abstract art had been around for 47 years and thus could hardly be regarded as revolutionary. Art critics from many countries were saying the same thing, he reported. Indeed Time magazine had even stated on 25 June, 1956, that; 'Having developed a front of a thousand easels wide in America, abstractionism can no longer be called a spearhead movement or even advance-guard.'[78] It was also wrong, Feuerring reprimanded Lynn, to 'suppose that only abstract art is contemporary'. Contemporary art comprised many trends of which abstraction was but one. Furthermore, adherence to a trend was not sufficient for the classification of a painter. 'The question, of how far he is creative; without leaning on doctrines and discoveries of others [was] more important.' Indeed, in the current obsession with trends and labelling, the true intent of art was being lost.[79] Clinging firmly to the original idealism of contemporary art, Feuerring stressed that the painter of the day needed to stand alone without the naive epithets of 'modern' or 'avant-garde', without the help of groups and Manifestos: he needed to be judged by his work and by that alone.[80] True to its original platform of pluralism, the NSW CAS was neither dogmatic nor united in its response to the popularity of abstract expressionism welcoming instead the stimulus of conflict and debate.

However, the NSW CAS was united in its concern about the impact that corporate sponsorship and commercialisation of the arts was having on artistic production. In the

aftermath of the Caltex Prize fiasco, artists responded lukewarmly to the new Royal Easter Show competition in March 1958, and this prompted one reviewer to ask 'Are there too many art competitions in Australia? Has saturation point been reached?'[81] 1958 was in fact marked by a growing concern that not only was the quality of work being affected, but also that the popularity of abstraction was fostering a lack of rigour and criticalness. And more importantly, it was placing the figure motif under threat. It was also becoming increasingly difficult for the abstractionists to retain a sense of integrity when the Observer's critic, Bernard Hesling, brought a new low point to Sydney's art discourse by evaluating works according to their price tags and speed of execution. Frank Hodgkinson's Prelude to Conflict and Conflict, he wrote in March 1958:

> would not be out of place in an enlightened pub or espresso bar, where the client could make even additional interest by discussing why these two works, which are almost twins, cost 35 guineas and 100 guineas respectively.[82]

No friend of abstraction, he was happy to cynically continue his value for money approach in April when he stated:

> During the past month I have seen some 300 recent paintings. One quarter were extreme abstractions. It is, I realise, cheap to say painters knock them off quickly, but it is none the less true that reputable artists who cross the tracks, find that instead of doing ten good small paintings per year, they can now churn out twenty big abstractions, each allegedly as full as an egg with serious perception, human understanding and what-have-you.[83]

Lynn retaliated in 'Heron, Braque, Picasso', asserting that Sydney abstraction was in danger of following the decline into 'mere decoration' that Patrick Heron had declared was occurring in England. 'Observe, for example, David Jones' autumn windows,' added Lynn,'[84] before turning to the English Observer and a series of articles concerned with the general decline of abstraction into decoration and 'charm'. Within these articles Braque was reported as stating:

> Gris' work is more profoundly "abstract" than the polite, modish painting which passes for 'abstract art' nowadays. Nearly all young painters have got into the habit of thinking in terms of ready-made pictures; all they are interested in is a nice effect.

To achieve this they had cut themselves off from reality and 'The result is their work ends up by being superficial, mannerist or feebly decorative. ... nobody is ever going to feel strongly enough about this genteel stuff to want to attack it ... These young men paint only to please.' Picasso was also asked for an opinion, and he admitted that many, including himself, had fallen victim to 'charm' and prostituted themselves by painting the nude for pleasure instead of the guitar which 'means all sorts of things'. Like Braque, Picasso believed that the fault lay with the venerated ideal of the Renaissance, with its hard-and-fast rules of perspective, beauty and naturalism. In concluding Lynn asked 'One imagined that in Sydney the postwar charm school was obsolescent; is it being revived through abstraction?'[85]

A matter of influence; Europe or America?

The re-emergence of the charm-decoration argument reflected the growing disenchantment with the School of Paris, which had been stimulated to a large extent by American propaganda. It was also stimulated in Sydney by the overseas experiences of the NSW CAS members, a large number of whom travelled abroad during 1957-1958 sharing their discoveries in letters, lectures and symposiums. Paris was still the centre of pilgrimage for Australian artists. Most, like Nancy Borlase, were excited by the diversity of styles, figurative and abstract, to be encountered there. They were also impressed by the shows of the Ecole de Paris at Galerie Charpentier which, when Borlase visited in late 1956, included Manessier, Pignon, Bissière, Clavé, Marchand, Soulages, Hartung, Goebel, Picasso, Buffet, da Silva and, as she put it 'dozens of lesser-known, challenging painters.[86]

Judy Cassab reported that the Paris scene was different from that in Australia. It was dominated by abstraction. One could find representational painters who 'have the same spirit as the abstractionists'. Clavé, for instance, painted 'medieval faces, imaginary rulers, whose faces are just a thought lighter grey than the background – soft black forms, pencil lines, a beautiful feel for paint', while Civet achieved 'not only expressiveness but an element of surrealism'. In Cassab's opinion the Parisian art scene was much more

complex than the art magazines suggested. There were so many artists, so many styles, so many extremes:

> The borders disappear and style merge everywhere: Yankel ... a more broken up de Staël. Domoto, a young Japanese, whose abstracts have powerful waves of pounds of paint: Tapies has knots and wrinkles like an old rheumatic hand: Coetzee, I think, took ping-pong balls from his dog's mouth to glue them on his canvas. Such extremes make me think that here is someone who has to hide mediocrity or ignorance.[87]

For all that was exciting about Paris, there was much to be disappointed about, from 'the hole-punching' experimentalists and the restrictive weight of past success, to the slickness that all agreed was creeping into French art. John Olsen reported:

> the School of Paris is ... [was] at its lowest ebb ever-whatever your prejudice, figurative or non-figurative, one can stay weeks or months on end and not see anything worthwhile; in your first week you can wipe aside Riopelle, Manessier, Singier and even Soulages.[88]

Cassab partially agreed, explaining that while first excited by the abstract expressionists, Manessier, Hartung, Gillet, Doucet, Soulages and Music, she soon found their work and particularly Soulages and Hartung's, monotonous and 'slick'. The work was repetitious 'as though they have both found a 'trademark' with the new shapes they have created and are afraid or unable to change.' Bernard Buffet who was 'lost in success' was the greatest disappointment.[89] That Paris should continue to shower him with accolades was not a good omen.[90]

The influence of America

Paris was no longer the centre of the new and the original. Australians had to look elsewhere. This was evident in Nancy Borlase's enthusiasm for the New Yorkers; for Albers, de Kooning, Gorky, Guston, Kline, Rothko, and Pollock, whose works she described, with a focus on process, as 'not abstract expressionism but paint-expressionism'. Amongst the first to visit America, Borlase observed the work with a passionate attention to detail and technique. She was impressed by the size and energy of the work, recording that, 'Not that there is virtue in size itself, but these men create big'.

She described Pollock's No. 4, 1950, Carnegie Art Institute, Pittsburgh, taking particular note of his technique; 'paint squeezed on, free flowing, out-of-tube ... splashed on paint ... . Energy charged. Controlled. Worked on deliberate thoughtful three dimensional. A visual and texture experience.' Impressed by Kline she reported that, 'One feels in the spreading black shapes a curious sense of threat ... these images reach out and seize the physical space of the room in which they hang.' In Guston she perceived ' a sense of unfreedom where only certain things can happen, unaccountably the unknown and free must appear'. While de Kooning's Woman and Bicycle was 'subjective, psycho-dramatic ... Attention-demanding.'[91]

The influence of American art was beginning to make inroads into Australia as a small number of Sydney artists - Kmit, Klippel, Nolan, and Plate - turned eastwards looking for residency or markets for their work. Borlase explained, that the American art was different, more inspiring and exciting than the French art with its roots in the post-impressionist tradition. In her case, she had been 'searching around' for stylistic direction, the subject matter being not so important, but rather 'a prop on which to hang form and colour'. While London, Paris and Italy were inspiring, it was the New Yorkers, with their involvement 'in painting and a painterly style – in the materials of the artist', their experimentation within collage, process and expressionism, that 'clicked' and felt closest in time and most immediate for Borlase.[92] On her return home, she gave a lecture to the NSW CAS illustrated with slides. This lecture was followed by more reports from Tom Gleghorn and Weaver Hawkins, and a symposium on abstract expressionism in September 1958 at which Nancy Borlase spoke on American developments, Weaver Hawkins on the London scene, and John Ogburn on European developments.

As new patterns of international relationships were evolving in foreign affairs so the same could be said of the arts. In October 1957, for instance, 'Canadian Art Today', a reciprocal show between Australian and Canadian National Art Galleries, opened at the Art Gallery of NSW.[93] The star of the show was Riopelle whose 'most beautiful organisation' and use of paint 'squeezed fresh from tube and controlled by the palette knife' impressed the critics.

Paul-Émile Borduas, who had also worked in New York, was praised for his action paintings and Harold Town for his abstract expressionism.[94] The biggest indication of change, however, came from the increased presence of American art in Australia in 1958, as the tentacles of MOMA's International Program finally reached into the outposts of Australasia. With its blockbuster exhibitions, 'The New American Painting' and the retrospective of Jackson Pollock touring Europe and England, the International Program launched three major print shows designed for international circulation; for the provinces of Scandinavia, Central America, Australasia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Singapore, Ceylon and India.[95]

'Contemporary US Prints', a collection of forty prints by thirty-two artists from MOMA, was sent to Australia and New Zealand and toured under the auspices of the CAS. When the show opened in Melbourne at the CAS Gallery of Contemporary Art in February 1958, some believed that it symbolised 'the start of a fresh chapter in Australian art'.[96] It was not so much the contents of this good but conservative exhibition that impressed Melbourne, as it was the prospect of establishing a link with the institution of MOMA. This thought inspired John Reed and his group to propose that the CAS transform its GCA into the Museum of Modern Art of Australia, MOMAA, which like MOMA would be funded by private enterprise. With a council of leading Melbourne professionals and businessmen and the patronage of Mr Justice Barry, Warwick Fairfax, Kym Bonython and the stockbroker Gerard Noall, MOMAA's aim was to establish a permanent collection of contemporary art and hold exhibitions of current work, abstract and figurative.[97] It opened in May 1958 with a show by Leonard French, who, significantly, was something of a favourite with corporate patrons.[98] It was not long, however, before the museum separated from the CAS with Reed arguing:

> if it is the function of the CAS to bring forward the young artists, then it becomes the function of the museum to create an atmosphere in which these artists will be more readily accessible to the public, and give them the opportunity of taking their proper place in the community.[99]

Reporting these developments, John Yule announced in the Observer that art was flowering in Melbourne. Not only was there now MOMAA, but Eric Westbrook was also

reorganising the National Gallery to include 'ultra-contemporary' foyer shows of abstract expressionist sculpture and painting. One result of this 'revival in Melbourne', he argued was:

> that the old liaison between the artists and the public – the hired gallery, is fast declining in importance. It is being replaced by the C.A.S. Gallery, by the patronage of big business – the E.S.& A. Bank in Collins Street is now showing a selection of Archibald-Wynn – Sulman prizes – and by the Australian Galleries in Collingwood, which is the first firm dealing in good contemporary Australian work to break through to the public in any substantial way.[100]

Thus contemporary art in Melbourne was in the process of becoming part of the institutional culture of museums, histories, hierarchies and commerce that it had rebelled against.

Sydney's response to 'Contemporary US Prints' was different. The NSW CAS prepared for it with a lecture from Dorothy Cogswell and incorporated it into their annual autumn show at David Jones'. Apologising profusely for the large number of local works that had to be rejected, the committee stated, 'We hope that it may be consolation to such members that their sacrifice enabled people to see the only graphic exhibition from USA ever shown in this city.'[101] The exhibition coincided with an exhibition of four painters from the North West Coast movement and four American sculptors at the Art Gallery of NSW which was opened by Alan Willcox, assistant curator of Seattle Museum, whose lecture with slides was well received.[102] Neither exhibition overly excited the press and rather than responding to the politics involved, Sydney was intrigued by the quality of the prints and the technical processes. For a moment, 'Contemporary US Prints' exhibition reaffirmed Sydney's commitment to drawing and graphic art leading to the establishment of the Australian Graphic Art Exhibition and Prize in 1959 by CAS and the Lithuanian community.[103]

The visiting American exhibitions, combined with the travel reports, reflected the heightened interest in American art which was emerging as a relationship began to open up between the art worlds of America and Australia. Stimulated by these developments Lynn devoted his 'Commentary' in April 1958, entirely to the wisdom of the American

'avant-garde'.[104] Shaping an imaginary gathering of 'Baziotes, de Kooning, Hans Hofmann, Lipton, Motherwell, David Smith, Tomlin, Marcel Duchamp, Darius Milhaud, Tobey and Frank Lloyd Wright', Lynn brought together their views on issues most relevant to the NSW CAS avant-garde platform. Wright attacked museums, while the critic Frankenstein led the discussion on 'Criticism' stating that 'We lash out when we fail to understand. It is a kind of violent, pathological aberration of the critical sense and means that the person has merely perceived the affront to his own lack of understanding'. On the vexed topic of 'The Artist and the Public', Milhaud stated that the public's reaction to a work of art was of absolutely no concern. A new note to the debate was introduced with de Kooning commenting on the School of Paris and its ideal of 'Finish' stating:

> I refrain from 'finishing' it. I paint myself out of the picture and when I have done that I either throw it away or keep it, only if the picture has a countenance ... The French artists have some 'touch' in making an object. They have a particular something that makes them look like a 'finished' painting. They have a touch which I am glad not to have.[105]

The influence of the European avant-garde; the absurd and the irrational in art

While interest in America was growing, the orientation of Sydney's artistic travellers was still towards Europe. Not to the centres of London and Paris, however, but to the provinces like Spain, where an Australian colony was forming around the Haefligers, Hodgkinson, Olsen, Charles Salisbury and Ron Miller.[106] Spain was inexpensive and it had considerable appeal with the Australian Anglo-Saxon imagination that romanticised the Mediterranean as the cradle of the modernist avant-garde.[107] As Hodgkinson reported home, there was also the appeal that Spain's younger artists were experiencing success with their attack on the aesthetic traditions of Western art. Paris, Hodgkinson wrote, was disappointing:

> All most competent; and ... madly advanced, but all too self-conscicusly so for my Australian (perhaps, lack of) taste. But if we suffer from a lack of taste, I thank God for it and would press on with something more ruggedly vital. In this way the Americans are breaking through ... But I'm not completely sold on these boys – too much evidence of the American 'get up and go' and 'let's get the problem solved.' Their approach is largely a physical one to the exclusion almost completely of the mystical.

Rothko was the exception, but the most exciting of all for Hodgkinson were:

> the young Spanish painters who created the greatest excitement at last year's Venice Biennale (names like Tapies, Munoz, Millases, are rapidly becoming internationally important) ... if painters is the correct term now that they have largely discarded paint, and stitch old bits of fatty rag and net and use plaster, cement and metal filings in a search for a new reality [108]

Hodgkinson was not alone in his enthusiasm for the Spaniards. Lynn was swept away by Burri and Tapies and their experimentations with matière when he visited Europe in late 1958. While the Americans had appeal, it was those European anti-art groups who were seeking to extend Art Brut's revolt against culture that had greatest appeal for Sydney's abstractionists. Lynn wrote home that Europe was alive with groups working to rupture the 'charming' conventions of figuration and abstraction through the use of subversive use of non-conventional materials and techniques. The Nucleur Group in Milan, he reported, had issued a 'manifesto against "style", the last, they think, element of ye olde arte to be blasted'; while groups in Dusseldorf and Frankfurt believed:

> it is not enough to break up the old geometrical surface with loose painting, but one must cut through the old linoleum effect by burrowing into the surface. Spackle-like plaster, 2" thick is cut and gouged and the positive and negatives surfaces painted and powdered until the work resembles quarries blooming with flowers. Another almost makes baroque sculpture on surfaces ravaged by bags & tree roots...[109]

Olsen, like Lynn, reflected the Australians' interest in plurality and process by describing the attractions as 'Sugaii, a Japanese, generates a folk-lore quality with echoes of Klee; Corneille, a Dutch painter, used landscape as something to walk through rather than to contemplate, as did Renaissance painters', and the trend 'to children's drawings and the work of the insane, which are studied all over the Continent.'[110]

To the Australians, Dubuffet, the father of Art Brut, was outstanding and the most inventive and least decorative 'artist of the day'.[111] His appeal outstripped that of the New York School and his commitment to the subversiveness of art and belief in the creative process as an existentialist act was taken more seriously than the Americans' subversive and metaphysical rhetoric. It is clear from Hodgkinson that reservations were held about the

quality of the Americans' expression of the abstract and metaphysical experience. This was Max Feuerring's thesis when he argued that new abstraction was born of Europe, from 'the purely visual experience of bombed cities, from the tragic landscapes, the ruins and chaos' as 'the law of order gave away to the awesome law of accident'. It had originated in Paris from this existentialist experience only to be 'processed' in New York where Rothko, Gottlieb and others cloaked it in pompous pseudo-metaphysics and woolly pronouncements.[112] For Sydney's abstractionists, American abstract expressionism was but one of many splinter groups in the new international abstract movement. While the bravado of the Americans work was exciting, Europe was still the philosophical cradle of Western humanism; the home of the true critical avant-garde. And the ideological platform of this avant-garde was the war against the comforting world of decoration and rationalism as Lynn asserted in the August 1958 NSW Broadsheet.

In 'It is a Mad World, My Masters', Lynn took Olsen's observation that in Europe some artists 'have turned to study the work of children, of lunatics and archaic symbolism' as his starting point. He stressed that the artists were 'doing this not to enjoy whimsical innocence, unrestrained adventure or the immediary [sic] of primitive form' but to seek 'for signs of those unencumbered urges that allow the primitive, the child and the insane to create without aesthetic preoccupations.' They were exploring the same world of 'irrational and primitive behaviour' which was present in Beckett, the French play The Blockhouse, William Golding's Lord of the Flies, and Ionesco's The Chairs. Like Camus, these artists were inspired by the 'theory of the absurd, the unreasonable and the unpredictable in human affairs.' For the artists, as for the writers:

> the unreal, the fantastic, is the true reality. It should not be surprising that artists have turned their backs on accepted behaviour or that Bernard Dubuffet epitomises their attitudes; his art brut (raw art) is concerned with matière, with sand, stones, sponges, steel wool, asphalt, lava, cement, plaster, roots, clinkers and charcoal ... This is war on the decorative, a campaign against the slick, the received, and an attempt to breach the walls of normal, rational methods, to reveal the inner keep of art.

Dubuffet had produced an art that was 'full of a peasant's insight' and attacked all that passed for civilised through his use of children's drawings, 'scrawls' and 'the clumsiness of thick textures'. This, Lyn concluded, with an interesting aside about the mass media:

> is the school of the uncivilized; it is almost as irrational as the juxtaposed items on a page of a daily paper or in the newsreels where Dior follows a Bagdad massacre. This is precisely what life and art is about to such artists and writers; they are not so much creating a world of horror as reflecting it; they are certainly not trying to hide it with charming gestures ... nor are they trying to make mankind forget.[113]

The Sydney abstractionists' interest in Dubuffet and in the absurd, the irrational and the uncivilised in art was crucial to their strategy of aesthetic activism and would be increasingly important as they moved into the 1960s.

Conclusion

By late 1958 abstract expressionism dominated the Sydney art scene to the point that the future of realism and the motif in painting was becoming an issue of real concern. Abstract expressionism was popular not only with the corporate and business sectors; it was also popular with the Cold War intelligentsia, the 'new right'. It was even popular with members of the conservative Roman Catholic intelligentsia who asserted that abstract art was superior to realism because it expressed the mind and spirit of Western democracy rather than material appearances. While cultural commentators sought to involve contemporary art and culture in the Cold War reshaping of Australia's cultural discourse, the NSW CAS abstractionists had their energies focused in new directions. Travelling widely, they studied the international world of abstract expressionism in the firm belief that they were participating in an international movement dedicated to the discovery of art forms through the experimental use of unconventional materials and processes. America was a new site for exploration; however, the Australians' interest was not in nations or groups but in the different processes and actions of painting. Inspired by the NSW CAS's campaign against the 'charm' school taste and geometric abstraction's decline into decoration, the artists turned their attention to the European anti-art avant-garde movement with its exploration of the subversive potential of the primitive and uncivilised. The new emphasis in the NSW

Broadsheet's rhetoric on psychology was reflective of the Cold War-inspired cultural shift away from the socialist contest of capitalism to the psychology of culture and the critique of cultural ideologies. Thus this chapter concludes: the NSW CAS's promotion of the irrational and the absurd was an important avant-garde strategy inspired by a combination of local and international circumstances. Most importantly, it enabled the NSW CAS to re-focus its avant-garde agenda to the critique of Sydney establishment's 'charm' school taste and the rule of reason in Western society.

1 L. Evans, Australia and the Modern World, Melbourne, Cheshire, 1957.

2 Yeomans, The Other Taj Mahal, p. 26; Quadrant was launched in the summer of 1956-7, while the Opera House design was announced in the Press on the 30th January 1957.

3 The SMH, 19 January, 1958, review was titled 'Air of Boredom in Archibald Contest'. However, a report on January 21 contained a photograph of the opening weekend when 12,000 people visited the Archibald, Wynn and Sulman prizes.

4 Dutton, The Innovators, p.148. Several exhibitions of Aboriginal art had been sent to America since the early 1950s, and Art News, March 1957, reviewed an exhibition of Australian Aboriginal art at Delacorte Gallery. The NSW CAS kept an eye on developments in this area, including a lecture on Aboriginal art in its 1957 lecture program. During the 1950s, Tony Tuckson at the Art Gallery of NSW was beginning to collect Aboriginal art while the Kupia exhibition of Aboriginal art was held at the Bissietta Galleries. See also A. McCulloch's review of, 'Arnhem Land Paintings', Meanjin, vol XIV, no. 2, 1955, pp. 233-239.

5 Evans, Australia and the Modern World, p. 3. 'They [migrant settlers] came to a land which had proved too difficult for its aboriginal inhabitants.'

6 ibid. These sentiments are beautifully encapsulated in the following passage from Evans:

> In accepting the challenge of a new land, and in developing its resources, Australians developed their own national characteristics ... We will see that some of these contributions [in primary and secondary industry and transport] were invaluable to the rest of the world, and they all gave Australia her own characteristic form of western civilization.

7 For discussion of Quadrant, the Observer and the 'new critics' see Docker, Critical Condition, 'The New Right and the New Left in the Same Trap', pp. 141-162; Cultural Elites, pp. 147-155; S. MacIntyre, 'Righteousness and the Right: Twenty-five years of Quadrant', Overland, no. 92, 1983. pp. 21-25; and Rowse, Australian Liberalism, 'The 'new critics' and the End of Ideology', pp. 185-245.

8 J. McAuley, 'Comment: By Way Of Prologue', Quadrant, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 3. McAuley set the ideological foundations of Quadrant with this editorial and further defined it in: 'Comment: Right and Left', vol. 1, no. 2; 'Comment: Two Ways Of Thought', vol 1, no. 3, p. 3; and 'Comment: Liberalism Today', vol. 1, no. 4, pp. 3-4.

9 Docker, A Critical Condition, p. 147. Docker, p. 146, listed the main 'new critics' of the Menzies era as Robin Boyd, Vincent Buckley, Manning Clark, Peter Coleman, Peter Hastings, Donald Horne, James McAuley, Craig McGregor, John Pringle, Leonie Kramer, Barry Humphries and

H.P. Heseltine. He referred to Tim Rowse and Warren Osmond, The Dilemma of an Australian Sociology when making his list.

10 McAuley, 'Comment: Liberalism Today', Quadrant, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 3.

11 P. Hasting 'Australia's Interests Does America Care?' Observer, June 1958, quoted in Docker, A Critical Condition, p. 148. The early issues of Quadrant carried many inflammatory articles on communism, including, Denis Warner, 'The Communist Conspiracy in Asia', vol. 1, no. 4; and J. E. Henry, 'Communist Strategy In Australia 1920-57', vol. 1, no. 4, p. 63; which claimed that:

> the communists can be thrown back: but only by loyal, intelligent and efficient teamwork transcending all petty and irrelevant divisions. The Survival of Australia as a free nation is the stake that will be played for in the struggle that lies ahead.

12 McAuley, 'By Way Of Prologue', p. 4.

13 See Docker, no. 6, above for the conflict between these two groups.

14 McAuley, 'By Way Of Prologue', p. 3:

> We shall never, we hope, confuse an Australian regionalism and proper pride, with the ugly nineteenth century vice of cultural nationalism, which imposes 'Australianity' as an anti-intellectual criterion, limiting the scope of the mind and serving only as a means of giving false value to mediocrity ... We shall try to be liberal and progressive without ... neurotic leftism.

15 ibid., p. 3.

