Fay Bottrell

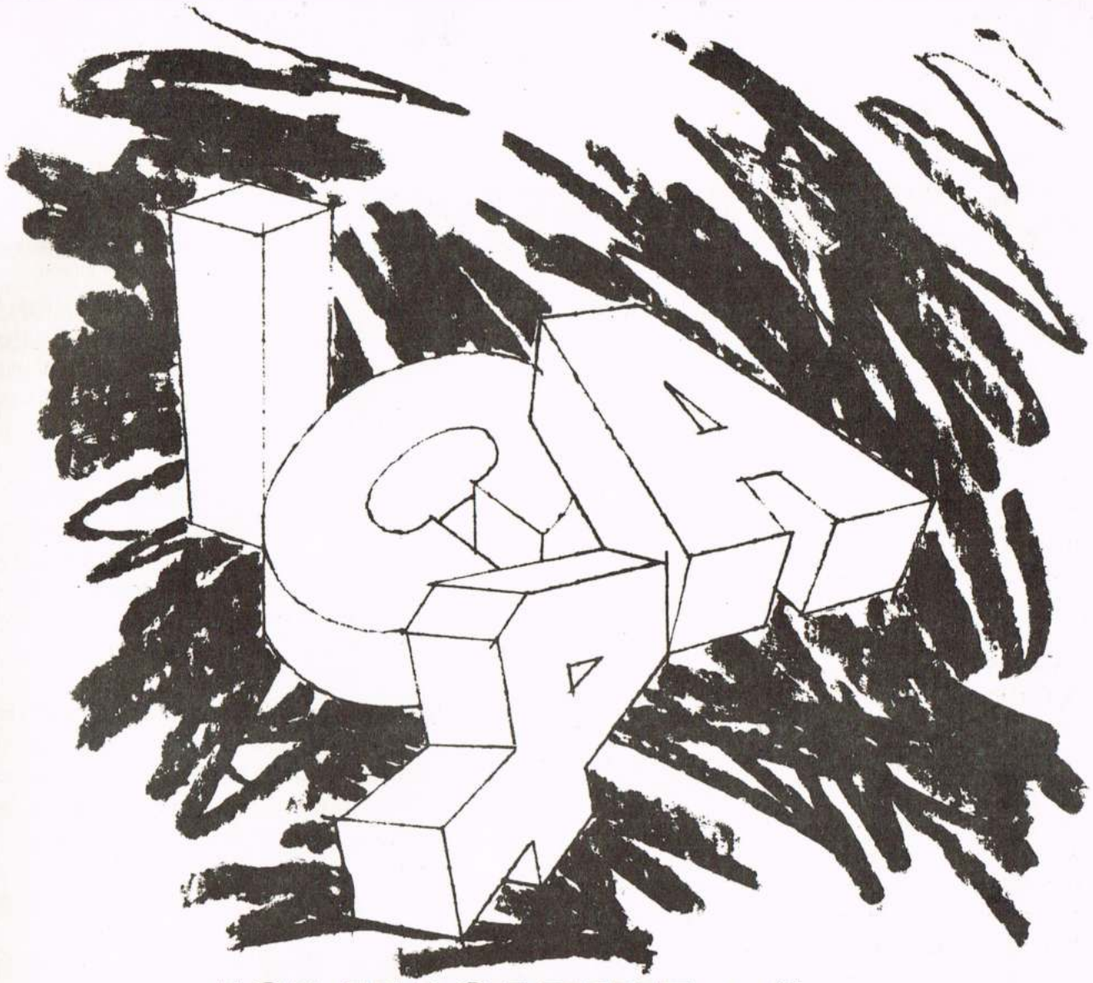
Having an exhibition is not so much a need to show my work, or to be measured in any way, as to extend myself through the experience of having to organise my thoughts into a total seeing for others. Having a concept and then directing it towards a statement of fact is probably what matters to me. I am enjoying the exercise and would like others to share my pleasure.

My studio is in the bush and I work alone, so it is also necessary for me to communicate with others and find out where I fit into the scheme of things.

Portraits from the Subconscious, or fabric caricatures (as I see them) have to flow. I can't contrive them or they would lack the dynamic I want to imbue in them. I started with me wanting to re-cycle fabric scraps whilst conducting a public workshop, "Fun with Fabric". I had read The Dice Man and, while working with scraps, I realised that I had a "dice" mentality - putting chance factors to work for me and on another level of design implications. I triggered the flow by picking up a scrap randomly and letting it suggest something to me. What it started to say was quite extraordinary, as I let myself be prompted into stating a character I had not realised had a home in me. I became aware it was a form of exorcism I was into. I started to hang looser and looser to allow these characters to emerge. Whilst stitching the pieces down onto a background, I became aware that I was actually drawing with the sewing machine as I concerned myself with the edges. I confirmed this later by checking the back of the fabric. Without colour, it was a drawing.

I am wondering - should I have given it more time; whether more "types" would come; or if this had been a one-off exercise to bring me into a particular awareness that could be applied when using other means. I delight in the company of others and I hope that is what my work will be... COMPANY.

December 1-18



ICA MAGAZINE #4
OCTOBER/DECEMBER '76

SCHLICHT
LATELLA
BOTTRELL
HIBBERD
BECKETT
BALDESSARI

ICA GENERAL MEETING

It had been hoped that the General Meeting held at the ICA on September 1st would serve to familiarise new members with the development of the ICA over the last 12 months. However, since the attendance was small and since those who attended were already fairly intimate with what has been happening, the meeting became an informal affair.
Paul McGillick began the meeting with a quick look at the last 12 months and an outline of present policy and plans for future development:
Artistic policy over the last 12 months has been for a broad base of activity, ranging from exhibitions to music and theatre performances. What is