16 McAuley, 'Comment: Liberalism Today', p. 4.

17 Casey, Friends and Neighbours, pp. 1-43. passim

18 ibid., p. 37.

19 ibid., introduction, unpaginated.

20 See M. Dunn, Australia and The Empire: From 1788 to the Present, Sydney, Fontana Collins, 1984, pp. 167-174, for a discussion of Australia's changing relationship with America, the establishment of Congress of Cultural Freedom in Australia and Casey's involvement. Casey's support for America was diametrically opposed to Prime Minister Menzies unswerving loyalty to Britain, and this tension within the government is indicative of the complexities and necessary contradictions that characterised Australia's engagement in internationalism.

21 ibid., p.170. GMH established the Australian Institute of Management, which set the pattern for Australian business practice. See also pp. 159-169, for American interference in labour relationships and the use of anti-communism as a means of bringing militant unions to heel and easing the way for American investment in Australia.

22 Pringle, Australian Accent, p. 183. Australian Accent was highly acclaimed by the 'new right', see D. Horne's review, Quadrant, vol. 9, Summer, 1958-9, pp. 103-104.

23 ibid., p.179. Pringle emphasised the Australian government made the important decision in 1957 to equip the Australian forces with American arms instead of British.

24 ibid., p. 181.

25 ibid., p.19.

26 ibid., pp. 9, 12.

27 ibid., p.141.

28 R. White, 'Everyman and his Holden', in Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1981, pp. 158-171; Pringle, Australian Accent, p. 166.

29 Evans, Australia and the Modern World.

30 C. Hartley Grattan, 'Reflections of Australian History', Quadrant, vol. 1, no. 2, 1957. In this article Grattan drew attention to the similarities between America's W. Prescott Webb's The Great Frontier and Tom Collins' Such is Life and Henry Lawson.

31 Quadrant, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 2.

32 Quadrant, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 2, see also MacIntyre, 'Righteousness and the Right', for a discussion of this issue.

33 Rowse, Australian Liberalism, p. 191.

34 Pringle, Australian Accent, p. 126.

35 R. Boyd, The Australian Ugliness, Ringwood, Penguin, 1963, (1st ed. 1960) is a fine example of the 'new right' internationalist argument.

36 Pringle, Australian Accent, p. 126.

37 ibid., pp. 193-194.

38 See Missingham, They Will Kill You, pp. 81-82, for details of the Helena Rubenstein Travelling Scholarship. Writing in 1973 Missingham recorded that the prize consisted of $2,000 plus an additional $600 for expenses. Its aim was to encourage young Australian painters who had finished their formal art school training and not yet arrived at any great degree of pubic and institutional acceptance. Ten artists were invited to submit five works each. Frank Hodgkinson won the first scholarship in late 1958.

39 'Impressive Exhibition by Carl Plate', SMH, September 1958; 'Force in New Works', Sun, 17 September, 1958. (Plate Papers)

40 NSW Broadsheet, December, 1957, included 'Notes on Contemporary Music' by H Kenneth Cook, in which experimenters in painting were advised that they might find fresh inspiration in the varied complex and impressive world of abstract sound. Contemporary music, jazz and musique concrete, was very popular and influential with several of the abstractionists, including Lynn and Carl Plate, and it was regularly mentioned in the both the NSW and Victorian Broadsheets. See 'How to Get on in Culture', Observer, 14 November, 1959, for a good insight into the market changes, while noting that artists now have agents.

41 Pringle, Australian Accent, p. 121.

42 ibid., p. 122.

43 Kmit's popularity was highlighted in the SMH, 27 October, 1957, in an article in the Women's Section, 'All in the name of art. Collecting painting is fashionable these days' which stated that 'to be in the swing you've got to be able to talk about 'my Kmit'. This article also noted that 'it's almost more socially acceptable to miss a first night than an art show opening. You may be sure everyone WILL be there.' Gallery goers, it continued, would probably not recognise the Bill Dobell and Elwyn Lynn types of artists who were hard to pick from any conservatively dressed businessmen, but you could, if you wanted a touch of bohemia 'hobnob with students and less established artists that look every inch what the public expects an artists to look like.'

44 E. Lynn, 'Abstract Painting in Sydney Today', NSW Broadsheet, September 1957, special supplement.

45 'Abstract wins Art Prize, Elwyn Lynn winner of this year's Blake and Bathurst won major prize at Mosman's Council's art exhibition', SMH, 17 September, 1957. Lynn's win was featured on the front page. Lynn told the reporter that the prize money would help finance his plans to study in France and Germany.

46 ibid.

47 W. Thornton, 'Younger artists get a go at Mosman', SMH, 16 September, 1957.

48 NSW Broadsheet, February 1958, mentioned that Michael Kmit left in January for the United States. Haefliger resigned from the SMH late in 1957 and left Australia with Jean Bellette to live overseas. His departure coincided with Pringle's return to England to edit the London Observer. Haefliger was appointed Paris art correspondent for London Observer in 1958.

49 'Four Vice Squad Checks Art Show Paintings', SMH, 24 October, 1957.

50 Lynn reported the success of the exhibition in NSW Broadsheet, November 1957.

51 ibid.

52 P. Haefliger, 'New Art Exhibition Opening Today', SMH, 23 October, 1957, which reviewed the Annual Interstate CAS exhibition.

53 Lynn, 'Abstract Painting in Sydney Today'.

54 ibid.

55 E. Lynn, 'Puritanism and So On', NSW Broadsheet, July 1957.

56 ibid.

57 E. Lynn, 'The Customer is Wrong', NSW Broadsheet, November 1957.

58 ibid.

59 P. Coleman, Memoirs of a Slow Learner, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1994, p.132, gave a lively description of the Quadrant as a centre for intellectual exchange, recalling that the office – an old wool store in Albert Street near the quay – was a forum for readings, launchings and seminars, and a drop-in centre for poets (from Alec Hope to Geoffrey Lehmann), painters (Jack Lynn, Stanislaus Rapotec, Nancy Short), composers, trade unionists (Laurie Short, Lloyd Ross) lawyers (John Kerr, Hal Wotten) academics (David Armstrong, Owen Harries, Dick Spann).

60 See Docker, Cultural Elites, pp. 144-155; A Critical Condition pp. 141-162; and Rowse, Australian Liberalism, pp. 214-238, for the 'new right' relationship with Andersonianism; also D. Horne, 'The Andersonians', Observer, 29 November, 1958, which attacks Lynn's commitment to radical Andersonianism.

61 Buckley quoted in Docker, Cultural Elites, p. 115.

62 Buckley quoted in Docker, A Critical Condition , p. 103.

63. ibid., p. 121. Docker, p. 143. argued that Manning Clark and Buckley turned to Sydney for support for their metaphysical tradition.

64 Buckley quoted in Rowse, Australian Liberalism, p. 233.

65 ibid., p. 237

66 Pringle, Australian Accent, pp. 116-119, argued that the sun and surf climate of Australia was not conducive to intellectualism; also, p. 119, for Ortega y Gasset.

67 Buckley quoted in Rowse, Australian Liberalism, p. 233.

68 Patrick White quoted in Rowse, Australian Liberalism, p. 234.

69 For McAuley, 'Comment: Liberalism', Quadrant, vol. 1, no. 4. pp. 3-5, the problem of the working classes was not wages or working conditions, but a spiritual malaise brought about by the unbridled indulgence of the welfare state (socialism). This had produced a loss of human dignity and growth of alienation from civic pride and duty.

70 J.P. Kenny, 'Is Modern Art Dehumanized', Meanjin, vol. XVI, no. 3, 1957, pp. 283-285.

71 ibid., p. 283.

72 ibid., p. 284.

73 ibid., p. 285.

74 See Buckley, 'An End to The Fifties' in Cutting Green Hay, pp. 183-206.

75 Lynn reported in NSW Broadsheet, November 1957, that Apollo and Time contained news of underground abstract movement in Russia, while the Listener reported that Russian painters were interested in Western experiments but were convinced that nothing could replace the human situation as a subject.

76 'Art and Artists under Communism', Art News, April 1958, p. 25, 50. This article published reports by several intellectuals who had just returned from Russia. Special mention was made of Llya Ehrenberg's The Thaw, a 1955 novel about an idealistic artist struggling to survive under communism's repressive regime of academic art. Picasso was watched closely by the artistic world because of his continued membership of the Communist Party. Lynn, NSW Broadsheet, May 1957, reported of Picasso, who was still a communist despite Hungary commenting, 'Political blindness can lead to artistic poor vision.'

77 E. Westbrook as reported in the SMH, 'Russian Art "Outdated",' 13 December, 1957.

78 M. Feuerring, 'Contemporaneity and Abstraction', NSW Broadsheet, October 1957.

NSW Records. The CAS committee for 1957-58 was Weaver Hawkins president, Rapotec and Feuerring vice president, Lynn secretary editor, Borlase publicity officer, Coburn, Gleghorn, Salkauskas, Ron Russell, S. McDonald and Roy Fluke, committee members.

79 Feuerring, 'Contemporaneity and Abstraction', quoted Jean Bazaine in 'New Decade', New York, 1955 to illustrate his argument.

80 Jumping to his own defence NSW Broadsheet, October 1957, Lynn replied:

> a revolution has occurred in the last ten years within abstract painting which, in itself, is no longer revolutionary. I have never stated that non-abstraction is not contemporary ... I do agree that the resurgence of abstraction had not eclipsed the value of figurative painting-Picasso is not dead.

81 W. Thornton, 'Little Response to the Royal Agricultural Show', SMH, 27 March, 1958. The major prize was won by Arthur Murch's New England.

82 B. Hesling, 'The Society of Artists', Observer, 22 March, 1958.

83 B. Hesling, 'Art Among the Cakes and Scones', Observer, 12 April, 1958.

[84] E. Lynn, 'Heron, Braque, Picasso', NSW Broadsheet, March 1958. The Observer articles were published in December 1957.

[85] ibid.

[86] N. Borlase, 'Impressions of Paintings and Painters in USA and Paris,' NSW Broadsheet, January 1957.

[87] J. Cassab, 'Paris by Judy Cassab', NSW Broadsheet, May 1958.

[88] J. Olsen, 'News From Abroad'. NSW Broadsheet, July 1958.

[89] Cassab, 'Paris'.

[90] E. Lynn, 'Pavlov of the Brush', NSW Broadsheet, October 1958.

[91] Borlase, 'Impressions'; and Borlase, AMPA A 290. Borlase visited Los Angeles and New York.

[92] Borlase, AMPA A 290.

[93] Contemporary Australian Painters: An exhibition organised by the National Galleries of Australia for circulation in Canada, 1957-58. Foreword by Laurie Thomas.

[94] 'Contemporary Art from Canada', SMH, 31 October, 1957; see Reid, A Concise History of Canadian Painting, for an account of the Canadian's engagement in abstraction expressionism.

[95] Franc, 'The Early Years of the International Program and Council', p. 137.

[96] See Heathcote, A Quiet Revolution, p. 107, for the Melbourne response.

[97] ibid., pp. 106-110, passim.

[98] The choice of Leonard French seems significant in that he was not a cohort of Reed and his circle but was successful due to the support of business and in particular that of Dr Coombs and the Reserve Bank.

[99] Reed quoted in Heathcote, A Quiet Revolution, p. 109.

[100] J. Yule, 'Art Flowers in the South', Observer, 5 April, 1958.

[101] NSW Broadsheet, February 1958 and April 1958; W. Thornton, SMH, 26 March, 1958, paid scant attention to the Americans and devoted his review to the CAS part of the show.

[102] NSW Broadsheet, March 1958.

[103] NSW Records. Inspired by the show the CAS invited Vaclovas Ratas to give a demonstration lecture on Graphics in May 1958. See also the Minutes, 17 July, 1959, for information on the Graphic Exhibition and Prize. The first discussion meeting was held between Weaver Hawkins, Olszanski, Salkauskas, Ratas and Feuerring, who agreed to initiate an exhibition and prize in this neglected area. The Lithuanian Cultural Association offered to sponsor a prize. The First

Australian Graphic Art Exhibition was held in mid 1960 and included two sections: Section A – Contemporary prints in black and white and colour; Section B – Black and white drawings.

[104] E. Lynn, 'Commentary', NSW Broadsheet, April 1958,

[105] ibid.

[106] Hodgkinson's letter was published in 'Abroad', NSW Broadsheet, September 1959.

[107] See Mellor, A Paradise Lost, for the British myth of the Mediterranean; and R. Hughes, 'Doric Columns, Domes and Vaults', in G. de Groen, Some Other Dream: the Artist and the Artworld and the Expatriate, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1984, p. 133, for an insight into the Australian version.

[108] Hodgkinson, 'Abroad'.

[109] 'From your editor abroad, Bremen 19-11-'58. Elwyn Lynn', NSW Broadsheet, January 1959.

[110] Olsen, 'News From Abroad'.

[111] ibid. Olsen isolated Dubuffet as the 'most interesting of the newer generation, original and influencing many.' Cassab, 'Paris', concluded, 'Dubuffet: rich in texture, free, inventive, deep, far from decorative – is probably the most outstanding.'

[112] M. Feuerring, 'Abstract Art', Quadrant, vol. II, no. 3, 1958, p. 64. To prove his point Feuerring quoted Rothko and Gottlieb's letter to the New York Times :

> to us art is an unknown world which can be explored only by those willing to take risks. This world of imagination is violently opposed to make the spectator see the world our way – not his way.

[113] E. Lynn, 'It is a Mad World, My Masters', NSW Broadsheet, August 1958.

Chapter 6

Cultural Independency: A National Tradition of Art

Chapter 6 focuses on the debate over regionalism, which emerged in the late 1950s, and the conflict it created between the Sydney abstract expressionists and the Melbourne Antipodean group. Australia ended the 1950s confident in its cultural maturity as the international success of Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale, Albert Tucker and Arthur Boyd was being promoted as evidence of the creation of a distinctive regional school of contemporary art. Inspired by these developments, art critics and cultural commentators began to evaluate contemporary art according to its contribution to the establishment of a national artistic tradition. The definition of this tradition was hotly contested: the polemics of the debate were set by the 'new right' and its cultural critics Robert Hughes and John Pringle, and by Bernard Smith, whose cultural influence as an historian of Australian art was now considerable. By asserting that artists assist in the establishment of a regional tradition that distinguished Australian culture from that of the Northern Hemisphere, Hughes, Pringle and Smith sowed the seeds for conflict between the abstract expressionists and the Antipodeans. The concern of this chapter is how these developments precipitated a reassessment of the value and meaning of abstract expressionism and internationalism, and how the artists responded to the assertion that they should serve the national agenda.

Confidence in a cultural maturity stimulated a movement to reshape cultural histories giving emphasis to the nation's distinctiveness and difference from other countries. Part I examines the attempts of different interest groups to define a distinctive artistic tradition and thus shape the ideological premise for the history of contemporary art. It proposes that Bernard Smith's European Vision and the South Pacific provided an important regional model for art history and practice. European Vision and the South Pacific together with Place, Taste and Tradition set the ideological basis for Smith's involvement in the Antipodean affair and for the Antipodean Manifesto's ideal of a figurative tradition of painting born from the unique experience of the Antipodes. Part I also investigates the

roles of John Pringle, Robert Hughes and the Observer in stimulating the national debate about the nature of a contemporary art tradition, in which the internationalism of abstract expressionism was positioned as a threat to the development of a distinctive Australian culture. The evidence offered here suggests that the 'new right' was pivotal in creating a controversy around abstract expressionism by questioning whether it could express the consciousness of the Australian people effectively.

The aim of Part II is to provide a reading of the Antipodean affair which does not focus in the conventional manner on Sydney-Melbourne rivalry and the intrigues of Melbourne art politics. It takes a wider view asserting that the formation of the Antipodean Brotherhood and Manifesto occurred within a climate of concern about the effect of abstract expressionism on regional cultures now that the movement was the mainstream of international modernism. Bernard Smith's aim was to exploit the popularity of Australian art in England and Europe, and promote the Antipodeans internationally as a regional school, whose defence of 'the image' and figurative painting could provide inspiration in the battle to defend British and European modernism from the levelling effects of American abstract expressionism. The artists, however, responded to the Antipodean Manifesto with hostility, viewing it as an attempt to restrict the creative freedom by drawing art into the politics of nationalism. The Antipodeans' 'defence of the image' struck a particularly repressive chord in Sydney, where Roman Catholic conservatives were insisting that the Blake Prize support only abstract art that served the national interest by communicating the artist's message intelligibly. For Sydney's abstractionists and the NSW CAS, therefore, the important issue was not the politics of nationalism, but the continuing conflict between the artist and society as a new wave of conservatism sought to limit the autonomy of art by demanding a return to realism.

Part I

A National School of Painting: The Threat of Abstract Expressionism

As the 1950s drew to a close, Australia's cultural establishment took the opportunity to reflect on the achievements of the postwar years seeking to find evidence that the country's culture was progressing 'From Dependency to Autonomy'.[1] On the popular front, the SMH published a special supplement in March 1959 with a report on the 'Advances in the Arts' which argued:

> A nation's growth can be fantastic in a mere three decades. If the time has not yet arrived that we in Australia can boast a national artistic expression it could be that this year is to be the turning point, and in the next 30 years we shall see something of great interest in local art development.[2]

John Pringle was also telling the Western world in Australian Accent that Australia had every reason to be confident. While still too young to have a 'true culture', which was the 'product of a deep and intimate relationship between a people and the soil where they have lived for centuries', it was making steady progress in this direction as the 'comparative vigour' of its arts and sciences indicated.[3] The fact that Australian writers, including Ray Lawler and Patrick White, were attracting attention in Europe with their critical evocations of the Australian experience encouraged a belief that the country was making definite progress towards producing its own literary tradition.[4] Many felt that the international success of these contemporary writers indicated that the university study of Australian literature was essential to the growth of cultural autonomy.[5] Perhaps not of the calibre of the great masterpieces of Europe, Australian literature and art nevertheless had helped to shape the Australian psyche, and this needed to be understood if Australians were to have a sense of themselves.[6] In Vincent Buckley's opinion, the study of Australian literature would foster an understanding of the development of Australian manners, ideas and expectations and encourage the growth of cultural standards and self-examination in Australia. In this manner, it would inspire and encourage young writers and critics to build on their own traditions and lead Australia out of its dependency on the centre.[7]

Australia was facing the cultural dilemmas that accompanied the process of decolonisation, as the Current Affairs Bulletin for November 1956 explained. Like South Africa and Canada, it was a new country, which had not yet established a distinctive culture with its own standards which would be 'able to challenge comparison with others'.[8] While the question of how long it would take to establish such a cultural tradition was important, the more pressing issue, as the debate over the establishment of a chair in Australian Literature at Sydney University illustrated, was how to go about 'becoming unprovincial'.[9] Was it through the study and creation of a reflective, self-assessing Australian culture? Was it by emulating and competing with Europe and England according to their standards and ideals? Or was it by learning from the most successful of new world cultures, the United States of America?[10]

A national school of painting

It was not only contemporary writers who were leading the world to believe that Australia was evolving a cultural tradition and generating its ideas and artistic creations independently - Australia's contemporary painters were also attracting attention overseas. This led Pringle to recount that by 'far the most striking development in Australia's culture was the rise of contemporary Australian painting', which:

> To some extent ... has already been recognised abroad. Perceptive visitors, like Sir Kenneth Clark and Professor Boase, have reported faithfully on the remarkable talent they have discovered. The strange poetical visions of Sidney Nolan have amazed the art lovers in London, New York and Rome, who had not previously believed anything good could come out of the Antipodes. More studious critics in Europe have learnt to recognise with respect the names and work of Drysdale, Dobell, Kmit, Passmore, Friend, Lymburner, Olsen and others.[11]

Pringle argued that a distinctive quality was emerging in Australian painting which suggested that a distinctly Australian school was being formed which would help 'to enlarge the Australian national consciousness'.[12] The average exhibition of Australian painting, he wrote:

> has a brilliance of light and colour which distinguishes it from the average exhibition in Europe or America. Australian painting is rarely introspective or sombre; it is extrovert, content with the first, fine, careless rapture of the visual image. The

> canvases often look as if they have been painted too quickly; on the other hand, they nearly always look as if they had been painted by someone who enjoyed painting for its own sake.[13]

Even more importantly, some artists, Drysdale, Friend, Dobell and Nolan, had managed 'to express something essentially Australian and by doing so', had given 'Australians a richer sense of their own existence'. Nolan, in particular, had managed 'to express the sense of loneliness and disappointment which lies at the heart of every Australian' through his depictions of Australia's myths and the 'red' centre.[14] The first generation of CAS contemporary painters had formed the foundations of a national school of painting which held the key to Australia's artistic independence.

The idea that Australia was evolving a distinctive school of painting was gaining considerable currency especially as popular survey exhibitions like MOMAA's Sydney exhibition of the John and Sunday Reed collection brought a historical perspective to the practice of contemporary painting. Other survey exhibitions, such as the Blaxland Gallery's 'Recent Australian Painting Survey' and the 'Waratah Spring Festival Art Show', brought together the work of contemporary artists from all states and of all ages to offer a 'bigger picture' encouraging critics to compare trends and achievements, not only amongst individuals but also between cities.[15] Robert Hughes evaluated the artistic achievements of 1958 by comparing those of Melbourne and Sydney and categorising contemporary painters into generational groups; into 'the rising painters' (Leonard Hessing); the thirty-year-old to middle aged (Hodgkinson, Coburn, Gleghorn, Smith, Dickerson, Lynn and Plate); and the mature older generation (Nolan and Drysdale).[16]

Australia was well on the way to forming an artistic tradition with the task ahead, being to set the critical standards, ideals and heroes. This would involve not only the establishment of a meritorious hierarchy amongst artists, past and future, but also the identification and promotion of appropriate themes and trends for Australian artists. A new emphasis on nationalism in art criticism emerged which saw John Olsen acclaimed as 'the strongest and most vital painter in Australia', because he signalled a new direction in Australian

landscape painting.[17] This critical focus on the distinctiveness of Australian artistic expression encouraged a confidence in the belief, that contemporary artists were reaching a 'new maturity' that Thornton asserted was distinguished within the younger generation 'a new stamina ... that is making Australian art "come of age".[18] Australian art, it followed, was mature enough to set its own internal standards which would stand international appraisal given an appropriate rigour of self-criticism.

A major change was occurring in the orientation of Australia's art discourse, not only in the public arena but also in education, where the tertiary study of art was expanding dramatically with some two thousand students enrolled at Sydney's National Art School in 1959. The study of art and art history was becoming part of the national agenda as the Fine Arts Department of Prof. Joseph Burke, Franz Philipp and Bernard Smith at Melbourne University produced the first generation of Australian art history graduates, whose impact as art professionals, educators and writers is still being felt today.[19] With the expansion of the educated middle classes and Australia's shift into a consumer-based economy, the infrastructure of art, and the interest groups involved were becoming increasingly complex. This was made most evident as developments in its intellectualism and patronage stimulated initiatives in the publication of promotional and historical texts on contemporary art. Not without significance amongst the first to move in this direction was one of the new breed of art patrons, Kim Bonython.

An art collector, gallery owner, racing car enthusiast and patron of MOMAA, Bonython approached Joseph Burke and Bernard Smith in late 1958 for assistance in compiling a survey of contemporary artists which he hoped would 'become something of a text book of the Art of Australia at this time'.[20] He explained to Smith that he was 'not in the league of Fairfax' but he did 'want a small high standard book' which would be authoritative and beneficial.[21] Smith, with his historian's vision firmly focused on the creation of an Australian art history, seized the opportunity to advise Bonython that the publication should be more extensive and substantial. The book he would like to be associated with, he explained, was a comprehensive history of 'Contemporary Art in Australia', which covered the

pioneers of the modern movement, and the 1937-38 crisis and the CAS, to the present day. It would not only define what 'the words contemporary art or modern art' meant but 'keep the overseas market in mind' and 'have a character and flavour about it which will make it possible to define and distinguish Australian contemporary art from other schools of contemporary art'.[22] Bonython's interests, however, were elsewhere. He did not want to do 'that same old stuff' again and chose instead to concentrate on 'present day artists who are still at their top ... well known and accepted', with 'mature artists with something of their own to say'.[23] His vision for a pictorial and biographical guide to the leading artists of the day was predicated on his knowledge of the local market and the needs of those, like himself, who were interested in investing and collecting. His book, which was inexpensively priced, was intended to appeal to those interested in Australian art as a matter of cultural differentiation. When published in 1960, without Smith's assistance, Bonython's Modern Australian Painting and Sculpture: A Survey of Australian Art from 1950 to 1960 was praised for being the 'only one of its kind, the first in full colour on the subject of present-day art of Australia, and the most important work since the Ure Smith series wound up'.[24]

This exchange between Bonython and Smith offers a valuable insight into the different interest groups involved in shaping the nature of Australia's artistic discourse. What is particularly interesting in this move to produce texts for the overseas and home market is the conflict of interests involved, as Australia set out to construct a national culture with its own internal standards and themes.[25] Bonython was clearly interested in establishing a promotional criterion for the local market; however, Smith as a pioneer of Australian art history, was intent on creating a critical framework which would challenge the imperialist paradigms which positioned the England and Europe as the source of all creativity and ideas. Smith was in fact in the process of preparing his doctorate European Vision and the South Pacific for publication.[26] An ambitious study in 'the history of art and ideas', European Vision questioned how the experience of the South Pacific impacted back on European art and philosophy, and whether the Europeans 'entry into it stimulate thought

and affect in any way traditional forms of expression?' Did the Antipodes, Smith asked, have the power to influence the mother culture or was the transmission of ideas always in one direction?

In what is a fine example of 'the Empire writing back', Smith argued that the first artists in the South Pacific created 'a different form of landscape painting which is best described as typical'. Derived by working from 'science and empirical observation', the 'typical landscape' was 'a form of landscape the component parts of which were carefully selected in order to express the essential qualities of a particular kind of geographical environment'. Rather than finding confirmation of the European ideal of universal order the:

> Landscape painters [became] fully conscious of the fact that the world contained distinct types of scenery with their own forms of visual unity. Such unity was only to be achieved by the appreciation of the essential character and beauty of each scenic type.

Smith hypothesised that not only did this discovery challenge the 'neoclassical ideal of the perfect landscape' it also changed the theory and practice of landscape painting.[27] The Antipodes, in its difference from Europe, had the power to influence and even change the nature of ideas about the world and its order. Rather than being dependent on the centre, the Antipodes had provided unexpected insights into the origins of man and his original relationship with the world. Smith argued this was conclusively proven when Darwin's and Strzelecki's empirical observation of flora and fauna in Australia and the Pacific detected 'a coherent, complete, and yet distinct order of nature from the rest of the world', and forced them to reshape their theories of evolution.[28]

Smith's thesis was an attempt to refigure the theory of evolution into an argument for the authenticity of the Australian experience; and to suggest that Australia, with its primal geography, evolutionary innocence and the unrealised possibilities of the 'romantic savage', had the potential to fulfil the prophecies of the 1850s and evolve a new civilisation out of its different experience.[29] As the South Pacific environment had shaped a 'complete and yet distinct order of nature', so it would shape a new order of culture from the experiences of its settlers and indigenous peoples. While Smith's study ended with the

1850s, it also ended with the prophecy that Australia would fulfil the European dream of a new world by creating a culture that would influence the centre.[30]

Australia, it could be argued was in a 'crisis of identity' which Bill Ashcroft identified in The Empire Writes Back as a distinguishing characteristic of all post-colonial societies.[31] As decolonisation was in reality impossible, Ashcroft reasoned, the fulcrum of this crisis was the relationship with the metropolis which formed the site for the struggle to construct meaning.[32] By tampering with the imperialist paradigms of 'home/colony, Europe/New World, Europe/Antipodes, metropolitan/provincial', colonial writers like Bernard Smith sought to shape a narrative of identity based on difference from the centre.[33] Their challenging of the imperial paradigms was part of the colony's process of self-assertion and a bid to attain cultural autonomy and authenticity. Pivotal to the struggle for cultural autonomy was the establishment of national schools of literature and art that could be shown to be separate from those of the metropolitan centre. Smith was part of a movement amongst Australian intellectuals to engage in this process. Manning Clark was amongst those leading this trend having advised Australians in 'Rewriting Australian History' to reject the imperialist model of history and develop a new history based on the subjective experience of Australians in Australia. He argued that as 'Europe [was] no longer the creative centre, the teacher of the world' it was time for Australia to construct a cultural heritage with its own internal standards and ideals derived from the authenticity of its own experience.[34]

The major challenge for white settler colonies in their bid to establish authenticity, Ashcroft argued, was 'the problem of establishing their 'indigeneity' and distinguishing it from their continuing sense of their European inheritance'.[35] This dilemma was deeply felt by Smith and those who agreed with Vincent Buckley that Europe – or England – was the cradle of civilisation; the birthplace of universal man and the intellectual themes of mankind, as opposed to folk themes of race or nation. However, they also emphatically agreed that Australia was not England and that: 'The challenge overarching all is that we're a European society in Asia, in a distinctive physical environment with something of the 'primitive' about

it'.[36] Not only was Australia's physical environment different, so were its economic and political circumstances and the demography of its immigrant population. The test facing Australian artists, Buckley argued, was to achieve a 'mutual adjustment of the objective and subjective worlds – the world of Australian landscape and manners with the world of European morality, and art, and spiritual values'. In searching for their own authenticity, Australians needed to realise:

> European values can live in Australian forms; and if we seek further, we find that they are not in any exclusive sense European at all, but universal, and merely exemplified most finely in the cultures of Europe.[37]

James McAuley, another leader of this cultural movement, praised Smith's European Vision for its positive contribution to the:

> recurrent anxiety to discover and affirm what it is to be an Australian – to define a distinctive national ethos and type – to set up Australianity as an identifiable quality and merit.

Australia was largely a nineteenth century creation – and therefore open to re-interpretation. Smith's book suggested new possibilities and strategies for constructing a new and positive myth of identity:

> The search for the essence of Australianity, like the hunt for the unicorn, takes us necessarily to regions of myth. Behind the actuality of Australia lies Terra Australis. Bernard Smith's elegant and copious study, European Vision and the South Pacific, has filled all this in for us. The South Pacific is the region of earthly paradise, where Natural Man in his primitive vigour and virtue shows his superiority over old-world effeteness and corruption; it is the Antipodean realm, where everything is the reverse of the European order of things; the light of the Golden Age lingers upon it; it is the last New World; man's final change for a fresh start; the Promised Land of a latter-day chosen people.[38]

The key strategy in attaining cultural independence, therefore, was not to imitate the centre but to embrace difference and the lack of centre (the marginality of distance and provincialism) as the fabric of social experience and take Australia's cultural energies from this vision.[39] Another strategy was to create Australian schools of literature, theatre, film and painting, and to establish traditions that would set a national canon of important works.

These works would establish those themes, forms and genres appropriate to the expression of Australian systems of manner, custom and value. Their study and debate would set the framework from which the young could build a distinctive national culture that would challenge the centre's claim to exclusivity.[40]

The Observer and art criticism

The movement to establish a national artistic tradition had ramifications for contemporary art production as its defining discourse became incorporated into a national debate about the nature of Australian culture. This process was facilitated by the Observer, with its fortnightly coverage of cultural activities and issues on a national scale. Polemical in intent, the Observer had an immediacy and topicality lacking in Quadrant and Meanjin, and an intellectual rigour and criticality not possible in newspapers, which made it appealing to the urban middle class.[41] More significantly, it was able, through extensive reviews of contemporary theatre, film, literature, music and art in Melbourne and Sydney, to foster a sense of cultural cohesiveness and engagement in a national debate. This sense of cultural consensus was enhanced by the fact that the Observer's contributors were drawn from all states, and appeared to form a 'new coalition' committed to attacking the old and building a new Australia based on the values of secular liberalism.

Peter Coleman remembered the magazine was committed to 'libertarianism, anti-communism and multiculturalism', and drew its ideas and commentators from:

> old freethinkers, former Marxists, ex-Trotskyists ranging from Douglas McCallum to Laurie Short; Central European refugees from Hitler or Stalin who understood the twentieth century, particularly Henry Mayer, Frank Knöpfelmacher, Eugene Kamenka, and Hugo Wolfsohn; and Catholics of the Pope Paul formation, especially, Jim McAuley, whose politics were an amalgam of John Anderson and Bob Santamaria in their Solerian modes.[42]

The dynamics of these factors were such that, according to Coleman:

> Without having planned anything of the kind, we found after the first year or so, that we had become a cooperative forum for New Australians, right-wing trade unionists, radical Liberals, Melbourne Catholics, Sydney freethinkers ... we helped

> discover and encourage a dialogue between these groups – the dialogue that offers the most promise for Australian culture ...
> We thought we owned the future.[43]

For contemporary artists and those in the NSW CAS committed to the autonomy of art, these developments came as mixed blessings for, while on one level they encouraged a greater interest in art, on another they brought an insistence that art serve the national interests. As Elwyn Lynn lamented in the NSW Broadsheet in June 1961, the Observer and similar magazines treated art as a component of an intellectual discourse concerned not with art for art's sake, but with the issue of cultural standards which included issues such as homosexuality, censorship, communism, religion, decolonisation in Africa and the Orr case.[44] Part of the politics of culture art was debated in terms of the progress of social and political manners and ideas, with Robert Hughes scathingly attacking Sydney's traditional socialite art patrons for being anti-intellectual. While the socialites formed 65% of Sydney's exhibition opening clientele, Hughes and the Observer treated them as part of a passing social elite for whom 'knowing artists is rather like being able to play bridge, a useful accomplishment'.[45] A new art patron and infrastructure was emerging, as Colin Young highlighted in his review of the opening of Barry Stern's Museum of Modern Art which opened late on Saturday and Sunday for music and poetry readings. Promoted by Young as a positive manifestation of art entrepreneurship, Stern's salon style Gallery reflected the emergence of an urban culture which involved the weekend consumption of art, poetry readings, music, and an educated interest 'in modern paintings and modern art in general' – Australian, of course.[46]

The threat of abstract expressionism

The polemic of the Observer's art criticism was set by Robert Hughes who, in his early twenties, had a raw intelligence and a precocious flair for romantic criticism that enabled him to have an impact on the art scene.[47] An architecture student, Hughes had no training in art history, but had a passion for art born of his adolescent study of the family's set of Art and Australia and from reading Cyril Connolly.[48] As one of Sydney's rising talents in

painting, and a fringe member of the Sydney Push, Hughes' criticism was coloured by the desire of the Observer's journalists to be 'hot and rebellious'.[49] His early years are remembered for the biting attacks he made on all artists no matter what their reputation.[50] However, he was also something of a traditionalist, having a romantic vision of European culture and a fondness for the Norman Lindsay myth of the artist and the romantic ideal of art as a hedonist bohemian lifestyle.[51]

Hughes was not unlike Paul Haefliger in his style of criticism; he too had a tendency to pontificate about standards and promote the romantic Sydney Group tradition of Sydney art. In many ways he was the heir of Haefliger with whom he shared a scepticism about formalism and a preference for 'content rich art'.[52] In one of his first reviews, Hughes took up the attack on abstraction where Haefliger left it, using John Olsen's exhibition at the Macquarie Galleries in August 1958 to launch a campaign denying the intelligibility of abstract art:

> These works exhibit the bifurcation between the artist and the public which is eventually going to kill abstract art. ... They have been described as 'landscapes'; which is nonsense ... There is simply not enough figuration, not enough common ground, to apply this term to these paintings. They record the artist's reaction to a landscape, which is a different thing; and surely the acid test is that you could remove the title from any one of the pictures, give it another, and be able to read entirely different meanings into it.
>
> In a sense, they are belated works of propaganda. They say what the new American school of abstract expressionism – Pollock, Kline, de Kooning and others – said a few years ago ...
>
> But all of this doesn't add up to much. Pictographs and thick paint do not make a painting. As an experiment they are successful. But the basic problem is unresolved: the need of the public, who have a right to something more than non-meaningful designs, however strongly they may be painted.[53]

For all its similarity to Haefliger, though, Hughes' was a new voice. With the nation as his readership, he welcomed the opportunity to set a polemic for contemporary practice that was tied to the 'new right's' nationalist agenda. In January 1959, he exploited the emerging tensions between Sydney and Melbourne to set the cities in competition over the virtues of

figuration and abstraction. Having attacked the NSW CAS establishment for producing 'tired, well mannered symbols and flaccidly decorative configurations', he provocatively stated:

> From this aspect Melbourne has it all over Sydney. Perceval and the Boyds commit their errors, but they paint strongly and unequivocally. I believe that what the Sydney art world lacks at the moment is one good figurative painter who can bundle up good taste and proper artistic manner and consign it to the furnace ... John Olsen the most remarkable ... but also the most opaque; the paintings convey their incomprehensibility with great vigour, as if they enjoy being an uncrackable code.[54]

This development, more than anything else, encapsulates the nature of the change that was occurring in the contemporary art discourse. Rather than artistic rivalry and progress being predicated on the continuance of the tradition of the avant-garde as the NSW CAS advocated, Hughes and the 'new right' advocated that it be based on progress towards the organic evolution of a national artistic expression which symbolically fused 'Australian landscape and manners with the world of European morality and art and spiritual values'.[55] Accordingly Hughes suggested in his Observer series on 'Australian Artists' that the issue facing Sydney's second generation of contemporary painters was whether abstraction could live up to the claims of its artists and symbolically communicate their feelings and experiences of being Australian. Could Tom Gleghorn fulfil his claim that he was a symbolic painter and equal his master Dobell's expression of the Australian experience? Did Gleghorn's symbolic explorations of Voss and his series on the 'Dead Heart' landscape of Central Australia capture, as he claimed, 'the essence' of his experience of standing in the middle of the landscape and letting 'every colour and form around pass through' him as if he were 'a filter'? Or was the truth that Gleghorn himself was doubtful about abstraction's ability to communicate, as he indicated when he 'mournfully' said to Hughes; 'Sounds good, doesn't it? ... But I'm not doing that, not yet.'[56] Similarly, Hughes asked could John Coburn's abstract symbols express, 'the underlying order', 'the order of God', and 'spirituality', that shaped the consciousness of the Australian people?[57]

Hughes was not alone in his campaign against abstraction. He was assisted by fellow contributors to the Observer's art pages, most specifically by Peter Hutton and Tim Burstall, who used the exhibition of 'Seven British Artists' at the Art Gallery of NSW to warn of the dangers of international abstraction. Introducing the issue of provincialism, Hutton argued that distance from the centre had protected Australia from the 'the influence of American action painting and European abstract expressionism', and allowed it to concentrate:

> for most part in the post-war years on the slow development of an indigenous form of expression centred primarily on the "Australian Scene" - Nolan, Drysdale, Daws and Pugh display unequivocal leanings towards this localised expression. Their art, successful, and deservedly so, is essentially figurative, the revelation of something new in terms of symbols with which most people are at least vaguely familiar. It is not parochialism. It has been and is an honest attempt to find a metier capable of expressing a particular heritage.[58]

Burstall also promoted the advantages of isolation, arguing that the British painters had been swamped by the advance of tachism and non-objectivism. He moved to inflame the Sydney Melbourne rivalry asking:

> Is the sole reason why the art roost in Australia – or in Melbourne at any rate – isn't ruled by the non-objectives just another example of our provincialism, the usual ten year lag in our tastes? Or is non-objectivism a disastrous mistake which we have had the good fortune or the good sense to avoid – rather like Velasquez continuing to work in the Renaissance tradition long after it had been wrecked by the Italian Eclectics?

The danger of provincialism, it followed, was not to be found in the creation of an Australian tradition, but in the tendency to follow the overseas fashion to abandon 'the image' and turn to an art that had to 'resort to titles such as "Rose Emergence" and "Atomic Image" ... as if in their titles they are trying to suggest the image which is missing from their paintings.'[59]

The theory that Australia's national school of painting and cultural uniqueness was born of geographical isolation was given extensive exposure by John Pringle. His thesis that 'physical isolation had ... had a profound effect on Australian politics and thought' formed the leitmotiv of Australian Accent. In his chapter titled 'Australia and the World', Pringle posited an isolationist-cum-provincialist theory for Australia which emphasised not only the

disadvantages but also the advantages of distance from the metropolis.[60] In a decidedly imperialist interpretation of postwar advances in air transport and communication, Pringle argued that while it was true that they had broken down Australia's geographical isolation they 'had made less difference than is often imagined'. Indeed, Australian cultural development had been limited because 'Of all the so-called Western countries Australia (with New Zealand) lies farthest from the centre'.[61] According to Pringle this extreme isolation had affected the development and nature of Australian thought, if only because:

> most technical journals and magazines and books still reach Australia by sea – because airmail is too expensive – and there is a definite and noticeable time-lag in the arrival of ideas. And since at first these ideas are received by a small minority, it still takes longer for them to spread outwards to the masses. One can see this time-lag quite easily in politics and literature, in women's fashions and the goods displayed for sale in shops.[62]

Despite Australian claims that the war had broken down its isolation, the reality was that it was still essentially intellectually isolated, and this was responsible for the 'very marked insularity or provincialism' of the majority of Australians who were 'still astonishingly ignorant about the rest of the world', and who neither knew nor cared about what was happening in Europe or Asia or America.[63]

Pringle reasoned that while distance and isolation created a sense of cultural alienation, it afforded Australia the time and space to develop its own cultural traditions that would, when it became mature and independent, differentiate it from other nations. This, he argued, was evident in the arts where contemporary painters, who 'unlike European students ... are neither oppressed by the weight of great paintings from the past – many of them have never seen a painting more than fifty years old – nor by the intense competition of the living'.[64] Cut off from direct access to European art, they had been able to make progress towards forming a distinct school of painting which expressed something of what it meant to be Australian.[65] Nolan's Ned Kelly series, for instance, symbolised the disillusionment and sense of injustice that nagged at the back of many an Australian mind. However, Pringle announced dramatically:

> Unfortunately, just when Australia seemed to be developing a distinctively national school of painting, bright with the light and colours of the country and mining the poetry which lies buried like gold beneath the surface of this unpoetic nation, abstract expressionism settled over the land like a blight.

Australian 'young men' in 'trying to express their innermost emotions in precisely the same blobs and dabs and spots of colour as young men in London, Paris, New York and Buenos Aires' were posing a real threat to the future of Australian culture. The challenge facing Australia was whether it could protect its embryonic school of painting from the onslaught of international abstraction.[66]

Part II

The Defence of the Image: The Antipodean Manifesto and the Blake Prize

Much of the public rhetoric behind the campaign to defend the Australian school of painting from the advance of international abstraction emanated from Sydney. However, the actual battle was launched in Melbourne in August 1959 with 'The Antipodean Manifesto' which attacked 'tachists, action painters, geometric abstractionists, abstract expressionists and their innumerable band of camp followers' for placing 'the existence of painting as an independent art ... in danger.[67] Written by Bernard Smith in cooperation with Arthur and David Boyd, John Brack, John Perceval, Charles Blackman and Clifton Pugh, the Manifesto formed the catalogue for an exhibition in which the Melbourne group joined with Bob Dickerson from Sydney to reassert 'the primacy of the image in all painting and sculpture'.[68] The Antipodean affair has been immortalised in Australian art history as second only to the Ern Malley affair in controversial significance. However, in contrast to Ern Malley, where politics are acknowledged as the cause of the conflict, the accounts of the Antipodean affair, in typical Cold War rhetoric, emphasise that the issue was not about politics but the aesthetic question of 'the relative merits of figural and abstract art'.[69] If any politics were involved, the rhetoric stresses, they were the politics of art (the regional rivalry between Sydney abstractionists and Melbourne figuratives) and definitely not the politics of nationalism. This is despite the fact that the group was named The Antipodeans and, that

it chose the name in order to address the Northern Hemisphere, where the 'New American Painting' exhibition had been creating controversy. The British and some Europeans argued that, as the new mainstream, American abstract expressionism was threatening to swamp Western culture and destroy all that was regional and culturally distinctive in its path. The principle of provincial difference and creativity which Nikolaus Pevsner had celebrated in The Englishness of English Art was at risk.[70]

By the late 1950s, the internationalisation of Western culture was stimulating a reworking of the hierarchical constructs of imperialism, especially as America was challenging Europe and Britain for economic and cultural leadership. For many, including John Russell, who reviewed the London showing of 'New American Painting' in Art News, April 1959, the exhibition signified the opening of 'a new chapter in Anglo-American relations' and with this, a change in the dynamics of metropolis and the province. He argued that the 'new' American painters, who were unfettered by 'the aspirations of the past' challenged the 'traditional aesthetic' through their abomination of the 'illustration ... of outworn myths or contemporary alibis' and privileging of 'the unqualified contemporary act' as their subject. He saw in them the healing powers of the new world, arguing:

> Can more profitable be seen, almost in medical terms: as a way of remedying one of the diseases of modern society – the total degradation of the recognizable image. This, as I see it, is one way of defining the ethical background of the "new" painting; and (Motherwell again) "without ethical consciousness, a painter is only a decorator." That the disease in question is almost everywhere rife, and that the remedy is widely regarded as effective, is proved by the near-frenzy of acceptance with which the new painting has been received.[71]

However, while the rhetoric of colonialism had fostered the ideal of a new world which would one day heal, if not surpass the old world, not all shared Russell's enthusiasm for the new American painting as the source of the new mainstream and New York as the new centre. Strong opposition was expressed in England as both 'the Right and the extreme Left' asserted that it was a threat to the integrity of Britain's cultural heritage [72]

No longer the dominant imperialist power, Britain positioned itself as a champion of provincialism. Drawing on Pevsner's regionalist thesis, the British argued that they were a province of European culture and the creative potential of this status was to be protected at all costs. Kenneth Clark explained, that in a good province buffered by distance and time, the artist struggled against the levelling influences of the dominant metropolis style 'to make a personal and local contribution in his own way'. This struggle gave the province a creative vitality that ensured that it would at times 'throw up an inexplicable individual of genius; or ... wish to express certain human values that have been neglected' and in so doing affect the culture of the metropolitan centre.[73] The province, Clark stressed, was an important source of creative renewal; as it was England's responsibility to protect and advance European culture, so too was it the responsibility of her colonies to revitalise their mother culture.

The dilemma for Australia, Pringle explained, lay in the question of whether Australia would follow its conservative Prime Minister Robert Menzies and cling fruitlessly to the old world, or follow the lead of its contemporary artists (Nolan, Boyd, Drysdale, Passmore, Olsen) and writers (A.D. Hope, James McAuley and Harold Stewart) and create a new and distinctive culture from a blend of the old and the new, or like its young 'abstract expressionists' be defeated by its geographic vulnerability and cultural provincialism and succumb to the advances of the United States and a new form of colonial dependency.[74] In a reflection of how pivotal the arts were to Australian cultural production in the 1950s, Pringle asserted that it was not the politicians who held the answer to Australia's dilemma but its intellectuals, its artists and writers. They were the key to the development of a high culture; that is to the educated and sophisticated practice of art, literature, music, and theatre the role of which was to articulate the country's system of beliefs and practice, myths and symbols.[75]

The Antipodeans Brotherhood

In Melbourne, events were conspiring to foster a growing sense that not only was it the historical heart of contemporary art practice, but also that its figurative artists were the heirs

to the national school of painting. As MOMAA defined its collection of Melbourne contemporary art as the source of a distinctively Australian school with its own heroes and distinctive genre, forms and themes, Australian Galleries were promoting this tradition by exhibiting and marketing specifically 'Australian contemporary art'. Coincidentally, the academics Joseph Burke, Franz Philipp, Ursula Hoff and Bernard Smith were beginning to promote specific Melbourne artists, praising them not only for their creation of Australian myths but also for the creation of a uniquely Australian style of painting.[76] For the first time Australian artists and their achievements were being endorsed by professional art historians, and in turn incorporated into the schema of art history which, as a university discipline, was dedicated to the study of the universal achievement of mankind. These developments contributed to the growth of Australian art publishing, a large amount of which emanated from Melbourne under the guidance of Bernard Smith and imprimatur of Melbourne University. These developments together with the Observer and Quadrant's cultural discourse helped to foster a sense that an Australian artistic expression had been formed. Accordingly it was the duty of following generations of contemporary artists to protect and extend this facet of their national culture the roots of which, lay in Melbourne's figurative expressionist tradition.

The individual members of the Antipodeans - the Boyds, Brack, Perceval, Blackman, Dickerson and Pugh - were advantaged by these developments the results of which, saw the market interest in contemporary Australian art rise throughout the country. It is possible their decision to form the Antipodean Brotherhood was partly influenced by the competitive nature of the art market and a desire to protect their position, as Sydney's abstractionists were exhibiting more frequently in Melbourne. There was a feeling amongst Melbourne's figurative expressionists that their 'type' of painting was being downgraded, as the growing popularity of abstraction amongst the Melbourne artistic community saw MOMAA open its space to abstract exhibitions, and Gallery A open in August 1959 specifically to promote abstraction and international modernist design.[77]

All well-established mid-career artists, the Antipodeans were on the way to becoming part of Melbourne's contemporary art establishment and several of them, on John Reed's departure from the Melbourne CAS, had risen to power on its council.[78] Confident of their leadership and that they had a tradition to uphold, they initiated moves to make the CAS more professional and less amateurish, suggesting in total contradiction of the founding ideals of the CAS, that the principle of open exhibitions be suspended. When defeated, they limited the number of works that younger members could exhibit, curbing the CAS's avant-garde commitment to the promotion of the young and to aesthetic activism.[79] Whatever their motivation, be it anxiety that the market's appetite for the young was threatening the careers of maturing artists, or the threat of abstraction, the actions of the group signified a will to change the Melbourne CAS charter from the avant-garde promotion of the new and unknown, to the support of the established and traditional.[80] Their intention, it seems, was not so much to challenge and change society, but to protect the interests of a new contemporary art establishment.

Outside Victoria, the critical response to Melbourne figuration was mixed as the Sydney abstraction dominated the prizes and competitions and the influence of the NSW CAS avant-gardism fed a scepticism towards notions of Australian art. While the Melbournians' attempts to break into the lucrative Sydney market had been supported by the Observer, Wallace Thornton and Laurie Thomas were firmly partisan in their support of Sydney abstraction, with Thornton being scathing of the Sunday and John Reed collection when it was shown in Sydney in February 1959. In his opinion not only was it too narrowly focused, it had:

> a decadent, inbred, 'hill-billy' flavour of tenth rate German expressionism mixed with a dash of Picasso and at times reverting to the Australian primitive school – this depressing mixture is supposed to represent thirty years of contemporary painting in Melbourne.[81]

Inside Melbourne the figuratives were not without opposition; hostilities between them and Ian Sime's abstractionist group were intense, while young artists angered by the repressive developments in the CAS moved to hold their own show, 'Young Painters', at MOMAA.[82]

While market rivalry undoubtedly contributed to growing antagonism between Sydney and Melbourne, and between abstract and figurative artists, it was a minor irritant in comparison to the ideological conflict that emerged as the Antipodeans sought to position themselves at the forefront of Australian art history by joining with Bernard Smith in a combative attack on abstraction which, by inference, was also an assault on Sydney's artistic practice.

Bernard Smith's European Vision

The inclusion of an art historian within the Antipodeans was a new development heralding the arrival of the art historian as a critic and promoter intent on shaping artistic practice to the constructs of art history.[83] Smith's correspondence indicates that his enthusiasm for the group was deeply linked to his vision of Australian art as prophesied in European Vision. The idea of such a group was not new for Smith who had written to Robin Boyd in September 1957 to float the possibility of forming an Antipodean Brotherhood of six to seven architects, designers, artists and critics, suggesting Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd and John Brack as the appropriate artists. He proposed the group would bond together like the Impressionists, De Stijl and the Pre-Raphaelites, to fight for a common cause which in this case, was the belief that Australia should solve its own problems and establish its own variation of modernism.[84] Accordingly he held grand hopes for the Antipodeans who, he explained to Kim Bonython in February 1959, would 'not be a new society but a closed coherent group' whose intention was to further develop 'the impression created by artists like Nolan, Tucker and Drysdale'. Prepared to become 'more directly involved in the local art than [he had] been for many years' and to dedicate at least ten years to ensuring the group's success, Smith became their promoter and advocate. He immediately set about promoting their vision of a Manifesto and plans for an exhibition in London and Adelaide, but not in 'Sydney for the moment since it is so deeply comitted [sic] to non-representational art'.[85]

Accounts of the Antipodean affair to date have treated it as a local event with little attention being paid to the fact that its ambitions were as much international as national. It was the artists' belief, Smith explained to Bonython, that while much of Australian abstraction was

good, 'the great bulk of it simply cannot compare with the best ... in England and America ... and they are looking for something original from the Antipodes anyway ... not pale reflections of things they are familiar with'.[86] For Australian art to be internationally successful, suggested Smith with a fine understanding of the politics of colonialism, it had to be seen as different from the centre, but it also had to play to the interests of the Empire and be incorporated into its cultural agenda.[87]

Smith began lobbying Kenneth Clark, then of the Arts Council of Great Britain, for support, couching the request in terms of finding an exhibition venue and Manifesto publisher. Clark's promotion of the idea of an Australian school of painting and his championing of Drysdale and Nolan as the Antipodean leaders of British Commonwealth art were well publicised and Smith sought to exploit this. Not only would the Melbourne group 'add' to Drysdale and Nolan, he informed Clark, they would form a new weapon in the battle to protect British and European culture against the spread of international abstraction. Smith explained that the Antipodeans did:

> not see themselves as nationalists ... But ... as defenders and indeed champions of the image, and are much concerned with the overwhelming success of non-figural art in Sydney and abroad.[88]

They were the fulfilment of the predictions of European Vision and the South Pacific (then in publication); that is, a provincial school which extended and elaborated the traditions and attitudes of the mother culture, but which, in its difference, offered fresh formal insights and new ideas that had the potential to rescue Britain's modernist tradition of figuration from the advance of American abstract expressionism.[89]

The defence of 'the image'

It was not until May 1959 that Smith launched the Antipodeans in the Victorian CAS Broadsheet and set the polemic for what was a rather long campaign leading up to the August exhibition.[90] Announcing the formation of 'a new art group in Melbourne', Smith emphasised that they had 'come together' as figurative artists in order 'to defend and to champion as well as they can the place of the image in art'.[91] The 'overwhelming success

of non-figurative painting abroad, especially in America, has become something of a tyranny' as artists everywhere 'were being press-ganged by the power of fashion into the non-figurative modes of art'. While non-figurative art was be 'one of the most interesting products of the present century' it could never be 'the only form of visual; nor ... the major form'. In the final instance Smith argued abstract was little more than 'a pleasant form of decorative art' and, therefore, it was incapable of the clear and unambiguous communication of 'meaning'.[92] This, Smith emphasised, was the crux of the matter because painting and sculpture as liberal arts have 'always been deeply committed to the human situation and to the interpretation of nature'. Non-figurative painters were:

> attempting to cut themselves from both, preferring to luxuriate in a bath of mere paint which may mean anything to anybody. Meaning, whether communicated directly in figured representations of reality or indirectly in terms of symbol is at the very heart of the arts of painting and sculpture.

Non-figurative art, he reasoned, was capable only of communicating 'meaning of the most elementary kind' and its practice was reducing and debasing 'the role of art to a kind of self indulgent play ... Art is communication not a guessing game!'[93]

In Sydney, where many were equally concerned about the fashion for abstract expressionism, it was not Smith's insults about decorators that attracted a reaction but his emphasis on 'the image' connected as it was to notions of 'nature', the 'human situation' and figuration. The rhetoric of Smith's Victorian Broadsheet statement was similar to that of the Blake Prize critic, Father Kenny, whose campaign for a modern art that was significantly human and intelligible was gaining momentum.[94] The 1959 Blake Prize had stimulated a heated debate about the role of intelligibility and the symbol in painting when its judges, who included Bernard Smith, had showed a clear preference for figurative over abstract work and pious narrative over symbols.[95]

In the conservative, spiritual and political climate of B.A. Santamaria and the Catholic Social Movement, the Jesuit Fathers Kenny and Scott had been able to convince the Blake committee to restrict the 1958 conditions of entry to art, which being of highest quality and profundity of theological thought, had 'the ability to convey inspiration in a manner that is

ultimately communicable to the perceptive seeker as well as to the artist.'[96] As Robert Hughes explained in the Observer, these measures ensured that the 1959 Blake Prize could not be won by an 'abstract, or at least anything as abstract as Eric Smith's "The Moment Christ Died",' especially as some of the judges had 'on several occasions shown that they do not think "pure" abstraction of the Coburn-Smith type to be a right vehicle for religious art.'[97] The conditions of entry made it clear that 'doctrinal orthodoxy' was necessary in religious painting and that 'An attitude (preferably a Catholic one) must be taken by the artist, and something must be said'. The decision was 'a healthy attitude', Hughes thought, because abstract art was 'not equipped for this kind of precision in its statements ... It can be incomprehensible, and it can be beautiful. But it cannot communicate a conceptual idea.' The simple truth, Hughes asserted, was that abstract art was not 'capable of transmitting its meaning and truth to Mr Joe Bloggs, who sees it in a church and expects to get something from it.'[98]

Incensed by what they saw as an attempt to instruct artists in how and what to paint, the NSW CAS, led by John Ogburn and Weaver Hawkins, launched a counter attack demanding to see the Blake Prize rejects and debating the issue in the NSW Broadsheet.[99] As acting editor, John Ogburn reported in the March 1959 NSW Broadsheet many members had complained that the 'expressed ideals of this exhibition, namely that "the church should welcome a thoroughly contemporary presentation of religion" has been denied'. Furthermore, some painters had been told that 'if they wished their work to be seriously considered then their paintings would have to be, to some degree, figurative.' When Father Scott replied that all that the judges demanded was that the work be 'intelligible to a perceptive viewer', Ogburn retorted that 'the exhibition evidenced the fact that on the whole intelligibility was equated with figurative story telling, Eric Smith's winning work notwithstanding. Certainly some painters understood intelligibility to mean figurative.'[100] While a Catholic, Ogburn placed the principles of art for art's sake and artistic autonomy before the demands of religious orthodoxy, restating the ideals of Sydney's liberal tradition: 'a painter of integrity paints the way he must, and follows something higher

and more imperative than his conscious intelligence and cannot alter his "style" for fashion or fancy.'[101] As the NSW CAS saw it, the issue was not one of communication but the quality of art. Art was not intended to be didactic nor to communicate religious feelings. As for figuration, they were not against it; on the contrary, the issue at stake was every artist's freedom of choice, and it was their belief that it was 'just as possible to present super natural truths by abstract as by naturalistic means.'[102]

The formation of the Melbourne Antipodeans came at a time when, as Lynn put it, 'the abstractionists [were] getting it right and left' and the definition of 'the image' was being widely debated in Sydney as different interest groups sought to control and redefine the relationship of art and society according their vision of Australian culture. When Lynn saw a draft copy of the Antipodean Manifesto (in June '59) he quickly wrote to Bernard Smith tactfully suggesting that the focus should be the politics of art and most specifically the 'definition of "the image",' adding that he 'should hate to see the term suffer for the lack of this as did "significant form" because I do feel that it's a most important concept'. Having expressed his opinion on the inherently symbolic nature of painting on several occasions to Smith, Lynn did not repeat an earlier statement:

> the painter's symbol, the image, is an ambiguous contrivance, quite different from literary images where the role is explanatory, illuminating. My feeling is that whatever symbols (as in Bosch) are used, the whole work symbolises (does not present) human feelings of a kind not able to communicate in any other way.[103]

Instead he reported to Smith that a debate over the image had the potential to force the abstractionists out of their complacency and make them think more seriously and deeply about their intentions. James McAuley, despite his sophistries, Lynn continued, was making an important contribution towards this end, speaking to the NSW CAS on the eve of the publication of The End of Modernity.[104]

A collection of critical essays on literature, art and culture, The End of Modernity extended McAuley's theories about the spirituality of art and the moral obligation of the poet and artist to evolve a symbolic language that expressed their experiences of the inner world while being anchored in external reality. While this did not mean a return to representation

nor figuration it did mean that the subject of art, that is the spiritual, had to be symbolically expressed in an intelligible and rational manner as in the work of William Dobell, Leonard French and Patrick White.[105] In speaking to the NSW CAS, McAuley stressed his theories about 'the disappearance of the subject in painting, the attempts of the poetic-imagists to destroy it and the present absence of commitment to specific subjects in poetry'.[106] According to McAuley, while literature had checks that could save it from the dehumanising process of abstraction, the visual arts did not, for while in 'prose immediately ... irrationality becomes unreadable, unpublishable, unmarketable ... in the visual arts it gets exhibited, it excites sensibilities, people can be induced to buy it.'[107] Thus McAuley argued abstract painting posed a threat to the progress of Australia, as a humanist culture in which the dignity of man and God took precedence over the individualism and materialism of capitalism. Like modernism, abstraction was a symptom of the decline of civilisation and the artist's alienation from society.

The Antipodean Manifesto

It is not without irony, given the Ern Malley affair, that when the Antipodean Manifesto was published in August 1959, it carried stronger echoes of McAuley than it did of the CAS's charter for innovation and aesthetic radicalism. While couched in noble and dogmatic sounding phrases such as, 'we are not seeking to return to naturalist forms of painting', 'the first loyalty of an artist is to his art', and 'our final obligation is neither place nor nation' but to 'the society of man', the Manifesto's constant use of the binary opposites, figuration and non-figuration, left little doubt as to its conservative and didactic intent. Attempts to define 'the image' as 'the recognisable shape, the meaningful symbol', and as 'a figured shape or symbol fashioned by the artist from his perceptions and imaginative experience', combined with the statement 'People, their surroundings and the past that made them are still subjects, ... worthy of the consideration of the artist' to leave even less doubt that 'the defence of the image' meant a return to the Renaissance tradition of figure and landscape and the 'humanisation of nature'. For many, this no doubt also suggested a return to the gum tree tradition, for while the Manifesto carried the disclaimer that, 'We are not, of

course, seeking to create a national style', it also proclaimed that Australian artists had 'a right and a duty' to draw upon their 'experience both of society and nature in Australia for the materials' of their art. As they saw and experienced nature differently in some degree from the artists of the northern hemisphere, so it was their duty to produce an art that spoke of this difference. In short, it was their duty to create myths of identity.[108] No longer was the practice of contemporary art in Australia to be dedicated to innovation and the new: the Manifesto asserted it was to be dedicated to the upholding of the cultural establishment and its traditions.

Even more disconcerting, coming as it did from the members of CAS, was the Antipodean Manifesto's suggestion that modernism was somehow dead – that abstraction (non-figuration) had failed totally in its efforts to create 'an utterly new artistic language', and that 'the disillusions of the generation of 1914' had lead to a dead end, in which the Melbournians could proclaim that, 'Dada is as dead as the dodo and it is time we buried this antique hobby-horse of our fathers.'[109] The defence of the image, therefore, was not just an attack on abstraction but an attack on modernism and all that the CAS stood for. Not surprisingly it was the Manifesto and not the exhibition that created controversy. When finally published, its full implications were realised and the reaction of the contemporary art world was somewhat hostile and shocked.[110] For some reason the Antipodeans did not recognise that the whole notion of their Manifesto was a contradiction in terms; not only did it not uphold a fresh art opposed to domination by orthodox practices but, by protecting the interests of one stylistic group, it sought to destroy modernism's ideological commitment to the creation of new artistic forms of expression.

Elwyn Lynn set his counter-attack in the inaugural issue of Australia's first contemporary art magazine Modern Art News, reminding the art world that manifestos were a strategy of the modernist avant-garde, devised by futurism, surrealism and dada to 'herald important new movements' and to say 'something that could not be interpreted in terms of the old'.[111] They were to be used, as they were in Europe by the visual vibrationists and the Nucleur Group, to attack established aesthetic modes and taste and advance experimentation with

new materials, processes and form. While Melbourne might encourage manifestos, Sydney, he stated was not so presumptuous. Furthermore there was something politically ill-advised about artists telling other artists what to paint. Lynn noted with perspicacity that in America, 'ideological battles such as figuration and non-figuration have usually been the production of such critics as Rosenberg and Greenberg.' Warning that some 'would say that such cries are signs of the modernist movement's desperate plight', Lynn proclaimed 'be cautious; Futurism, Surrealism and Dadaism are entrenched in the modern arts', and warned of the conservatives' desperate desire to curb such anarchist tendencies.[112] In the NSW Broadsheet Lynn stated that the Antipodean Manifesto was yet another attempt by Australian conservatives to secure the defeat of abstraction and a return to realism as the 'true role of painting'. This, he continued, was evident in Alan McCulloch's review of the Antipodeans which:

> commented that art can weather any storm, such as tachism, which, he says, will make its contribution and dissolve. It can hardly mean, as the manifesto says 'the death of art'. He assumes, as do the Antipodeans, that figuration cannot dissolve.[113]

The aftermath

The conservatism of the Antipodean exhibition was made all the more acute by the opening one week earlier of Gallery A.[114] A commercial venture run by the abstractionists Clement Meadmore and Peter Upward and businessman Max Hutchinson, Gallery A was described as 'a new art centre aiming to present exhibitions of the latest developments in local and overseas art' and to promote 'the relationship of modern art and design to the home, office, and to architecture and science'.[115] Like John Reed's MOMAA, Gallery A sought to promote abstraction in a non-partisan manner and included artists from all states in its exhibitions. Its first show, 'Eight Australians', July/August 1959, included Nancy Borlase, John Coburn, Dutruc, Kenneth Hood, George Johnson, Elwyn Lynn, John Ogburn and Peter Upward, whose catalogue statements emphasised their experimentation with new materials and modes of expressionism. Lynn pointed to the emergence of 'a new expressive neo-dadaism and collage not devoted to "interesting" arrangements'.[116] The

establishment of Gallery A was closely followed by the publication of George Mora's and John Gooday's Modern Art News which aimed to stimulate 'the ventilation and exchange of ideas' on modern art, which indicates the emergence of a faction in Melbourne for whom the involvement in international modernism was a cultural statement.[117] However, international modernism was hard to sell in Melbourne, and Hutchinson, Meadmore and Upward retreated to the sympathetic climate of Sydney before moving on to America and London.[118] Clearly it is not without significance that the Antipodean affair occurred when the Melbourne art scene was opening itself to the latest changes in international modernism, and given this situation, perhaps it is not surprising that the Manifesto, coming from the leaders of the CAS, proved an embarrassment for the artists involved, and that they would seek to distance themselves from it and from Bernard Smith.

Bernard Smith's role in the Antipodean affair and the construction of its mythic significance is vexed, stretching into the 1960s and 'The Myth of Isolation' debate, and into the 1980s post-modernist revival of figuration when Smith and the English critic Peter Fuller sought to revive interest in the Antipodeans and Australian figurative expressionism as a way out of the impasse of modernism.[119] While it is true that Smith shaped the Manifesto from the artists' written submissions he also had his own agenda. Like McAuley, Smith was ideologically opposed to abstract art and made several predictions of its imminent demise and the return to realism or figuration. Influenced by Marxist thinkers such as Christopher Caudwell, Smith believed art should be first and foremost social and deal with the human drama.[120] His attitude was similar to that of the English-based art historians and critics, Frederick Antal, Anthony Blunt and John Berger, who viewed modernist abstraction, with its romantic ideal of the alienated artist and its art for art's sake ideology, as the rejection of the humanist tradition of art and the placement of art in the servitude of the forces of capitalism.[121] In Smith's opinion Clive Bell, Henri Bergson and Benedetto Croce's *art pour l'art* theories were elitist and a symptom of capitalist decadence.[122] Abstraction's popularity was proof of Ruskin's theory that it is the decadence and destructiveness of industrialisation and capitalism which alienates man and art.[123] The pure modernists in

their retreat into aesthetic isolationism, Smith reasoned, had contributed to destruction of European culture. They had supported 'the flight from reason' and encouraged artists to turn away from the real struggle of their day to the pursuit of art as an inner, mystical and obscure activity; to romantic aestheticism and the alienation of the artist from society.[124] The true destiny of art, Smith argued, was to find its way out of abstraction and re-establish its commitment to the central realities of its era. The way of the impasse of modernism therefore was not in the long process of metaphysical subtlety (abstraction) but in a deep felt response to the world of experience, to the social and political.

Smith's vision of the evolution of art pivoted on the idea that there would be a return to the Renaissance humanist tradition which modernism had sought to destroy and that this was where Australia's potential to revitalise the mother culture would come to fruition. As early as Place, Taste and Tradition (1945), Smith predicted that a return to realism in Australian contemporary art was 'one of the most interesting and portentous signs in the history of its development.'[125] He argued that isolated from the direct influences of the modern movement, Australian artists, such as Dobell and Drysdale, had been able to develop a set of conventions for landscape and portraiture which no longer relied on verisimilitude but captured the inner drama of the human struggle. Drysdale's Two Children, 1946, for instance, expressed 'the consuming loneliness of humankind', and like Dobell's Billy Boy, 1943, presented a tough vision of life which was unsuited to the walls of the homes of millionaires thus reclaiming art as a voice of the people.[126] Drysdale's and Dobell's rawly painted portraits were not vehicles for the display and endorsement of the capitalist class, rather the people who filled their canvases were manifestations of the common man; the drover's wife, cricketers, a billy boy in his singlet and tattoos, drought victims, folk heroes. Similarly their landscapes were sites of hardship and struggle as Australians sought to construct a classless society away from the decay and decadence of the industrial Europe which had exiled them. For Smith, Australian contemporary art, in its re-appropriation of these categories from the academies to recount the story of the people, became a metaphor for the defeat of capitalism and the bourgeoisie, which in the 1950s and 1960s,

was signified by corporate America. Built from the traditions of the past and a colony's battle for freedom and democracy, a mature school of Australian figuration, Smith believed, would assist not only in the revitalisation of Western artistic practice, but in the democratisation of the West's humanist culture.

Accordingly, the establishment of the Antipodeans as the next stage in the development of the Australian school of painting was important to Smith and he continued to support them and the sentiments of the Manifesto long after the group had begun to disperse. In the early 1960s as interest was fading, he wrote to Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker, Fred Williams and Jon Molvig asking them to join the group in a second exhibition which he hoped would be held in London.[127] When they declined and John Brack resigned, Smith continued determinedly on his quest asking the Sydney art dealer, Rudy Komon, to manage the group and help organise a London Show for 1962. It was his belief, Smith explained 'that Australia can provide a distinctive art based on the figurative image' that would 'win its way to international distinction not only through one or two painters like Nolan and Drysdale, but ... as a school.' He suggested the time was perfect for a London exhibition because people like Sir Kenneth Clark were clearly making 'use of the unusual exotic charm of Nolan's images to bring the figurative image back into the public favour in England ... and this is just perfect for the Antipodeans.' The name Antipodeans he added was 'perfect for the overseas market although Aussies might not like it.[128]

Smith was not the only party keen to exploit the enormous popularity that Australian painting was experiencing abroad. As 1959 drew to a close, the NSW CAS shipped their 'Contemporary Australian Painters' exhibition to London for showing in March-April 1960 at the New Vision Centre and news of America's critical response to the Matson Line exhibition was beginning to filter through in the NSW Broadsheet.[129] In London, the interest in Australian art was at a peak as Nolan's 'total sell out' exhibition at the Matthiesen Gallery left no doubt that he was 'now one of the most sought after painters in Britain and his pictures beside their own intrinsic merit, now constitute a status symbol to hang on the wall'.[130] While the mid-career artists Arthur Boyd and Albert Tucker were praised for the

distinctive Australianness of their work, younger artists like Brett Whiteley were finding instant success as they arrived in London seeking international recognition.[131] The Australians were the flavour of the year as London's galleries opened their doors to them. As Qantas also opened a modern gallery in the centre of London specifically for their promotion, the publisher Thames and Hudson initiated moves to produce the first monograph on an Australian artist – on Sydney Nolan of course.[132]

It was not only distinctively Australia art, however, that was attracting attention. Carl Plate's exhibition at London's Leicester Galleries in October 1959 and the NSW CAS New Vision exhibition, followed by the success of Frank Hodgkinson on the Continent, combined to alert the British to the fact that Australia had reached a level of sophistication that enabled it to produce abstract painters of international standards and paintings that were not necessarily of a literal manner.[133] Alan Brissenden reported to the Sydney Observer, London was ready for 'a large, carefully chosen exhibition' of Australian contemporary art. But rather than being an Antipodean type show, this exhibition would need to give 'the English artists and the public' an opportunity to place the painters they had already seen in the wider perspective of present-day Australian painting.[134]

The important issue for Smith however was whether this exhibition would position Australian art in a positive independent manner, or present an image of Australian culture which would 'be just the kind of thing that the English art world wanted to believe'?[135] When the task of curating the exhibition went to Bryan Robertson of the prestigious Whitechapel Gallery and, when he in turn invited Sir Kenneth Clark and Robert Hughes to contribute the catalogue's essays, Smith had grounds for concern.[136] The 1961 Whitechapel exhibition of 'Recent Australian Painting' was to be surrounded by controversy: a controversy focused not on the quality of the art, but on the image of Australian culture that it offered to the world.

Conclusion

This chapter has established that the Antipodean affair and its relationship with Sydney abstraction were more complex than histories have suggested to date. The Antipodean affair brought the issue of regionalism to the fore at a crucial moment when Sydney abstractionists were finding their feet internationally and abstract expressionism was well ensconced as an integral part of contemporary art production. However, the Antipodean affair also drew attention to international concerns about the impact of the spread of American abstract expressionism on regional cultures including those of Britain and Europe. Bernard Smith effectively exploited these concerns promoting the Antipodeans as evidence of the strength of regional culture. As contemporary art was evaluated in terms of its contribution to the development of an uniquely Australian art, the internationalism of abstract expressionism was increasingly positioned as a threat to Australia's cultural future. The issue of Australian relations with the centres of England, Europe and America now became a defining theme of the contemporary art discourse.

More important for Sydney's abstractionists, however, was the Antipodean Manifesto's 'defence of the image' which came at a time, when the 'new right' and conservative forces were insisting artists should communicate their message intelligibly; the inference being that in order to express the spiritual experience of Australians, artists needed to use either imagery or symbolism. This wave of conservativeness saw the NSW CAS and Sydney abstractionists turn their energies once again to the Blake Prize in a final bid to reassert the validity not only of abstraction but also of the principle of artistic autonomy. As the enthusiasm for the ideal of an independent culture grew, Sydney and its abstract expressionists faced a new set of pressures as the role of abstract art in the production of Australian culture was called into question.

1 'Standards in Australian Literature', Current Affairs Bulletin, 26 November, 1956, vol. 19, no. 3, p. 45.

2 'Advances in the Art' in the supplement: 'Pageant of the Ten Millions'. SMH, 9 March, 1959, also 'Sydney learned this week that it's boom and bust in the art market.', SMH, 1 March, 1959. Victorian painting, the article explained had 'no value at all in Australia as the National Art Gallery seeks to sell off its Victorian art'. Those interested in art investment were advised 'to speculate buying young artists.'

3 Pringle, Australian Accent, p. 113.

4 ibid. See specifically the chapters, 'Australian Culture', pp. 113-137; and 'Poetry: the Counter-Revolution', pp. 138- 163; also 'Standards in Australian Literature', CAB.

5 J. Thompson, 'On Becoming Unprovincial', Southerly, vol. 19, no. 1, 1958, pp. 42-44, used the negativity of provincialism to argue against the establishment of a Chair in Australian Literature; while W. Power, 'How to Become Unprovincial', Southerly, vol. 19, no. 4, 1958, pp. 224-225, argued the opposite in reply.

6 Power, 'On Becoming Unprovincial', p. 225.

7 V. Buckley, 'Towards an Australian Literature', Meanjin, vol. XVIII, no I, 1959, p. 68.

8 'Standards in Australian Literature', CAB, p. 37.

9 Thompson, 'How to Become Unprovincial'.

10 'Standards in Australian Literature', CAB, p. 37.

11 Pringle, Australian Accent, p. 121.

12 ibid., p. 122.

13 ibid., p. 123.

14 ibid., pp. 12[illegible]-124

15 W. Thornton, 'Finest Exhibition of Our Recent Painting', SMH, 24 September, 1958; and 'Bank's Art Display, Memorable Waratah Spring Festival', SMH, 3 October, 1958.

16 R. Hughes, 'Few New Ideas: Sydney is better at saying things while Melbourne has more to say', Observer, 10 January, 1959.

17 ibid. For Hughes the hierarchy for 1958-9 was – John Olsen, Carl Plate and John Coburn.

18 Thornton, 'Bank's Art Display, Memorable Waratah Spring Festival'.

19 'Advances in the Art', SMH.

[20] Smith Papers. The correspondence between Smith and Bonython occurred during October to December 1958. Bonython's correspondence, gives the month and year only.

[21] Smith Papers. Correspondence from Bonython to Smith, November 1958.

[22] Smith Papers. Correspondence from Smith to Bonython, 17 November, 1958.

[23] Smith Papers. Correspondence from Bonython to Smith, December 1958.

[24] Bonython, Modern Australian Painting and Sculpture. The book included an introduction by Prof. J. Burke and an essay by the Sydney journalist Laurie Thomas; A. McCulloch, 'Australian Art: The Bonython Book', Meanjin, vol. XIX, no. 2, 1960, pp. 206-208, thought that it was 'especially admirable given the prohibitive cast of art-book production'. However, it was sold short by Burke's 'diplomatic and eulogistic foreword' and Thomas' writing which was at best 'warmly romantic' and unfortunately 'too liberally besprinkled with shorthand reportage, studio gossip and unimportant quotations.'

[25] See Ashcroft et al., The Empire Writes Back, for the importance of the construction of a 'national literary history' for settler colonies.

[26] Smith, European Vision. Reviewed by J. Burke, 'Bernard Smith: European Vision and the South Pacific 1769-1850', Quadrant, no. 17, Summer 1960-61, pp. 79-81; and R.F. Brissenden, 'European Vision and the South Pacific', Meanjin, vol. XX, no. 1, 1961, pp. 116-118.

[27] Smiths, European Vision, p. v.

[28] ibid., pp. 240-241.

[29] ibid., p. 51, Smith's study is a fine example of the process that Ashcroft et al., The Empire Writes Back, describe as the search for authenticity and indigeneity.

[30] Smith, European Vision, p. 253.

[31] Ashcroft, The Empire Writes Back; also R. Young, White Mythologies: Writing History and the West, London, Routledge, 1990, for post colonial theory.

[32] Ashcroft, The Empire Writes Back, p. 2.

[33] ibid., p. 11.

[34] M. Clark, 'Re-writing Australian History', in T.A. G. Hungerford, (ed.) Australian Signpost, Melbourne, Cheshire, 1956, as quoted in Docker, A Critical Condition, pp. 111-112.

For a discussion of Clark and Buckley's relationship with Sydney and the 'new critics' see Docker, A Critical Condition, pp. 100-121. Docker argues that Clark, Buckley, G.A. Wilkes and H. P. Heseltine launched Australia's post-colonial discourse by advocating the establishment of anti-imperialist paradigms for literature and history.

[35] Ashcroft, The Empire Writes Back, p. 135.

[36] V. Buckley, 'The Image of Man in Australian Poetry', 1957, as quoted in Docker, A Critical Condition, p. 103.

[37] ibid, pp. 103-104.

[38] J. McAuley, 'Literature and Arts', in P. Coleman, (ed.) Australian Civilization: A Symposium, Melbourne, Cheshire, 1962, pp. 122-123.

[39] Ashcroft, The Empire Writes Back, pp. 104-109.

[40] ibid., pp. 115, 117; also Buckley 'Towards an Australian Literature', p. 68, which lists a set of the justifications for teaching Australian Literature.

[41] P. Coleman, Memoirs, p. 94, noted that: 'Although called the *Observer*, the magazine could have been called *Polemic*, since each issue set out to portray Australia as a dun country run by second-raters and their toadies.'

[42] ibid., p. 121.

[43] ibid., pp. 143-144.

[44] E. Lynn, 'An Art Book, Art, and Art Books', NSW Broadsheet, June 1961.

[45] R. Hughes, 'At the Gallery: 'Not in terms of Money', Observer, 18 October, 1958.

[46] C. Young, 'Barry Stern's Museum of Modern Art: 1 p.m. to Midnight', Observer, 30 May, 1959.

[47] P. Coleman, Memoirs, p. 99.

[48] Hughes. 'Doric Column, Domes and Vaults', in de Groen, Some Other Dreams, pp. 121-122, 130.

[49] P. Coleman, Memoirs, p. 98.

[50] ibid., pp. 98-99.

[51] Hughes, 'Doric Column, Domes and Vaults', pp. 120-132.

[52] ibid., p. 132.

[53] R. Hughes, 'Art: Killing Abstractionists', Observer, 23 August, 1958. This is an early review by Hughes in which he was being critical for criticism's sake. He would become a great admirer and supporter of Olsen.

[54] Hughes, 'Few New Ideas'.

[55] V. Buckley, 'The Image of Man in Australian Poetry', Essays in Poetry, 1957, as quoted in Docker, Cultural Elites, pp. 104-105.

[56] R. Hughes, 'Australian Artists: 1. Gleghorn: Dobell's Disciple', Observer, 24 January, 1959.

[57] R. Hughes, 'Australian Artists: 2: Coburn: Quiet, Shy and Abstract', Observer, 7 February, 1959. As Coburn was a devote Roman Catholic it is interesting to consider his attitudes towards abstraction and the metaphysical. In the interview Coburn rejected the notion of a Sydney school of abstraction:

> I don't think abstract art can die out. All art is abstract. It has to be; structure, arrangements of forms and disposition of colours are all abstract qualities, and they are what makes art. Abstract art is fundamentally religious ...
>
> Well, I think abstract work reflects the order underlying the universe. This is an abstract thing ... Admittedly, abstract art has become more romantic now, but it still goes beyond symbolism into the underlying order which gives all symbols meaning. That is the order of God. Painting has become spiritual; away from the materialism of objects. People are wrong when they say abstract art is a purely subjective business.

[58] P. Hutton, 'Sydney Art: The Art of Abstraction', Observer, 4 April, 1959.

[59] T. Burstall, 'Paintings: Painting with Spray-Guns', Observer, 16 May, 1959.

[60] Pringle, Australian Accent, pp. 164-185. It is highly possible that Pringle was also a critical model for Hughes.

[61] Pringle, Australian Accent, p. 164.

[62] ibid., p. 165.

[63] ibid., pp. 165-166.

[64] ibid., p. 122.

[65] ibid., p. 123.

[66] ibid., p. 124.

[67] 'The Antipodean Manifesto' in The Antipodean Exhibition, 4-15 August 1959, Victorian Artists' Society; also in T. Allen, The Antipodeans: Another Chapter, Lauraine Diggins Fine Arts, Melbourne, October 1988, pp. 15-16; The NSW Broadsheet, June 1959, mentions that a Manifesto was to be published by the Antipodean Group in Melbourne whose aim was the re-assertion of 'the primacy of the image in all painting and sculpture'.

[68] See Heathcote, A Quiet Revolution, 'Antipodeans Aweigh', pp. 105-123, for the most recent and well-informed account; also Smith Papers, 'Antipodean file'. This file includes statements by Clifton Pugh (undated), David Boyd and John Perceval (undated) all of which were used extensively by Smith to form the Manifesto.

[69] Smith, Two Commentaries, p. 5.

[70] N. Pevsner, The Englishness of English Art, Middlesex, Penguin, 1964.

71 J. Russell, 'Art News from London', Art News, April 1959, pp. 46-47.

72 ibid, p. 47; and R. A. Simpson, 'Art: A Decade's Dribbling', Observer, 26 December, 1959, which refers to John Berger's statement in New Statesman that tachism and action painting were 'the worship of the accident'.

73 K. Clark, 'Provincialism' (1962), Moments of Vision and Other Essays, New York, Harper and Row, 1981, p. 51.

74 Pringle, Australian Accent, p. 124.

75 ibid., p. 164.

76 Ursula Hoff and Bernard Smith were both supporters of Arthur Boyd and John Brack. Hoff's interest in these artists was related to the idea of the creation of an Australian iconography, see 'Content and Form in Modern Art', Meanjin, vol. XII, no. 4, 1953, pp. 449-450; as was Joseph Burke's, see Some Recollections of the Post-War Years in Australian Painting: A Lesson for the Future, The Sixth Sir William Dobell Memorial Lecture, Sydney, Power Publications, 1981; and Franz Philipp's, Arthur Boyd, London Thames and Hudson, 1968.

77 Heathcote, A Quiet Revolution, p. 114.

78 ibid, p. 112.

79 ibid.

80 Eric Westbrook expressed his opinions on the threat of the young in the press and in 'A Reply to "Tachism" (Art News, No. 1)', Victorian Broadsheet, April 1957; also Smith Papers. Correspondence of 10 January 1958. Smith expressed similar sentiments to Westbrook when recommending Arthur Boyd and John Brack for the Rubenstein Prize, and suggesting to the organisers that the prize be 'for established artists, not young hopefuls who are never heard of again'.

81 W. Thornton, SMH, 18 February, 1959.

82 Heathcote, A Quiet Revolution, pp. 110-112; also Smith Papers, for an undated correspondence from Helen Brack which expressed concern that the influence of big personalities like Boyd and Nolan on younger artists was not necessarily good and argued for a bigger view of art.

83 Smith took the role of the art historian seriously, arguing in 'Sir Herbert Read and the Power Bequest', p. 82, that the historian was 'a living and shaping hand not unlike the hand of the artists'.

84 Smith Papers. Correspondence to Robin Boyd, 22 September, 1957.

85 Smith Papers. Correspondence to Kim Bonython, 21 February, 1959. In this correspondence Smith announced that a new group had been formed in Melbourne and that he was its chairman and John Brack its secretary-treasurer. He continued:

> I think these artists together pin-point as it were the most of what is most vital and individual in Australian art to-day. They are all rather disturbed by the increased fashionableness of abstract expressionism in Sydney – and this is one of the reasons they are coming together ... if we were to do any good we should have to stick together for ten years.

Smith proposed an exhibition of 100 paintings that would to be 'small and coherent enough to make a single impact and develop the impression created by artists like Nolan, Tucker and Drysdale'.

86 ibid.

87 See N. Barber, Conversations with Painters, London, Collins, 1994. pp. 83-100 for the British appropriation of Sidney Nolan as a British artist.

88 Smith Papers. Correspondence to Kenneth Clark, 28 February, 1959.

89 Smith Papers. Correspondence to Bryan Robertson, 4 April, 1959, requesting an exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in Spring 1960.

90 B. Smith, 'A New Art Group-The Antipodeans', Victorian Broadsheet, May 1959.

91 ibid., p. 5.

92 ibid., p. 6.

93 ibid., p. 7 .

94 B. Smith,' Antipodeans', Letter to the editor, Observer, 27 June, 1959.

95 Crumlin, The Blake Prize for Religious Art, p. 23. In 1958-9 Smith was a judge along with D. Dundas, Rev. Michael Scott, Tom Bass and Rev. I. Shevill, the Bishop of North Queensland. The Prize was won by Eric Smith's Christ is Risen and Matilda Lister's Christ Preaching from the Sea of Galilee won the Darcy Morris Memorial Prize for a scriptural subject. See also Crumlin, 'An Investigation', pp. 72-74 for an account of the controversy and the move to tightened conditions of entry following Lynn's victory in 1957/8 and Eric Smith's in 1958/9 with the fairly abstract The Moment Christ Died; Crumlin, 'An Investigation', p. 72, describes how Father Michael Scott joined with Father Kenny to convince the committee to be more prescriptive.

96 F. Hinder, 'The Blake Prize', Meanjin, vol. XVIII, no. 3, 1959, pp. 368-369, reported that the new foreword to the Prize catalogue stated:

> It (the Committee) believes the Church should welcome a thoroughly contemporary presentation of religious truth; this involves some attempt to penetrate into the

profundity of theological thought and also the ability to convey inspiration in a manner that is ultimately communicable to the perceptive seeker as well as to the artist. Hinder noted this placed the onus on the artist to be well-versed in theology.

97 R. Hughes, 'Back to the Primitives', Observer, 24 January, 1959; and P. Hutton, 'A Stylised Blake', Observer, 7 March, 1959, pp. 148-149 for reviews.

98 Hughes, 'Back to the Primitives'.

99 John Ogburn was acting as editor of the NSW Broadsheet while Lynn was overseas. In February 1959 Ogburn published 'Questionnaire' which was followed by 'Poor William' in March. When Lynn returned he published 'Blake Prize', May 1959.

100 Ogburn, 'Poor William'. Of 300 entries only 70 were exhibited and this created some disquiet.

101 Ogburn, 'Poor William'. Ogburn stated that the key issue was whether religious feeling can constitute a criterion by which one can judge a painting. Surely, he asked:

> it was a question of quality? Anything else calls for an artistic compromise by the artist ... This talk about religious feeling is somewhat futile. A committee can't discuss emotions, but they can discuss the quality of a painting as a painting. The didactic role of art in a universally literate, mass communicated, photographed society is surely to be questioned?

102 ibid.

103 Smith Papers. Correspondence from Elwyn Lynn, 3 August 1958.

104 ibid.

105 McAuley, 'Literature and Arts', p. 13; see also L. Kramer, (ed.), James McAuley: Poetry, Essays and Personal Commentary, St Lucia, University of Queensland, 1988; J. McAuley, The End of Modernity, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1959; and the NSW Broadsheet, July 1959, for a review of The End of Modernity.

106 Smith Papers. Correspondence from Elwyn Lynn, 26 June, 1959.

107 McAuley, 'Literature and Arts', p. 128.

108 The Antipodean Manifesto included the statement: 'We live in a young society still making its myths. The emergence of myth is a continuous social activity. In the growth and transformation of its myths a society achieves it own sense of identity. In this process the artists may play a creative and liberating role.'

109 The Antipodean Manifesto.

[110] See Allen, The Antipodeans: Another Chapter, pp. 7-13; B. Blackman, 'The Antipodean Affair', Art and Australia, vol. 5, no. 4, 1968, p. 608; Heathcote, A Quiet Revolution, pp. 118-121; and Lynn, 'Preface', Body and Soul, p. 6.

[111] E. Lynn, 'Excuse my Manifist', Modern Art News, vol. 1, no. 1, August 1959, p. 5. The first edition of MAN contained a survey of the Antipodean exhibition and with a circulation of 7,000 copies it no doubt helped to publicise the debate.

[112] ibid.

[113] NSW Broadsheet, August 1959.

[114] The conservatism of the Antipodean exhibition is well illustrated by the fact that when Smith, Smith Papers. Correspondence of June 1959, wrote to the trustees of the state galleries inviting them to the exhibition and soliciting sales they declined his offer. In reply they stated that they knew the artists well enough already and had their work in their collections. Thus, while the Antipodean exhibition was a financial success this cannot be attributed to the radicalism of the work but to the fact that the artists, represented in the nation's collections, were secure investments. G. Catalano, The Years of Hope: Australian Art and Criticism 1959-1968, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1981, pp. 39-42, questions Smith's claims of extensive hostility to the Antipodeans; Heathcote, A Quiet Revolution, pp. 119, also notes that the general critical reception was mild.

[115] M. Hutchinson, 'Down in Des Moines', in De Groen, Some Other Dream, pp. 156-158; and Gallery statement contained in the catalogue, Sydney Nine, Gallery A, September 1961.

[116] Eight Australians, July-August 1959, Gallery A.

[117] Modern Art News, 1959, no. 1-2. Its editors were John Gooday and George Mora. Designed by Peter Burn, it was sponsored by the Victorian CAS and MOMAA.

[118] Hutchinson, 'Down in Des Moines', p. 158.

[119] Smith has written extensively on the Antipodeans with his key essays being:
'The Myth of Isolation', in The Death of the Artist as Hero, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1988, pp. 217-229, which is an edited version of Australian Painting Today; 'The Truth about the Antipodeans', The Death of the Artist as Hero; 'Notes on Abstract Art', in Catalogue of Abstract Art in Australia, Two Commentaries on the Exhibition; and Foreword to P. Fuller, The Australian Scapegoat, pp. ix-xv. For Peter Fuller's attempt to revive the issue see 'Introduction: The Antipodes and I', The Australian Scapegoat, pp. xvii-xxv.

[120] In 'The New Realism in Australian Art', Meanjin, vol. 3, no. 1, 1944, pp. 23-24.

[121] B. Smith, The Boy Adeodatus, Ringwood, Allen Lane, 1984, p. 261; see also Dyer, Ways of Telling, pp. 6-11, for the parallels between Smith and John Berger. The connection, however, while on one level political is based on a shared commitment to a social history of art as defined by scholars like Antal.

[122] Smith, The Boy Adeodatus, pp. 235-261, passim.

[123] ibid., p. 240.

[124] Smith, Place, Taste and Tradition, p. 239.

[125] ibid.

[126] Smith, Australian Painting: 1788-1960, pp. 249-251, 255-264, passim.

[127] Smith Papers. Correspondence to Tucker, Nolan, Molvig and Fred William in early February 1960.

[128] Smith Papers. In this Correspondence to Rudy Komon, 12 August, 1960, Smith requested an exhibition in Sydney June 1961. Writing in the aftermath of John Brack's letter of resignation, 18 July 1960, Smith appeared to be trying to hold the group together by seeking commercial assistance. In appealing to Komon, Smith lamented 'it is by no means easy to keep a group with so much individual talent together, they all have their own interests and future to think about.' In his opinion they needed an exhibition to generate a sense of renewed cohesiveness.

[129] The New Vision Centre exhibition was organised by Lynn while he was in London in early 1959. The exhibition of fifteen CAS artists included Borlase, Coburn, Fluke, Gilliland, Gleghorn, Hessing, Hinder, Laverty, Lewers, Lynn, McDonald, Ogburn, Rapotec, Salkauskas and Eric Smith. When shown at the Bissietta Gallery in December 1959 it received mixed reviews; W. Thornton, 'Australian Abstract Art for London Showing', SMH, 10 December, 1959, was critical that certain names, Fairweather, Passmore, Olsen, Hodgkinson, Plate and Cassab, were missing. Correspondence followed with the NSW CAS accusing Thornton of being unsupportive and ill-informed; SMH, 12 & 15 December, 1959; NSW Records. Notes for 6 June, 1960. Lynn reported to the committee that the exhibition opening was not well attended, the catalogue was poor and the exhibition not an unqualified success. Bad location and poor publicity was credited with the poor London response to the exhibition which fared much better when shown later at the Univision Gallery in Newcastle on Tyne.

[130] NSW Records. British Council Australia Bulletin, August 1960, 'London Correspondence on Arts', by Sir Hugh Jones; and NSW Broadsheet, September 1960.

[131] A. Brissenden, 'Art Reviews, Swans in Bond Street', Observer, December 1960, reported that Nolan's exhibition was second in popularity only to the Picasso retrospective. It attracted four to five hundred people every day for the month it was shown. These were exceptional figures for a

one-man show in the West End. Arthur Boyd, Albert Tucker and Brett Whiteley were also attracting attention, together with the New Vision exhibition.

[132] Lynn mentions 'The Sidney Nolan Book', in 'Books', NSW Broadsheet, November 1960. Devised by Bryan Robertson, with an introduction by Sir Kenneth Clark and text by Colin McInnes, it was published by Thames and Hudson, London, in 1961.

[133] NSW Records. 'Transcript: Robert Haggerty speaking to you from London, recording from the United Kingdom Office.' In covering the New Vision Exhibition, Haggerty spoke to Ron Russell, the CAS's London representative, and Simon Hodgeson, a critic with the English Spectator; NSW Broadsheets, January 1960, carried summaries of the London critics reviews of Carl Plate's exhibition at the Leicester Galleries where Keith Vaughan and David Wynne were also exhibiting.

[134] Brissenden, 'Swans in Bond Street'.

[135] Smith, Two Commentaries, pp. 5-6.

[136] Smith Papers. Correspondence from Ursula Hoff, 30 August, 1962.

Chapter 7

The Cultural Validity of Abstract Expressionism

This chapter brings the study of the construction of the cultural meaning and value of contemporary abstraction for Australian society to a close. The focus is on 1961 when Stanislaus Rapotec's Blake Prize victory and the 'Recent Australian Painting' exhibition at the London Whitechapel Gallery finally established the cultural validity of abstract expressionism. At this moment when the validity of abstract expressionism was confirmed, a major shift of emphasis also occurred in the contemporary art discourse. Bernard Smith and Robert Hughes initiated this shift when they clashed, in the aftermath of the Whitechapel exhibition, over the nature of the effects which Australia's geographic and cultural isolation had on artistic production. Together, they set the parameters for a debate about provincialism in which Sydney abstract expressionism was positioned as an example of the dangers of the provincial pursuit of international modernism. This chapter investigates the themes of the provincialism debate and how this debate contributed to the negative positioning of abstract expressionism within historical interpretations of postwar contemporary art.

Part I opens with the neo-dadaist 'Muffled Drums' performance and exhibition which the NSW CAS staged in response to the Antipodean Manifesto. 'Muffled Drums' signalled the end of the avant-garde phase of abstract expressionism as the NSW CAS's refocussed its energies introducing neo-dada and assemblage as new strategies for aesthetic activism. Sydney's contemporary art world and its critics responded negatively, focusing their energies on promoting Sydney's leadership of contemporary abstraction. In the process, they defined abstract expressionism as the subjective exploration of the spiritual and metaphysical, according to Sydney's romantic ideal of art. Their promotion of Rapotec's Blake Prize victory and the 'Sydney Nine' group, it is contended, was designed to establish the presence of a leadership group of gestural abstractionists, whose stylistic affiliations with the New York School were proof that Australian now had a genuine 'school' of abstract

expressionism. This was a significant development as the orientation of the production of abstract art turned towards New York as the new centre of modernism.

Part II investigates the nature and impact of the rhetoric of the Whitechapel exhibition and its catalogue's promotion of 'the sudden appearance of an Australian school of painting that might add something entirely fresh to contemporary painting'.[1] The catalogue's essays by Kenneth Clark, Robert Hughes and Bryan Robertson were highly contentious and in long term had negative outcomes for Australian artists. Hughes and Robertson incensed Bernard Smith, by promoting the abstract expressionists as the leaders of an intuitive and metaphysical Australian modernism that was produced in total isolation from the traditions of European culture and, most significantly, from direct contact with the international origins of abstract expressionism. Angered by the catalogue's 'Myth of Isolation' and its attack on his Antipodean ideal, Smith launched a counter-attack positioning Sydney and its abstractionists as a major threat to Australian art. Even the NSW CAS came under attack, as Smith argued that its avant-garde 'tradition of the new' encouraged young artists to neglect their own artistic traditions, for the provincial pursuit of international art trends. As Lynn predicted, the danger of the Whitechapel and its rhetoric was that it reduced art to the issues of geography, sociology and national identity.

Part I

The 1961 Blake Prize: The Victory of Abstract Expressionism

Neo dada

The NSW CAS responded to the Antipodean Manifesto by reaffirming its commitment to the politics of the avant-garde. It turned to strategy of satire and ridicule, with Lynn exploiting the current revival of dadaism to highlight the silliness of the Manifesto's claims. Lampooning the Manifesto's dogmatic tone, he wrote:

> There is a spectre haunting Europe; it is the spectre of dadaism. Dead, said the Melbourne Manifesto, as the dodo, but like an Ionesco corpse it grows, it spreads.

> Gertrude Von Swartzfeld in her "The New Paris; It All Began With Dada", declares that the irrational, the unpredictable in contemporary abstraction and in Beckett and Ionesco spring fully armed from dada which was not so much a movement, as a styleless spirit of satire and fantasy opposed to the orthodox, the smooth, the art that looks like repeated exercises.

For Sydney, he explained, the issue at stake was not of the stylistic conflict between figuration and non-figuration, but the role of true art which, as the dadaists had illustrated with their attacks on the culture of reason, was 'to shock' and imply 'the bankruptcy of traditional modes'. Lynn asserted progressive abstraction was by nature oppositional; its intention was not ease of communication but to show, like the dadaists and the dramatist Ionesco 'that the clearly articulated is not always aesthetically expressive; that ... there are meanings other than those conveyed by recognisable images and grammatically impeccable sentences.' As the neo-dadaists from Dusseldorf to Denver were proving, a new metaphorical language was emerging from the avant-garde's experimentation with collage and non-conventional materials in which 'discarded things', - bags, burnt wood, cluttered iron - became earnestly 'redolent of the whole of the decay of the past and of the impending decay of the present'. Not only was dada alive and well, its irrational and irreverent spirit was the spearhead of the next phase in abstract expressionism; that is of the next manifestation of the avant-garde's struggle against the establishment's use of art to support its social order.[2]

In a bid to publicly restate the NSW CAS's commitment to the tradition of the avant-garde, John Coburn, Oscar Edwards, Roy Fluke, Elwyn Lynn, John Ogburn and Henry Salkauskas joined together to parody the Antipodeans with a satirical exhibition at the Terry Clune Gallery in October 1959. Titled 'Muffled Drums' their exhibition opened amid dadaist chaos as the jazz musician Graeme Bell welcomed the crowds with a drum roll and Prof. Smurd Delffum (Lynn) delivered a nonsense speech. Meanwhile, East Sydney Technical College students wearing red dots on their foreheads blew whistles, and added to the general mayhem of the performance. The art works displayed attacked not only the art critics and their heroes, but also the heroes of mass culture including Billy Graham and The

Average Australian. Not withstanding the frivolity, the intention as Lynn explained to Bernard Smith was to hold the idols of the market-place up to ridicule, and to stimulate thought about the image and the changes that had occurred over the last ten to fifteen years. The exhibition succeeded as a public spectacle, generating controversy and attracting excellent TV and newspaper coverage; however, the art establishment's response was hostile.

Resistant to disturbing the buoyant market, Sydney's art critics unanimously dismissed 'Muffled Drums' as a misguided and destructive exercise in schoolboy humour which they, and many in the art community including Hal Missingham and Tom Gleghorn, feared would lower the standing of the artist.[3] None of the Sydney critics read the exhibition as an attack on the Antipodean Manifesto nor seriously considered the implications of the satirical attacks on mass culture and the use of the irrational to attack establishment's values and the gullibility of the masses. The response was one of conservative puzzlement as Robert Hughes questioned why audiences should be expected to respond seriously to such antics, to think them funny, when dada had been dead for forty years.[4] And given that dada was dead, the question the critics asked in unison was 'Why revisit old battles?'[5]

The exhibition's intention was just that however – to remind all on the eve of the CAS's Twenty-First Annual Interstate CAS Exhibition that the struggle of the avant-garde was on-going.[6] While the NSW CAS 'had reached adult status with the leading art societies' its unique status still rested on its oppositional positioning and promotion of the young and unknown, not on the promotion of established artists. The catalogue of the exhibition stated that it was the responsibility of the mid-career artists on the CAS committee (Weaver Hawkins, Nancy Borlase, Sheila McDonald, Mary Rooney, Leonard Hessing, John Coburn, Roy Fluke, John Ogburn, Elwyn Lynn, Henry Salkauskas and Max Feuerring) to promote the next wave of the new and keep the practice of contemporary art vibrant and shocking. As the 'Muffled Drums' performance illustrated, this involved the use of the irrational and the absurd as a new strategy to subvert the conservativeness of the cultural establishment.

Sydney artists were attracted to the anti-art statements of Art Brut, Cobra and Dubuffet which they admired for their attacks on the School of Paris establishment's ideal of taste and decorum. The use of the outsiderism of madness, dreams, irrationality and primitivism was a strategy of the European modernist avant-garde, and according to Bill Ashcroft it was also a strategy which the colonial cultures used to establish their difference.[7] John Olsen provided a good illustration of colonial use of primitivism when he told Virginia Spate that he rejoiced in the 'vulgarity' of the Australian character' elaborating:

> It has enormous vitality. Sometimes I put in a loutish head, sneering and snarling. One has to be prepared to be a bit corny; I don't like international painting – the slick sort of abstraction that one sees a surfeit of in Europe. The power of Australian society is this vulgarity ... It is a pretty bitter pill to take, but if you miss it you miss a lot.[8]

As the provincial debate took hold in the 1960s, the irrational and primitive was increasingly referred to as an identifiable characteristic of Australia's radical art practice by artists (Annandale Imitation Realists), critics (Robert Hughes) and historians (Virginia Spate). Its use by artists was clearly meant as a critique of Australia's cultural establishment and consequently it was also a critique of the mother culture. The manner in which Australian artists used the irrational and ideas of cultural alienation as a differentiating strategy to establish their opposition to the centre has yet to be explored by historians. Pierre Schneider writing in Art News in 1957 made an interesting connection between provincialism and the avant-garde which bears consideration. Arguing that provincialism 'might ... be defined as being dated in space or outplaced in time', he noted that 'Such anachronism and 'anatopism' often causes the shock of alienation. Hence, one may describe surrealism, which so assiduously cultivates this shock, as a kind of deliberate provincialism.' Further, Schneider suggested provincialism, with its tendency to outsiderism and hostility to the centre, involved a natural inclination towards avant-gardism.[9] The irrational, outsiderism, deliberate provincialism, international avant-gardism and national differences interweave and blur in Australia's education of contemporary art and thus care must be taken not to simplify or over-rationalise the tensions in an art scene

that was much more complex than the binary of Melbourne figuration and Sydney non-figuration suggests. Clearly the Antipodean affair triggered tensions within Australian art discourse about the relationship of contemporary art with the centres of modernism. As Bernard Smith envisaged an Australian-assisted return to the art of reason, Lynn and his fellow abstractionists turned to the irrational and non-visible as a strategy to fracture, if not destroy, the rational order of the West. They believed that the tradition of the international avant-garde offered a way out of the imperial paradigms and the opportunity to create a new visual order, which transcended issues of nationalism and the power of the centre.[10]

The promotion of an Australian school of painting was strengthening just as the Sydney abstractionists art was being accepted and praised on the international circuit as evidence of the success of abstraction as a new universal and democratic language. As their art received exposure in America, Europe and England, international critics commented that their work gave every indication that an international style was taking root in the new modern societies.[11] One English reviewer wrote that devoid of any 'Australian accent' the work of the Australian abstract painters suggested to the world 'that modern abstract art [offered] the most truly international idiom in the history of world art.'[12] Clearly influenced by its Western ancestry, Australian art, he explained, also showed signs that 'a new sensibility' was evolving, but whether this would develop into a national school style was hard to define. He concluded that whatever the outcome, 'These painters remain individuals, not Australian artists'. Their work was irrefutable evidence 'that young multi-racial countries like Australia' were stimulating environments for artists.[13]

The Blake Prize

It was the 1961 Blake Prize for Religious Art that proved to be Sydney's final testing ground for the validity of abstract art and the principle of artistic freedom. The controversy surrounding the Blake Prize had been growing since 1956 when Fathers Kenny and Scott took the debate about what constituted religious art into the public arena, arguing that as its intention was to 'help people to pray better and teach them to be religious' it had a

responsibility to be intelligible.[14] Kenny, who was the main agitator of the debate, ran an unrelenting campaign in intellectual journals and the popular media which came to a climax in the months preceding the 1961 exhibition.[15] Constantly in the spotlight, Kenny argued that church art needed to be revitalised to meet the demands of the modern day. The mass-produced objects of piety were to be condemned and with them representational art which at its worst produced 'chocolate box' imagery and 'the most mawkish of our Christmas cards.'[16] He asserted that representational art could no longer 'bear the brunt of conveying the mysteries of Christianity'. As the Church was embracing modern architecture it needed to embrace modern art and abstraction which, with its mastery of decoration, colour and pattern, was ideally suited for the stained glass windows which were a feature of this new architecture.[17] A supporter of abstraction, Kenny took care to emphasise that he did not 'advocate abstract art to the exclusion of all human elements'. Rather he advocated 'an intellectual art' which was 'symbolic, semi-abstract' and capable of portraying 'religion with great majesty.'[18] Semi-abstract, symbolic art was ideal for religious art because it 'deliberately blurred details ... in the interest of [the] deeper target'; that is, the Christian ideal or principle. The function of religious art was 'to be a symbol of faith' and an intellectual art was one that communicated the mysteries of this faith in an intelligible manner.[19]

The important issue for all concerned was who should define what was 'intelligible' and 'intellectual'. For Kenny and Scott it was a matter of theology, and accordingly it was the clergy on the Blake Prize committee who should have the authority to remove paintings that were too obscure or lacking 'basic intelligibility'. Artists, Scott implied in his ABC talk 'Plain Christianity: Faith and Art' were unreliable, as their continual production of unintelligible art evidenced. Their failure to communicate, he argued, resulted from the fact that 'they did not know or did not care'. They lacked the necessary vision of faith and cloaked 'their poverty of mind under a show of technical brilliance.'[20] Why, then, it must be asked did the Blake Prize, as John Ogburn phrased it 'provoke so much attention and interest for painters? Why did they ask 'Can religious – devotional art be abstract or

personal?' and question whether an atheist could paint a religious image? Why, given the strong campaign of opposition to genuine abstraction, did Stanislaus Rapotec's Meditating on Good Friday, 'a pure piece of abstract expressionism' that 'eschewed all conventional symbolism', win the 1961 Blake Prize?[21]

Faith and secular humanism

Father Kenny's stance was diametrically opposed to that of the founders of the Blake Prize who had greater faith in the integrity of the artist's search for 'Ultimate Truth' and were willing to believe in the 'implicitly' religious nature of any art that expressed an honest search for the ultimate meaning in the midst of life's concerns. That one of the founders, Father Michael Scott, should become dogmatic and sectarian and join forces with Kenny was indicative of the Cold War climate which saw the increasing infiltration of right-wing conservatism and religion into politics and culture. As Pringle made clear by devoting an entire chapter of Australian Accent to B.A. Santamaria and the Democratic Labor Party, the nature of religion and its place in the Australian society was a contentious issue in the late 1950s, as anti-communist factions within the Roman Catholic Church organised themselves to become actively involved in the shaping of Australian society.[22] The sectarianism that resulted brought tension and a great deal of anti-Catholic feeling.

Catholic intellectuals, in particular James McAuley and Vincent Buckley, were important in shaping the end-of-ideology debate about the nature of Australian culture.[23] They believed that poetry and art were essential to the expression of the metaphysical experience which, they held, was the key to the development of a mature, secular humanist culture. In attacking the radical nationalist tradition for its naivete, Buckley argued that Australia had an alternative metaphysical tradition and, an evolutionary vitalism which formed the core of a deeply rooted spirituality. However, this metaphysical heritage included the aesthetic vitalism of Norman Lindsay with its Nietzschean conception of the artist as superman and this, Buckley argued in 'Utopianism and Vitalism', was anti-spiritual and anti-human. It focused on the subjective at the expense of the objective world and thus was pagan. The

formation of an adult culture required the fusion of the best of Australia's vitalist tradition with Western humanism's Christian respect for man and the human condition.[24]

As the debate about the spiritual in Australian culture gained momentum, it presented Sydney abstractionists with a new challenge in that the metaphysical was being re-defined in terms of the Christian philosophical and religious tradition and the artist was expected to submit to this order.[25] Kenny and Scott sought to make this expectation a condition of the Blake Prize by bringing the Catholic definition of religion to the fore while constantly attacking the failings of abstract work in the Blake Prize exhibitions. Religion for them meant Christianity and this, Kenny emphasised, was 'not a religion of vague pantheism or nebulous emotionalism.' Its world was objective and pivoted around historical persons and events. Its messages and its truths were clear-cut, even when they were sublime to the point of mystery.[26] Thus, Kenny argued 'authentically' Christian art manifested a predilection for symbolism and the semi-abstract style was ideally suited for this purpose.[27]

Unwilling to be dictated to, the artists singled out the Catholic Church for attack. Ron Russell used the NSW Broadsheet to accuse members of the Blake Prize committee and the public of approaching 'art with a deadly mixture of authority and ignorance'. He contended that no matter how well-educated and intelligent people like Kenny and Scott were, they could not simply 'take up' art for a few years and then pronounce far-reaching edicts.[28] The Blake Prize committee of laypersons and clerics had neither the authority, precedent nor knowledge to instruct a painter on what or what not to paint. The problem, William Hannon wrote in the Observer, was that 'Learned men, and especially clerics, often display an unsettling tendency to believe that the world runs on principles' thus the principles which Kenny was seeking to impose on art were those of the Catholic Church.[29] Kenny and his supporters might dream of a return to the golden days of the Church, however, this was unlikely to happen in Australia where 'For the last two centuries at least the best artists of the country have had nothing to do with the Church, nor the Church with them.'

Hannon asserted that the Catholic Church's claim to authority in matters of art needed to be contested given that little contemporary art, let alone art of any kind, was to found in local churches. What was to be encountered was an abundance of 'mass-produced sentimental rubbish'. The Catholic Church in fact had an appalling record of arts patronage and Kenny's claim that it supported progressive art was without substance. The truth, Hannon stressed was that the Church had little genuine respect for modern art. It did not appear to occur to its dogmatic mind 'That an artist could solve the problem of what and how to paint or build', nor that 'When a new work is needed only an artist will be able to create it.' Instead it fostered a situation in which 'The priests choose the architects and painters, mostly it seems on their record as Catholics, and everything needs some sort of doctrinal imprimatur.' In seeking to impose theological strictures on abstract art, Kenny, Hannon warned, was seeking to control artists in the same way that the clergy of the Catholic Church sought to control its laymen.[30] In the final instance, therefore, the problem was not the validity of abstract art but the attempt to impose a restrictive religious ideology on artistic practice and force artists to serve the common good. For Sydney artists, Catholic or otherwise, these attempts to insist that art serve society and its institutions could only be read as an attack on the ideology of contemporary art and the principle of artistic autonomy.[31]

The effect of the Kenny and Scott campaign in the lead-up to the 1961 Blake Prize was that more artists than ever before submitted work with non-referential subject matter.[32] When the jury, which included Tony Tuckson and Lloyd Rees, unanimously awarded the Prize to Stanislaus Rapotec's Meditating on Good Friday the decision excited 'strong emotions'.[33] Kenny resigned from the Blake committee. Scott publicly condemned the award to a work that had 'no symbolism and no content' and the committee moved to further tighten the conditions of entry.[34] The critics, however, were elated praising Rapotec's 'black-lined abstraction' for the power of 'its big brush blows of paint' and its 'massive energetic conflict.'[35] As Wallace Thornton put it, the huge triptych (15 feet long) may not have been symbolic to the viewer but it was powerfully impressive in its roughly dynamic impact.[36] For

George Berger in the Observer, Rapotec's Prize was a victory for formalism and the artist's struggle to find the ultimate truth. Rapotec's Meditating, he explained, was:

> the crowning effort in his series of "Via Crucis" and "Tensions," a gigantic struggle towards the light of redemption, which has predominantly occupied him since 1956. It is painted in a grandiose manner and has the hallmarks of a masterpiece, carrying conviction in the poignancy of its message and feeling, in its order, form and technique. In Rapotec, Sydney has an artist of international stature who now has found recognition at home... [37]

Rapotec's Via Crucis series was well known and much admired in the art world, and given that it had been constantly attacked by the opponents of abstraction as the epitome of all that was wrong with modern art, Rapotec's win was particularly significant. As Berger implied, it was a victory not only for the integrity of the artist but also for Sydney's ideal of art as the pursuit of the metaphysical and higher realms.

Sydney's 'school' of abstract expressionism

With the validity of abstract expressionism irrevocably established, the Sydney art scene took on a fresh element of confident assertiveness. There was a consensus that Australia had reached a level of cultural maturity that could sustain two schools of painting, and it was hoped that a lively and creative rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne would be generated. Telling his 'Tale of Two Cities' in the Observer in March 1961, William Hannon explained that the Australian art scene was divided between the two cities with the distance between them contributing to the growth, not only of different stylistic schools, but also of different art markets. In Sydney 'the best received painters were convinced abstractionists like Olsen, Upward and Rapotec' who did:

> not necessarily exclude images from their work, ... images appear largely as simple formal elements in the painting, interesting in themselves visually but not intended to communicate connected ideas or stand as symbols.

On the other hand in Melbourne, images were 'avowedly intended to represent or create Australian "myths" or a local style.' However, he stressed, at this stage in neither city was there a dominating figure, nor coherent group spokesmen. Within the abstract style

Sydney painters varied enormously and the same, Hannon thought, could be said of 'the self-styled Antipodeans.[38]

To exploit the benefits of Rapotec's Blake Prize success and trump the Antipodeans' claims, Sydney art needed a mature group of abstract expressionists who could direct a counter attack on Melbourne and claim the leadership of contemporary art for Sydney. Stanislaus Rapotec was a long-standing member of the community of artists who lived and had studios in the Victoria Street area of King's Cross.[39] Within this community there was a grouping of abstractionists including Olsen, Hessing, Rose, Plate and the recent addition to the ranks of abstraction, Robert Hughes. Hughes' career as an artist was taking off, having being highly praised by the critics for his contribution to the 1961 Blake Prize. George Berger described Hughes' 'The Moment Christ Died' as 'an image of great suffering and commiseration, painted with deep feeling and sincerity', while Wallace Thornton praised him for being one of the few 'to plunge into the romanticism of painting'.[40]

A disparate group, the Victoria Street abstractionists shared an enthusiasm for linear abstraction and the direct and spontaneous use of gesture and automatism to express the unconscious and subjective experience. There was a strong sense of comradeship between them which was given extra edge when Olsen returned from overseas and Upward and Meadmore joined them from Melbourne. Rapotec's win was something of a victory for their variation of abstraction and to take advantage of this, they formed the 'Sydney Nine' group of Olsen, Plate, Hessing, Rose, Smith, Gilliland, Upward, Meadmore and Rapotec, organising two exhibitions; one for David Jones Gallery in July 1961 and the other for Melbourne's Gallery A in September 1961.

The Gallery A catalogue was distinguished by its introduction by Virginia Spate, a young Fine Arts post-graduate student from Melbourne University. To seek endorsement and support from academia in this manner was a new development, which reflected the changes occurring in art's infrastructure and the effect of the increasing intellectualism on art practice and promotion. In elegant and suitably romantic prose, Spate stated that the

validity of abstract art was no longer of central importance in Sydney. Now the central issue was 'the establishment of criteria within the movement itself' and this was beginning to develop as 'Sydney Nine' led a move away from objective abstraction to an interest in 'the artist's feeling for the subjective content, the communicable meaning of his conscious and instinctual formal experience.' Equally important, Spate stressed, was the group's challenge to the fashionable abstraction which obscured 'the real significance of an art form whose very meaning lies in the sense of urgency of the individual adventure-to-form.'[41]

The 'Sydney Nine' exhibitions were skilfully orchestrated to achieve the maximum publicity and controversy and were so successful that they have become landmarks in the history of abstract expressionism in Australia. The success of 'Sydney Nine' was greatly assisted by the fact that three of its members had been part of 'Direction 1' and that their supporters exploited this to great effect to suggest an ideological cohesiveness.[42] Both Hughes and Thornton used it to argue that 'Sydney Nine' was evidence of an emerging national school of abstraction which Thornton claimed brought 'Australia's past lyricism and romanticism' into flower as a local form of abstraction.[43] Hughes, with his theatrical sense of the moment, romanticised that as 'Direction 1' heralded the birth of a local tradition of non-figurative art, so 'Sydney Nine' marked 'the advance to adolescence' and corrected 'the illusion that abstract painters here lack what the figurative ones already possess – a common ground of image, myth and sign.'[44]

The success of 'Sydney Nine' saw gestural abstraction established as the preferred style in Sydney and the affirmation by the critics (Thornton, Gleeson, Hughes) of Sydney's romantic tradition. It also saw the marginalisation of other forms of abstraction, including the anti-establishment texture abstraction of, Sheila McDonald, Oscar Edwards Max Feuerring, Tom Gleghorn, Don Watson and Elwyn Lynn, who were the strong force of the NSW CAS.[45] In seeking to shape themselves into a 'school' the Victoria Street group signalled a shift of focus away from Europe to American abstract expressionism. That they were promoted as a bohemian group working and living hard in the heart of the metropolis encouraged comparisons with the New York School, which were further supported by their

use of gestural, linear and calligraphic abstraction. Lynn also encouraged this perception in his Meanjin essay 'Avant Garde Painting in Sydney', in which he drew attention to the similarities between Olsen and Pollock and stated that Peter Upward was closer to the Kline and de Kooning school than any other Australian.[46] At last Australia had an abstract expressionist group which appeared to be avant-garde because its work displayed parallels and allegiances to American abstract expressionism. The tide was turning; Sydney artists were increasingly looking towards America as the centre of modernism. Thus, the goal of the NSW CAS had been finally achieved; abstract expressionism was established as a movement in itself with it own mainstream, splinter groups and avant-garde tradition. Furthermore, Sydney art was now securely international in orientation. The question that faced the NSW CAS was whether or not it had outlived its purpose.

Part II

The Whitechapel Exhibition: Australian Contemporary Paintings makes 'the Grade'

Opening the 25th anniversary exhibition of the Contemporary Art Society at Farmers Blaxland Gallery on October 23, 1963, Dr Bernard Smith set a polemical tone by suggesting that the CAS's days as an avant-garde force were over. The fact of the matter, he told the audience:

> is surely that the CAS has, to a very large extent, won the battle it was created to fight. The Australian Academy is long since dead, the academic is most unfashionable, art having no other aim than representation is out.[47]

The past 25 years had seen a fundamental change in the international and Australian art scene in which 'the art-loving, art-buying public' and artists, convinced by the argument of modernism, had become committed to 'innovation' and 'contemporaneity.' Today, critics, dealers and galleries, he reported, accept any signs of innovation as soon as they appear and the establishment had come to accept contemporaneity as a principle. One of the cardinal facts of the art situation was the virtual disappearance of an avant-garde. As the principles of the avant-garde, 'of innovation, of contemporaneity and of permanent

revolution in the arts, had shifted from a few pioneers to society as a whole', the destiny of the CAS would be like that of New York's MOMA: it would become a part, albeit important, of the artistic establishment it originally set out to challenge.[48]

Smith argued that while change was fundamental to the arts, the cycle of change had accelerated to such a speed that it had become a situation of innovation for the sake of change and the pursuit of, what Harold Rosenberg termed, a 'tradition of the new'. The challenge facing the CAS was whether it would continue to be driven by the pursuit of the new or would it recognise that it was time to consolidate and support the growth of a metropolitan art. A metropolitan art, he explained, was distinct from provincial art because it delved inwards as well as outwards and had respect for its own past. It did not devour its children and destroy its founders in the pursuit of the new. The question, therefore, was could the CAS 'accept ... resistance to innovation as natural to an organic development' of a necessary tradition or would it turn on its members who advocated consolidation and describe them as 'reactionaries and conservatives?'[49]

Smith's observations about the changing status of the CAS and contemporary art were timely. Contemporary art it was experiencing a high degree of acceptance both at home and abroad what was evidenced by the 'phenomenal' and 'overwhelming' success of the Whitechapel exhibition of 'Recent Australian Painting', which opened in London in June 1961.[50] A block buster show of 110 abstract and figurative works, the Whitechapel exhibition drew effusive praise from the British press with Terence Mullaly of the London Daily Telegraph describing it as 'the most stimulating and rewarding show of contemporary painting we have seen in London in recent months'. Australian artists, he enthused, 'had a directness of approach, coupled with a degree of integrity, that makes the painting we see in London look wearily academic, or, even worse, like the facile pursuit of the latest craze'.[51] The Daily Mail's Pierre Jeannerat agreed: Australian art had made 'the Grade' and 'definitely arrived as a national school and not a rehash of European and American pictorial achievements.'[52] Congratulating their countryman Sir Kenneth Clark for being 'the first person to suggest that Australia might be the birthplace of the next notable school of

painting', the British press unanimously praised the painting for being 'something new', and different' and 'surprising'.[53]

The Whitechapel exhibition was 'a landmark in the history of Australian painting' because, as Smith phrased it, 'For the first time Australian art ... found a large receptive audience outside its own country.'[54] More significant, however, was the official sanction that the exhibition and its London reception gave to Australia's artistic maturity and to its status as a newly independent nation.[55] Bryan Robertson observed that the exhibition created the impression that Australia was on the way to becoming 'truly cultured'. Australian 'philistine hostility to art' was on the wane and this was evident not only in the art but also in a new cultural attitude. The new art, he explained, was a product of an enlightened private and public patronage system and because of this 'The value of art as a cultural property [was being] recognised if not yet widely enjoyed'.[56]

The national and international popularity of contemporary art might have lead Bernard Smith to argue that the battle for modern art had been won. Elwyn Lynn and the NSW CAS were less inclined to agree. The current art boom had brought the acceptance of contemporary art but it also had brought new challenges, not the least of which was the threat to the existence of the NSW CAS as its members demanded it become a professional group and compete with the art prizes and commercial galleries.[57] In a bid to stave off redundancy, the NSW CAS had entered the establishment art game of offering annual prizes to attract quality entries and the young. Accordingly its 'coup for 1962' was to secure the patronage of the industrialist Roy H. Taffs for a £500 prize for the annual exhibition and an annual competition for Fabric Design.[58] They also instigated the Young Painters exhibition in 1963, again offering monetary prizes to attract entries.[59] Lynn reported in the NSW Broadsheet that the extravagance of the art market and high prices being paid for work of the young and relatively inexperienced was creating an inflated situation, where price tag rather than merit set the value of art. In what was now a dealer's world, a wave of indiscriminate exhibitions was engulfing exhibitions of real merit and any real sense of artistic standards was being lost. As for avant-garde art, this capitalist

machine was absorbing any new developments in this direction with a readiness that neutralised them.[60]

According to Lynn, the challenge facing the NSW CAS was to maintain the standards of advanced art in a world dedicated to sales rather than critical inquiry. The purpose of the CAS Society in these changed circumstances, he stated, was not only to oppose 'all that is academic, reactionary and merely ritualistic' but also to educate and influence opinion and 'sharpen discrimination' against the mediocrity which was a feature of the current fashion for art.[61] The task ahead was to educate the public to standards in art and combat the forces of conservatism that wished to stifle change.[62] One of the biggest problems facing the NSW CAS, however, was the trend in art publishing and criticism to convert art into 'an illustration of history and national identity'.[63] The plethora of new publications focusing on the notion of a national school of painting as exemplified by Melbourne figuration had the potential, particularly given the influence of Bernard Smith in this area, to damage the reputation of abstraction and it future progress.[64]

The CAS decision to have Smith open the anniversary exhibition was obviously intended to create controversy and even re-invigorate the NSW CAS's commitment to avant-gardism. Since the Antipodean Manifesto, Smith had been conducting a vitriolic public campaign against Sydney art and abstract expressionism which he incorporated into his Australian Painting 1788-1960 published in 1962.[65] Australian Painting was praised by critics for setting 'the story of art in Australia ... on a *national* stage' by telling the story of the struggle to create a national tradition of painting out of the experiences of the people and the land.[66] It was, however, also criticised for its final chapters, 'Rebirth 1939-50,' and 'Figurative and Non-Figurative 1950-1960', which privileged the Melbourne figurative school and attacked Sydney's abstraction expressionism as an exclusive doctrine whose champions behaved like a totalitarian regime intent on destroying Australia's artistic independence.[67] Smith's campaign for an Australian school of figuration had been attracting a great deal of attention and helped to feed the provincialism and isolationist debate which Robert Hughes and the 'new right' were also promoting in their efforts to reshape Australia's cultural identity in a

more critical manner.[68] Smith's sympathies were with socialism and the radical nationalist tradition therefore his ideals conflicted with those of the 'new right'. He found his main opponent in Hughes who had risen to such prominence on the strength of his involvement in the Whitechapel exhibition, that he had been commissioned to write the Penguin alternative to Smith's scholarly history of Australian art.[69]

'The Myth of Isolation'

A major feature of the Whitechapel exhibition was its claim to represent a 'fresh' Australian 'cultural identity'.[70] The catalogue included three opinion-forming essays by Sir Kenneth Clark, Bryan Robertson and Robert Hughes which played with the theme of geographical and cultural isolation to explain the uniqueness of Australian art in a manner that conflicted with Smith's grand vision.[71] Like Smith they argued that Australian artists, isolated and alienated from the effects of the decadence and decline of European culture, had developed a healthy irreverence for authority and passion for expressing their struggle to bond with their land and that this gave their art its uniqueness. However, where Smith's vision involved the revitalisation of the Renaissance tradition, the Whitechapel vision involved its rejection in favour of a future dedicated to the progress of modernism and abstraction.

Robertson had not consulted Smith when he visited Australia to organise the Whitechapel show and asked Hughes to make the Australian contribution to the catalogue.[72] Using a rhetoric echoed Pringle's Australian Accent, Hughes portrayed Australia as culturally isolated with a national character which, born of the struggle with the land, was essentially philistine when it came to matters of the mind and the arts.[73] While the isolation might have had the advantage of offering a tabula rasa, the lack of contact with significant works of arts, Renaissance and modern before 1939, had 'distorted the perspectives of overseas art and rendered intelligent discussion of cultural values difficult. It [had] narrowed experience and minds.'[74] Totally isolated from the centre of culture, Australian art was inherently provincial consisting of half-assimilated and misunderstood overseas influences combined

with plagiarism. However, without the oppressive weight of tradition to burden it, Australian art was also characterised by an exhilarating sense of starting from scratch, and this fostered a 'Crusoe mentality' amongst its artists.[75] It was an art of the future with the establishment of its traditions still before it.

According to Hughes, therefore, the strength of the contemporary Australian art was not to be found in the mastery of style and technique. It lay in the artists' individualism; in their autonomous view of their role; their integrity of vision and dedication to the 'other' image that emerged naturally from the environment rather than from the social and stylistic platform recommended by Smith and his Antipodeans. If a distinct tradition were to emerge it would not be from Smith's sterile program of 'Australianism' with its 'myths, heroes and whiteman's folklore'.[76] It would grow independently and intuitively as 'a matter of vision, attitude, belief', and the artists leading in this direction were those concerned with the 'other' conception of image. For these artists, including Rapotec, Olsen and Plate, Hughes explained:

> The image does not result directly from the imposition on a lump of raw experience. The painter initially adopts a passive role. He stands in the landscape; lets it permeate his being; it flows through him until it has become one of his natural extensions ... Having absorbed, he directs and channels; and the motions of his hand are the rhythms of the earth. This produces a *total* image, in which seer and seen are inextricably fused ... the result is a pure distillation of a particular time and place.[77]

The 'something entirely fresh' which Kenneth Clark predicted Australia could bring to contemporary art, Hughes asserted, was its outward vision; its peculiar perception of universal which was encapsulated in the 'acute awareness of the dark side of experience [that] runs like a thread through the intuitions of Australian painters'.[78] Contrary to Smith's vision, it was not the creation of a national style that would ensure Australia's rise to cultural maturity, it was the artists' highly developed sensibilities which enabled them to transcend nation and place, and create an art that was 'a hymn to the tender indifference of

the universe'. Hughes elaborated that there was a heroic, even unique, quality about Australian artists because it was:

> not easy to be a painter here and believe that man is the measure of all things. This being so, painting ceases to be a "cultural activity". It is exorcism, a ritual in the dark. A unique art may emerge. Perhaps it must, circumstance and talents being as they are. But that is not really important. What matters is the purity of the intention, the integrity of the vision.
>
> In that sense, we are all painters before we are Australians.[79]

Bryan Robertson agreed with Hughes that the primary concern of Australian contemporary art was metaphysical abstraction, and he sought to link this with the growth of a new world culture which, in its 'otherness' and pursuit of the subjective experience, had parallels with American abstract expressionism.[80] He argued that Australian art was characterised by a primitivism that rejected Western sophistication and was centred on the psyche; on instinctual, primal, unsublimated creativity. Australian contemporary art, Robertson suggested, was by nature modernist, as its artists alienated, not just from their own society but from Western culture in general, were a natural manifestation of the romantic ideal of the artist as outsider. Culturally isolated the Australian artist used art as a vehicle for independent and uninhibited self-expression; as the subjective search for the universal in a manner similar to Jackson Pollock.[81] Implicit in Robertson and Hughes' appropriation of primitivism to define the alienation of Australian artists, was the bold suggestion that they had the potential to form an avant-garde and produce an art form that was totally original like Pollock and the New York School had done before them. The challenge facing Australian artists, Hughes suggested, was whether they could inject new energy into world art by producing 'a national "School of Australia", which was as immediately recognizable as the *ecole de Paris* or New York abstract expressionism?'[82]

For Bernard Smith, the Whitechapel catalogue was an attack on all he believed was right for Australian art. Incensed, he used the Macrossan lectures in August 1961 to launch a scathing counter-attack.[83] 'The Myth of Isolation' as he termed Robertson and Hughes' isolationist rhetoric was a manifestation of the modernist obsession with primitivism.

Arguing that the myth effectively colonised Australian art by presenting it as the exotic production of noble savages, Smith set up a counter myth of 'isolationalism' which privileged the theme of the rebirth of the Renaissance tradition and civilisation and marginalised abstraction as a threat to the progress of civilisation. In his myth, a remote and conservative Australia was by-passed by the full effects of the modern movement. Australian artists, who were by nature conservative, isolated themselves from modernism clinging to the traditional categories of landscape, figures and portraiture which were eminently suited to expressing the experiences of an evolving nation. It was in these categories that the traditions of Australian painting were established and that its most significant achievements were realised during the 1940s and 1950s. As the success of William Dobell, Russell Drysdale, Arthur Boyd and Sidney Nolan indicated, Australia provided a situation in which these categories could still evoke highly creative art. It was the blend of innovation and tradition which characterised Australian contemporary artists' handling of these categories that was responsible for the vitality that the London critics so widely applauded.[84] Thus Smith argued - rather than being isolated from the Renaissance tradition, Australian art testified to its survival.

In his second lecture, 'The Rebirth of Australian Painting', Smith went on to identify Sydney abstract expressionism with American abstract expressionism and position it as the threat to Australian cultural progress.[85] He argued that Australian artists were incapable of creating an indigenous abstract tradition having only had superficial contact with modernism. Sydney's production of abstraction was essentially provincial because, it lacked the rigour and leadership that characterised Melbourne art and which was necessary if there was to be a challenge to authority in matters of taste and art. Melbourne figuration displayed a deep concern for life, whereas Sydney abstraction was characterised by a pure love of pattern and design and a distinct strain of art for art's sake, aestheticism.[86] It was not grounded in a depth of human experience but in a superficial knowledge of the centre's style gleaned from inadequate magazine reproductions and, American cultural propaganda.

Smith asserted that it was Sydney's tendency to indiscriminately follow the latest overseas fashion that accounted for the movement overnight conversion to American abstraction expressionism in 1956-57, and for its becoming 'a kind of Juggernaut intent upon destroying every other kind of art in its path'.[87] As Europe's cultural tradition had been destroyed, Australia's was now under threat from the forces of American expansionism and Sydney art's provincial embrace of abstract expressionism. The heroes of Smith's story were the Melbourne Antipodeans whose art presented 'a sharper critical edge to society than the more individualistic and decorative art of Sydney.' They had issued the Antipodean Manifesto because they recognised that the fashionability of abstract expressionism had to be countered or:

> otherwise most of the individuality that has developed in Australian painting during the preceding twenty years would be swamped by the provincial form of American abstraction expressionism ... Sydney was already beginning to look, in terms of art, rather like a south western suburb of San Francisco.[88]

But lamented Smith, setting the battle lines, their efforts had been in vain because such was the popularity of abstraction in Sydney that all its critics 'to a man' attacked any figurative painting from Melbourne most savagely and 'Ideas in art had become the unforgivable sin'.[89]

Primitivism

The Whitechapel exhibition and the ensuing debate were reported extensively in the NSW Broadsheet with Lynn arguing that the exhibition formed a threat to the progress of contemporary art and the production of abstraction. The basis of Lynn's concerns, expressed in the July 1961 issue, was that the catalogue and the British reviewers fostered a picture of Australia as 'an elemental land inhabited by elemental people', While this might appeal to the British, it would have detrimental long terms effects for Australia art.[90] The critics' and commentators' concentration on the geography and sociology of Australia was understandable given that the catalogue's cover 'showed a palisade of Australian gums' and that the themes of myth, landscape and image loomed large in Clark's and Robertson's preambles. However, it was inexcusable that so much attention was given to

'finding Australia' in all art whether figurative or abstract.[91] Would an exhibition from New York or Canada, Lynn asked, 'occasion the spate of remarks on myth, history and geography that followed the Australian exhibition?'[92]

The Whitechapel exhibition was organised by the British for the British, and Lynn argued they were behaving like descendants of Captain Cook, intent on rediscovering Australia to their advantage.[93] The British agenda was evident in the press reviews, including John Nash's in the Yorkshire Post which depicted Australia as an heroic nation emerging from a virtual pre-history situation to save the world. Enjoying the notion of a tabula rasa, he wrote:

> From the beginning, Australian painters culturally isolated in a new land, sought to give themselves a past by the creation of a national myth. The vast continent and its antedeluvian [sic] creatures had an heroic scale which defied the conventional weapons of realism and spontaneously the artists turned to expressive symbolism.[94]

Quite typically, Nash was attracted to Nolan, Drysdale, Arthur Boyd, Pugh and the Antipodean group. The reviews indicated that the appeal of the figurative artists was based on their familiarity: they matched the English myths of what constituted Australia and thus promised a renewal of English culture in a new tribal form as Pringle had predicted in Australian Accent.[95] For many reviewers, Australian painting was characterised by a primitivism in style and content which suggested that it was the art of the lost white tribe. Nash even described Nolan's style as having 'the right blend of savagery and sophistication to match his new, raw, subjects', while his Ned Kelly was 'the Australian outlaw' who strides through the pictures 'in tincan armour, like a fearful witchdoctor.' Australian artists, the rhetoric suggested were frontier heroes whose 'isolation from the hearth of tradition' led them 'into a promethian search for divine fire': a divine fire which had the potential to save Western art if the Australians were 'aware of their tremendous responsibility and ... big enough to shoulder it'.[96]

When criticising the British reviews for being more concerned with Australiana and art as literature rather than painting, Lynn no doubt had in mind the alternative response of the

Americans to the Matson Line exhibition in 1959. While not heaping praise on the Australian works, the American reviewers tried to assess them on their own merits and in relation to what was happening in America and elsewhere.[97] Little discussion was made of geography, myth or national differences, rather the emphasis was one of curiosity and surprise at Australia's grasp of contemporary art and most especially abstraction. Alexander Fried of the San Francisco Examiner, for example wrote:

> What struck me repeatedly is the quality of craftsmanship that pervades the exhibit in all its styles. The painters, modern or conservative, know their business, less surprising is the fact that the modern-minded painters of Austr.[sic] are in intimate touch with the advanced thinkers of European and American Art. Thus Bob Dickerson's Sunday Stroll with its bleakly fugitive, hunger looking family, is a close relation to paintings by the American Ben Shahn. Elwyn Lynn's cottage [sic] with mosquito netting and wood belongs to the weird texture world of the Italian, Balla.[98]

In contrast to the English reviews, where the tone was pessimistic and defensiveness against the advance of internationalism, here the tone was one of welcome aboard the modern world in which individuality and freedom of expression is valued. There was no suggestion that Australia was in any way culturally isolated.

The triumph of the Whitechapel exhibition was celebrated in the Australian press as evidence that Australia had attained a distinctive culture which signified its changed status in international affairs.[99] Its success helped to foster the 'Myth of Isolation' in Australia's art discourse which was something of an anomaly considering the postwar advances in transportation and communication and growth of internationalism. However, it was a myth of strategic importance. While World War II had ensured that Australia's days as a secure outpost were over, the Cold War had accentuated Australian vulnerability by shifting the centre of world conflict from Europe to Asia and so placing Australia under direct threat from the advance of communism. Ironically in an increasingly international world, the paranoid rhetoric of the Cold War fed an abnormal fear of isolation in the West. As the protectionist rhetoric of Quadrant and the Observer indicated, Australia felt particularly at risk. The 'Myth of Isolation' can be viewed as was part of a wide cultural move to mythologise Australian ethnicity and difference and thus secure Australian claims to

ownership of the landmass. The purpose of art within this process of cultural production was as Pringle argued to create the necessary folklore; the unifying cultural myths, heroes and images necessary for cultural consensus. Not surprisingly the central tenet of nationhood myths, the fusion of citizenship with ethnicity and territory, underpinned the rhetoric of the Whitechapel catalogue and Bernard Smith's writings, as it did the majority of the early 1960s publications on recent Australian painting and influential cultural texts, including Robin Boyd's The Australian Ugliness and Peter Coleman's Australian Civilization.

Considered in this light, the rhetoric of the Whitechapel discourse can be linked with Australian and British diplomatic needs to have Australia's strategic status as an emerging Western nation in the Pacific recognised. The problem facing contemporary art in the aftermath of the Whitechapel exhibition as Lynn rightly suggested, was the long-term impact of its regionalist rhetoric on Australian attitudes towards artistic practice, and more specifically towards the production of abstraction. While Robertson and Hughes' tabula rasa and primitivism arguments had worked positively on one level, on another level they had created a damaging image of the intellectual capacity of Australian artists, which discouraged serious consideration of the centrality of intellectual ideas to the production of abstract expressionism. In contrast to the European and American situations where primitivism and outsiderness gave the avant-garde a critical edge, in the Australian case they worked against it; the Australian 'outside' was too distant from the centre of ideas. The majority of the British reviews positioned Australian art outside European artistic traditions aligning it to the ideal of folk – ethnological culture – the creation of folklore being a necessary phase in the development of a nation. Eric Newton positioned Australian art so far outside that it had to be explained in ethnic, rather than artistic, terms. He likened Australia to Mexico and Africa and those societies, which were beginning to emerge from their primitive (non-Western) status into outposts of Western capitalism, and whose art was of ethnological rather than aesthetic interest.[100]

Interpreted in this manner Australian primitivism signified a lack of education and erudition. The Australian artist became a folk artist -- a witchdoctor or noble savage – while the art was folkloric – primitive and childlike – and, like the Australian nation, adolescent, rebellious, full of promise but not yet truly civilised. As an example of T.S. Eliot's 'primitive culture' Australia was yet to develop a genuine 'culture'.[101] It was not yet capable of grasping the high realms of intelligence nor engaging in complexities of abstract thought. Australian artists' engagement in the metaphysical, therefore, was intuitive and primal while Australian abstraction was an intuitive and subjective form of art rather than an intellectually informed, rigorous mode of critical inquiry.

The battle for contemporary art was clearly far from over for the NSW CAS. Not only had the Whitechapel exhibition endorsed the 'new right's' revival of the romantic ideal of the artist and subjective creativity, it had also marginalised the production of international abstraction as provincial. How could the abstract expressionists truly international if they were isolated from contact with the world of art and ideas? There was also the problem, of how Sydney abstraction was being positioned within the new histories of contemporary art. Lynn attacked these new histories for being deliberately subversive by privileging 'Direction 1' and 'Sydney Nine' as the vanguard of abstract expressionism.[102] He argued that by concentrating on these two exhibitions, which were primarily self-promotional exercises, the establishment's historians were promoting the idea that abstract expressionism arrived overnight from abroad, rather than acknowledging that Sydney's practice of abstraction had a long history that stretched back to the founding days of the NSW CAS. By ignoring the CAS's promotion of abstraction as an oppositional force, the establishment was effectively stripping abstract expressionism of its critical and radical intent marginalising it, either as subjective self-expression or the provincial pursuit of American abstract expressionism.

Lynn also rightly warned against the influence of the 'important opinion maker', Bernard Smith and his call for the end of the avant-garde.[103] When Smith, delivered his Macrossan lectures on ABC radio, he read the climate well, exploiting Australian anxiety about American culture, and the popularity of the Melbourne figurative tradition, to position

abstraction as a threat to the well-being of Australian culture. By exaggerating Sydney's libertarianism, and playing on the distrust of abstraction that had come to a climax with the 1961 Blake Prize, Smith positined figurative nationalism as the radical mainstream which was under threat from the forces of American imperialism. Smith sounded the right note: the response to the lectures was such that the Queensland University Press rushed them into print, and when the Tate Gallery survey exhibition was organised by the Commonwealth Art Advisory Council it was titled 'Antipodean Vision'. When the exhibition opened in London in January 1963, the English critics were issued with a copy of Smith's Australian Painting.[104]

Conclusion

This study draws to a close with abstract expressionism firmly entrenched as the academy of Sydney art and the NSW CAS securely positioned as a respected oppositional artists' group. The young generation of painters who had taken over the NSW CAS in 1954 were all mature artists with established careers. Once again, it was time for the NSW CAS to direct its energies towards attracting a new generation of young painters to take up the cause of the avant-garde. The Whitechapel exhibition marked the end of the avant-garde practice of abstract expressionism. It also triggered a competition to define the ideological premise for the definitive history of contemporary painting. The key theme of this history, as constructed by Bernard Smith and Robert Hughes, was the artists' struggle to overcome their colonial isolation and create an artistic expression, which was unique and different from that of the Northern Hemisphere. The originality and strength of Australian art, therefore, lay in the new 'ideas' and the fresh insights that the Australian experience brought to the practice of modernism. Within this regionalist vision, Sydney's participation in the international abstract expressionist movement became a sign of a provincial lack of originality and critical nerve. In the long term, the debate, which the Whitechapel exhibition triggered over benefits of cultural isolation on contemporary art production was instrumental in creating the negative theory that Sydney's abstract expressionism was provincial in the extreme and devoid of innovation and ideas. Furthermore, the

Whitechapel exhibition's promotion of the primitive and intuitive nature of Australian abstract art removed any possibility that Sydney's abstract expressionism might be intellectually informed and critical in intent.

1 K. Clark, 'Australian Painting: Whitechapel 1961,' in Recent Australian Painting 1961, Whitechapel Gallery, London, June-July 1961, p. 4.

2 E. Lynn, 'Neo-Dada', NSW Broadsheet, August 1959.

3 Smith Papers. Correspondence from E. Lynn, 20 October, 1959, which gave an account of 'Muffled Drums' and the politics that surrounded it. Beside giving them a bad review, Thornton had 'tackled John Coburn before the show ... for his participation', while 'Hal Missingham condemned it beforehand as a sure-fire way of lowering the status of the artist; Tom Gleghorn agreed and ordered Wallace's pontifications at said party. Designer Andrews [Gordon Andrews] was vehemently opposed, Peter Laverty had gravest doubt ... Jim Gleeson got lost and as we included some serious works he thought we were satirising ourselves! ... and said that it was too late and out of date'.

3 ibid.

4 R. Hughes, 'Art: Dada Without Teeth', Observer, 31 October, 1959.

5 J. Gleeson, 'Muffled Drums at Terry Clune's', Sun, 21 October, 1959; and W. Thornton, 'Muffled Drums at Terry Clune's', SMH, 21 October, 1959.

6 NSW Records. 21st Annual Interstate CAS Exhibition, October 1959, Farmers Blaxland Gallery. The catalogue was designed by Leonard Hessing while the foreword was by Weaver Hawkins. While work was sent from South Australia, nothing was sent from the Melbourne CAS, which held its own exhibition at MOMAA in November; see C. Wallace-Crabbe, 'Art-Safety in Numbers', Observer, 12 December, 1959. This caused tension, with the NSW committee sending a terse letter, 12 January, 1960, to Melbourne saying it would be necessary to exclude them from all exhibitions unless they co-operated and sent pictures next year.

7 Ashcroft, The Empire Writes Back, pp. 149-154; also S. Hiller, (ed.), The Myth of Primitivism, Perspectives on Art, London, Routledge, 1991, for a discussion of modernism's appropriation of primitivism and the imperialist implications; in particular D. Maclagan, 'Outsiders or Insiders?', pp. 32-49, for an excellent analysis of Art Brut's and surrealism's appropriation of outsider art.

8 V. Spate, John Olsen, Melbourne, Georgian House, Australian Art Monographs Series, 1963, p. 12.

9 P. Schneider, 'Art news from Paris', Art News, December 1957, p. 49, refigured the notion of provincialism into a criterion to assess artistic excellence on an international scale while surveying the Parisian year's of exhibitions by international artists.

10 Ashcroft, The Empire Writes Back, p. 153.

[11] For the Australian response see 'Matson Line Exhibition: An Artistic Melange', SMH, 24 September, 1959; 'From Foreign Shores', NSW Broadsheet, January 1960, published extracts of San Francisco reviews of the Matson Line exhibition. It also published an anonymous review of the Australian and Baltic Painters exhibition which praised the exhibition for verifying 'once again how much art is now less regional than it is international.'

[12] Fifteen Australian at Newcastle England, Alan Tompkins, "A new style takes root. How should an Australian paint?" Evening Chronicle, 2 June, 1960, NSW Broadsheet, July 1960. This is a review of the New Vision Centre Exhibition when shown in Newcastle.

[13] ibid.

[14] Father Kenny as paraphrased in, 'Church Art "Must be Revitalised",' SMH, 20 September, 1960.

[15] Father Kenny, Letter to the editor, Observer, 26 November, 1960. Kenny wrote in reply to Hannan's article 'Sunday Artist', Observer, 12 November, 1960, which attacked his views as expressed in Quadrant (Winter 1960), Observer (October 29, 1960) and on the ABC.

[16] 'Modern Art for Religion Urged', SMH, 26 September, 1960, reported Kenny's ABC talk 'Contemporary Religious Art – A Priest's View'.

[17] ibid.; also Father Scott, 'Blake Prize', NSW Broadsheet, May 1959.

[18] 'Church Art "Must be Revitalised",' SMH.

[19] Father Kenny as reported in 'Modern Art for Religion Urged', SMH.

[20] Crumlin, 'An Investigation', p. 75. Scott as quoted from a well-advertised ABC talk, 'Plain Christianity: Faith and Art', 2 February, 1961.

[21] Ogburn, 'Questionnaire'; As described by E. Lynn, 'The Blake Prize for 1962', Meanjin, vol. XXXI, no. 1, 1962, p. 91.

[22] Pringle, 'Santamaria, Santamaria!', Australian Accent, pp. 73-95, 85.

[23] Coleman, Memoirs, pp. 134-138, gives an account of McAuley's anti-communist activities and relates that it was Santamaria who suggested McAuley for editor to Quadrant's founder Richard Krygier; see Kramer, 'Introduction', James McAuley pp. xi-xxx; Buckley, Cutting Green Hay, gives an excellent account of Catholic intellectualism in the Cold War era; Buckley, 'Intellectuals', in P. Coleman, Australian Civilization, pp. 89-104.

[24] V. Buckley, 'Utopianism and Vitalism', as quoted in Docker, A Critical Condition, pp. 101-102.

[25] McAuley, Literature and the Arts, p. 126.

[26] Crumlin, 'An Investigation', p. 72, Father Kenny as quoted from an article in Twentieth Century, Winter 1958, which attacked Rapotec's entry of Via Crucis in the 1959 Blake Prize.

[27] Kenny as quoted by Hannan, 'Sunday Artist', Observer, 12 November, 1960.

[28] R. Russell, 'Poor William', NSW Broadsheet, March 1959.

[29] Hannan, 'Sunday Artist'.

[30] ibid.

[31] For the issue of secular spiritualism see Smith, 'Notes on Abstract Art', in Catalogue of Abstract Art, p. 34; McAuley, Literature and the Arts, p. 131; M. Clark, 'Faith' in Coleman, Australian Civilization, pp. 78-88.

[32] Crumlin, 'An Investigation', p. 75.

[33] Rev. Alan Dougan quoted in 'Blake Religious Prize won by Yugoslav Immigrant.', SMH, 21 February, 1961; G. Berger, 'Capricious Juries', Observer, 4 March, 1961; and Crumlin, The Blake Prize, p. 23, who listed the judging panel as J. Munro (Doctor), J Burnheim (R.C. clergy), R Wakelin (artist), G. Molnar (architect cartoonist);

[34] See Crumlin, 'An Investigation', pp. 77-80, for the impact of the Rapotec's victory on the Blake committee and the future on the Blake Prize; E. Lynn, 'The Blake Prize for 1962', Meanjin, vol. XXI, no. 1, 1962, p. 91. The new conditions for 1962, Lynn argued, meant that artist would not enter. F. Hinder, 'Blake Prize 1961', Meanjin, vol. XX, no. 2, 1961, p. 221, reporting on the aftermath of the Prize commented that Meditating had:

> caused considerable discussion and unfortunately the resignation of at least one member of the committee. The point at issue, probably, was whether or not the painting expressed or communicated a religious idea in terms of symbols which were other than the result of a very personal emotional experience. Obviously the judges thought so ...

[35] W. Thornton, 'Rapotec's Exciting Blake Award', SMH, 22 February, 1961.

[36] ibid.

[37] Berger, 'Capricious Juries'.

[38] W. Hannan, 'A Tale of Two Cities', Observer, 4 March, 1961.

[39] For Victoria Street see J. Coleman, 'Towards Abstract Expressionism', pp. 10-15; Green, 'Abstract Expressionism in Australia', pp. 485-491; Hart, Olsen, pp. 49-51; Heathcote, A Quiet Revolution, pp. 135-139; and E. Lynn, 'Avant-Garde Painting in Sydney', Meanjin, vol. XX, no. 3, 1961, pp. 302-306; Lynn, 'Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Who are the Only Abstractionists of Them All?' NSW Broadsheet, June 1962; and Spate, John Olsen, pp. 8-9; also Thomas, The Most Noble of Them All, for articles on John Olsen, pp. 149-152; Stanislaus Rapotec, pp. 153-157; and William Rose, pp. 159-161, which portray Victoria Street and its artists as a romantic bustling bohemia.

[40] Berger, 'Capricious Juries'; and Thornton, 'Rapotec's Exciting Blake Award'.

[41] V. Spate, Foreword, Sydney Nine, Gallery A, Melbourne September 1961· also Bill Hannan, 'Our Best Abstractionists: Nine Sydney Artists, Gallery A, Melbourne', Bulletin, 2 September, 1961.

[42] Lynn, 'Mirror Mirror', seeks to counter this interpretation of events arguing that the Blaxland Galleries held it first Survey of Avant-Garde Painting before the Sydney Nine exhibition at David Jones'. It included one of the nine – Carl Plate – as well as Nancy Borlase, John Coburn, Gerard Ebeli, Margo Lewers, Elwyn Lynn, Sheila McDonald, Daryl Hill, Henry Salkauskas, John Stockdale and Guy Warren.

[43] W. Thornton, 'Group Display A National Vigour', SMH, 19 July, 1961; J. Gleeson, 'First Class!', Sun, 19 July, 1961 wrote 'nine artists of 'international idiom, yet within this framework they all establish their identities as individuals and Australians'.

[44] R. Hughes, 'Air of Abstraction', Nation, 29 July, 1961.

[45] Lynn, 'Avant Garde Painting in Sydney', pp. 305-307.

[46] ibid.

[47] 'Bernard Smith's Opening Address', NSW Broadsheet, December 1963.

[48] ibid.

[49] ibid.

[50] Recent Australian Painting 1961, Whitechapel Gallery, London, June-July 1961. Foreword by Sir Kenneth Clark, preface Bryan Robertson and introduction Robert Hughes; see E. Lynn, 'Recent Australian Painting at the Whitechapel Galleries, London', NSW Broadsheet, July 1961, for a report on the London reception which is critical of both the British and the Australians for their neglect of the abstract work. He reported that of the 60-odd works for sale almost all sold. The Tate Gallery bought abstractions by Brett Whiteley and Godfrey Miller and the exhibition was followed by promises of solos and group shows including one for Amsterdam's Stedelijk Museum. It was also announced that two books on Australian art were to be published.

For the press coverage see also E. Lynn, 'Australia Rediscovered', Meanjin, vol. XX, no. 3, 1961, p. 338; and 'Special Supplement: the Contemporary Art Society of NSW-- July 1961. Recent Australian Painting at Whitechapel Gallery, London, June 2, 1961', NSW Broadsheet, July 1961. Consisting of 17 foolscap pages the supplement contained abstracts of Hughes' and Robertson's essays and a comprehensive coverage of the British press reviews.

[51] Terence Mullaly of The London Daily Telegraph, 6th June, 1961, in 'Special Supplement', NSW Broadsheet.

52 P. Jeanneret, 'Aussie Art Makes the Grade', 'The London "Daily Mail", 3rd June 1961', in 'Special Supplement', NSW Broadsheet.

53 Unnamed reviewer in The London Tablet, 'Special Supplement'.

54 B. Smith, Australian Painting Today, p. 3.

55 See Clark, Recent Australian Painting, p. 4; and Robertson, Recent Australian Painting p. 5; and p. 7; While receiving funding from the British Council, Robertson claimed this was an independent exhibition designed '... to show the most recent trends in Australian art in the broadest way possible, in which the work of younger artists could be adequately represented'.

56 Robertson, Recent Australian Painting, pp. 5-7, passim. The new school of painting, he wrote, was a product of a healthy patronage system for contemporary culture which included Commonwealth and State institutions, influential patrons like Kenneth Clark, Sir Colin Anderson and Kim Bonython, numerous commercial galleries and proliferation of public art prizes and recurring art competitions. Robertson emphasised the importance of the patronage system which had encouraged the growth of a new cultural identity as evidenced in the impressive overseas profile of writers (Ray Lawler and Patrick White), performers (Barry Humphries, Joan Sutherland, Diane Cilento), in the art (Albert Tucker, Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd) and the building of the Sydney Opera House and the new plans for an art museum in Melbourne.

57 For the NSW Broadsheet discussion of the art market and pressure on the CAS see E. Lynn, 'The Contemporary Art Society', NSW Broadsheet May 1961; 'The Local Scene', NSW Broadsheet, August 1961; 'Origins of Abstraction in Sydney', NSW Broadsheet, July 1962; and 'Boomlay, Boomlay, Boom (Bis)!', NSW Broadsheet, April 1963. The concern about the pressures of the art market on artists was widespread. In 'The Local Scene', Lynn offered a survey of the growth of institutional patronage for abstraction but warned that state galleries were not always the best taste makers and that Australia needed taste makers like John Reed and Rudy Komon and Kim Bonython to create some discrimination in the market place. In 'Origins of Abstraction in Sydney', he quoted Daniel Thomas' concern that 'At times also one feels there are almost too many opportunities for the very young, and for amateurs, to exhibit their work ... undiscriminating exhibition of such stuff can only confuse standards for the general public.'

58 NSW Records. Notes for August 1962.

59 ibid. The first 'Young Painters' exhibition was held in May 1963 at Farmers Blaxland Galleries. John Firth-Smith won the prize for 23 years and under; Colin Lanceley the 24 and over. Exhibitors included E. Raft, I. Munro, K. Reinhard, R. Hughes, M. Kitching, R. Milgate, C. Griffin and L. Zemak.

60 E. Lynn, Foreword, 25th Annual CAS Exhibition, Sydney, Blaxland Gallery, October 1963.

61 ibid.

62 Lynn, 'The Contemporary Art Society'. The establishment of standards included the re-identification of the 'charm' school, which became a theme of Sydney art criticism in the 1960s; see specifically 'The Gentility Principle', NSW Broadsheet, August 1962; and 'Origins of Abstraction in Sydney', NSW Broadsheet, July 1962.

63 E. Lynn,' An Art Book, Art, and Art Books', NSW Broadsheet, June 1961.

64 The early 1960s brought an art-publishing boom. As the titles indicate, the bulk of the publications, like the Whitechapel catalogue, focused on recent Australian painting; Bonython, Modern Australian Painting and Sculpture; A Survey of Australian Art from 1950 to 1960; Smith, Australian Painting Today; Pringle, Australian Painting Today; The Georgian House Australian Art Monographs concentrated on living artists; Longmans Arts in Australia on current developments in art and design; while the first edition of the journal Art and Australia, 1963, included survey essays on painting and sculpture since 1945. Aimed at various audiences from the commercial gallery scene to schools these publications had mixed goals. Significantly few of the substantial publications were specifically aimed at the Australian audience rather, the focus was on an international audience following the trend set by 'The Sidney Nolan Book', which included an essay, 'The Search for an Australian Myth', by the popular writer Colin McInnes that to appealed to the British imagination.

65 For the critical response to Bernard Smith's Australian Painting see U. Hoff, 'A Consistent View of History, *Australian Painting: 1788-1960*', Art and Australia, vol. 1, no. 2, 1963, pp. 119-120; and 'Book Review' Bernard Smith, *Australian Painting*, U. Hoff, I) 1788-1939, E. Lynn, II) 1939-1960, Meanjin, vol. XXI, no. 2, 1963, pp. 227-235. Lynn stated it was significant because it responded to a 'new demand for greater intellectual content in art comment as opposed to appreciative rhapsodies ...'; also E. Lynn, 'Bernard Smith, *Australian Painting: 1788-1960*', Quadrant, vol. VII, no. 1, 1963, pp. 73-77.

66 Lynn, Meanjin, vol. XXI, no. 2, 1963, pp. 232-235.

67 Lynn launched a strong attack on Smith's handling of Sydney abstraction and the Antipodeans in his Meanjin, and Quadrant reviews and NSW Broadsheet review, November 1962.

68 Docker, A Critical Condition, p. 147, describes the 'new right' approach as 'a harsher, less optimistic and supposedly more mature and honest re-reading of Australian history.'

The 'new right' were opposed to the older left establishment as exemplified by Meanjin, whose editor Clem Christesen, in letters to Bernard Smith in December 1961, Smith Papers, generously praised them as the new 'bright boys'. Their penetrating gaze and reappraisal of literature and art, while involving an unnecessarily severe lash back against nationalism, he wrote, was part of a

positive move towards a new culture. Then in a comment mindful that they were now the establishment, Christesen reassured Smith that 'You and I mightn't always be too happy about the tone of their criticism, but overall their contributions will be valuable.'

69 Docker, A Critical Condition, pp. 145-152.

70 Robertson, Recent Australian Painting, p. 6.

71 In his 'Special Supplement', NSW Broadsheet, foreword Lynn called the catalogue 'a Book' drawing attention to its size and seriousness.

72 See B. Smith, 'The Truth about the Antipodeans', in The Death of the Artist as Hero, for Smith's bitter account of the occasion.

73 Docker, A Critical Condition, p. 90; see also P. Coleman, Australian Civilization; and R. Boyd, The Australian Ugliness, Ringwood, Penguin, 1963, as examples of the 'new right' discourse.

74 Hughes, Recent Australian Painting, p. 14. Hughes introduced the theme of travelling exhibitions to argue that Australians had not had direct contact with modernism before the Herald Murdoch exhibition of 1939.

75 Ibid., p. 15.

76 ibid., p. 18.

77 ibid., p. 20.

78 ibid. Hughes' dark view of the metaphysical was undoubtedly influenced by Manning Clark's and Vincent Buckley's interpretation of the metaphysical in terms of the universal themes of despair, doubt, alienation, terror and suffering. Having stating that 'If such an identity comes, it will have nothing to do with style and technical experiments. It will be a matter of vision, attitude, belief.', Hughes continued to suggest the dark side was well known to Australians; ' "We men of the South," Camus wrote in a very different context, "Know that the sun has it dark side." Acute awareness of the dark side of experience runs like a thread through the intuitions of Australian Painters.'

79 ibid., p. 21.

80 Robertson, Recent Australian Painting, p. 11.

81 B. Robertson, Jackson Pollock, London, Thames and Hudson, 1960. See Lynn, 'An Art Book, Art and Art Books', NSW Broadsheet, June 1961, who reviewed Robertson's book on Pollock positively in face of wide criticism by reviewers for its neglect of the influences of past artists on Pollock and its emphasis on painting as a primitive activity.

82 Hughes, Recent Australian Painting, p. 20.

[83] Smith, Australian Painting Today. The Macrossan Lectures which were delivered on August 29 and 31, 1961, closely followed the Whitechapel Exhibition. They were received with great interest; Lynn printed a summary by Smith in the NSW Broadsheet, October 1961; and a reply from Hughes, 'Mr. Robert Hughes, Dr. Bernard Smith and the Renaissance', in November 1961.

[84] Smith, 'The Myth of Isolation', Australian Painting Today, pp. 3-17.

[85] ibid., 'The Rebirth of Australian Painting', pp. 18-32, passim.

[86] ibid., pp. 19-2, passim.

[87] ibid., p. 29. Smith used combative and emotive language, claiming for instance, that 'the conversion of artists and critics to abstract expressionism' since 1956-57 was accomplished by its Sydney vanguard 'with the enthusiasm, speed and efficiency of a modern evangelical crusade'.

[88] ibid.

[89] ibid., pp. 31-2.

[90] Lynn, 'Recent Australian Painting'.

[91] ibid.; see also Robertson, Recent Australian Painting, p. 9, who encouraged this tendency by claiming 'Australian painters are still much nearer their own landscape than European artists, still excited about it and often passionately identified with it even when the images they make from it are entirely abstract.'

[92] Lynn, 'Recent Australian Painting'.

[93] Lynn, 'Australia Rediscovered', Meanjin, vol. xx, no. 3, 1961, p. 337.

[94] J. Nash, The Yorkshire Post, 9 June, 1961, in 'Special Supplement'.

[95] Pringle, Australian Accent, titled Chapter 2, 'Kangaroo', in homage to D. H. Lawrence who created the image of the typical Australian as a taciturn character, shaped by the vast, silent, uninhabited land, standing perplexed before a tabula rasa of culture. This was a popular image with the British and with immigrants such as Prof. J. Burke, Some Recollections of the Post-War Years in Australian Painting: A Lesson for the Future, The Sixth Sir William Dobell Memorial Lecture, Sydney, Power Publications, 1981, pp. 5-6, who read Lawrence and T.S. Eliot's The Waste Land, as preparation for coming to the Antipodes and on arrival found Drysdale's work a perfect match to this image. For similarities between the British and Australian figurative schools see Mellor, (ed.) A Paradise Lost.

[96] Nash, The Yorkshire Post, 9 June 1961, in 'Special Supplement'.

[97] 'From Foreign Shores', NSW Broadsheet, January 1960; see also 'The World Outside', NSW Broadsheet, March 1960; and 'Late Reviews', NSW Broadsheet April 1960.

[98] 'San Francisco Chronicle, 9th December 1959', in 'Late Reviews', NSW Broadsheet, April 1960.

[99] 'Praise for Australian Artists", SMH, 7 June 1961; and 'Australian Painting stir English Critics', SMH, 8 June 1961.

[100] Eric Newton, 'The Manchester "Guardian" - 5th June 1961'; and The London "Time and Tide' - 15th June, 1961' in 'Special Supplement'.

[101] T.S. Eliot, 'Notes Towards a Definition of Culture', Partisan Review, vol. XI, no. 2, 1944, p. 145. A civilisation, Eliot argued, included two levels of culture: firstly, 'culture'; 'a refinement of living, including the appreciation of philosophy and the arts, among the upper levels of society', and secondly 'primitive culture'.

[102] See Lynn's reviews of Smith's Australian Painting; Lynn, 'Avant-Garde Painting in Sydney'; and Lynn, 'Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Who are the Only Abstractionists of Them All', NSW Broadsheet, June 1961 which attacked a series of articles by Gavin Souter, 'Modern Art in Sydney (1) - The Emperor is Dressed-But What In?' SMH, 20 November, 1961, and 'Modern Art in Sydney (2) : Journey across a New Landscape', SMH, 2 June, 1962.

[103] E. Lynn, 'Antipodeans seen in a Northern Light', a response to Smith's 'Image and Meaning in Recent Painting', The Listener, 19 July 1962', NSW Broadsheet, October 1962.

[104] E. Lynn, 'The Tate', NSW Broadsheet, March 1963.

Conclusion

The Whitechapel exhibition marked the end of an era for the NSW CAS and its promotion of abstraction as the advanced stream of modernism. Following closely after Stanislaus Rapotec's Blake Prize victory, the exhibition provided the final confirmation of the validity of abstract expressionism and its importance to Australian culture. As Rapotec's victory had irrevocably established that abstract expressionism could communicate the spiritual and metaphysical, the Whitechapel exhibition established that abstract expressionism could express the consciousness of the Australian people, as shaped by the uniqueness of their collective experience. The goals of the NSW CAS postwar abstractionists to challenge the centrality of the motif in painting, and create a humanist mode of expression from the fusion of expressionism and abstraction, finally had been achieved. Furthermore, the goal of the CAS to change the nature of culture through the introduction of contemporary art and thought also had been achieved.

The Whitechapel exhibition was a landmark, not only because it proved that there was an international audience of Australian art, but also because it gave official endorsement to contemporary art, by promoting the co-existing streams of abstract expressionism and figurative expressionism as evidence of cultural maturity. The production of contemporary art was now fully integrated into the intellectual and public discourse, which debated and defined the character and ideology of Australian culture. This fact was clearly proven by the nature of the nationalist discourse which supported the exhibition. In particular, it was proven by the manner in which this discourse equated the struggle between the figurative expressionists and the abstract expressionists, with the cultural dilemmas that faced Australia as a new nation, caught between its loyalties to the old order of England and Europe, and the necessity to create new world alliances with its Asia Pacific neighbours and the United States.

As the debate between Bernard Smith and Robert Hughes illustrated, the Whitechapel exhibition activated a major shift of emphasis in the contemporary art discourse, as the

history and future of contemporary painting was interpreted and evaluated in terms of its expression of the conflicting ideologies of regionalism and internationalism. Within this regional schema of art criticism and history, the development of postwar art was linked to the story of the nation's rise to cultural maturity, with the measure of this cultural maturity being the manner in which artists responded to the influence of overseas cultures, and more specifically, to the ideals and influences of international modernism. The contentious issue was no longer the controversial and shocking nature of contemporary art. It was the question of which stream of contemporary painting would lead Australian art to further international success, the figurative expressionists or the abstract expressionists? It was an important landmark for the NSW CAS and Sydney art, therefore, when the Whitechapel exhibition officially sanctioned abstract expressionism as the advanced stream of modernism by predicting that the abstractionists, and not the figurative Antipodeans, held the key to the future.

Abstract expressionism had become a self-contained movement with its own academy, mainstream, splinter groups and avant-garde, as Elwyn Lynn had predicted in his early NSW Broadsheet essays. While the movement was national in orientation, the centre of its mainstream and avant-garde was Sydney. There, the NSW CAS had dedicated two decades of concerted effort as an oppositional artists' society to the production of abstraction as an anti-establishment art form. Not only had it established a much needed forum for new and experimental abstraction, it had also established a supporting discourse which, under Elwyn Lynn's authorship, skilfully shaped the ideological basis for Sydney's participation in abstract expressionism, as an international avant-garde art form, according to the realities of Australian art. Coincidentally, the Blake Prize provided the artists with a mainstream forum in which to test the validity of abstract expressionism while also contesting the principle of artistic freedom. The strength and energy of Sydney's leadership of the abstract expressionist movement, thus, had its roots in the traditions and politics of Sydney art, and most specifically in the on-going conflict during the 1950s between the artists and the establishment over the meaning and function of art.

The NSW CAS and Elwyn Lynn were instrumental in initiating the debate on Sydney's ideas about art, and in bringing them to the fore as an important influence in contemporary art practice while using this debate to promote the avant-garde practice of abstract expressionism. With their campaigns against the city's promotional art system and its art critics, they drew attention to the distinctive 'charm' school nature of Sydney art and set the theoretical and ideological grounds for its opposition. Most importantly, they set the premise for radical modernist practice in Sydney, with their campaign against the motif in painting, and assertion that true art was an autonomous, intellectual discipline dedicated to the disruption of the establishment's social and cultural order. This definition of the autonomy of art was crucial in differentiating the NSW CAS's radical practice from Sydney's mainstream abstract expressionists, and their romantic ideal of painting as exploration of the subjective experience. By introducing avant-garde and formalist theory, Lynn and the NSW CAS mounted an important intellectual challenge to Sydney's romantic tradition, and laid the foundations for the development of formalist art criticism and practice in the 1960s.

This study has shown the period of 1947-61, with its vital combination of postwar prosperity and Cold War anxiety, brought considerable change to the nature of artistic production and to the nature of its supporting discourse. The growth of new commercial and institutional infrastructures for contemporary art encouraged competitiveness, together with greater diversity and professionalism in the arts. At the same time, developments in education saw the intellectualisation of art. Tensions arose within the CAS of Australia, as the NSW CAS's promotion of abstraction and the ideal of the avant-garde, challenged the achievements of the Melbourne CAS. The NSW CAS's focus on the creation of the new came into conflict with Melbourne's efforts to build a tradition of Australian contemporary art from the early achievements of the 'Angry Penguins' circle and Melbourne CAS. The clash between the Antipodeans and the NSW abstract expressionists was important, because it drew attention to the conflicting ideologies that now underpinned the practice of art, and marked the beginning of Melbourne's attempts to shape an Australian history of contemporary art.

It was significant for the future, that in Melbourne the Whitechapel exhibition was followed by a series of exhibitions and publications on recent Australian painting which sought to establish the early 'Rebel and Precursors' years of the CAS as the source of an Australian tradition of radical modernism, and the Antipodeans as the heirs to this tradition. The move to construct the history of contemporary art and its heroes was facilitated by the new art critics and historians who were emerging from the Melbourne University's Fine Art Department. Together with Bernard Smith these young critics, who included Patrick McCaughey, Margaret Plant and Virginia Spate, would be influential in formulating the history of Australian art, and in stimulating the polemics for art practice in the 1960s. With abstract art and internationalism established as major forces in Australian contemporary art, the conflict over the definition of art and its relationship to Australian society continued unabated.

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Direction

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Sydney Morning Herald

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Lectures

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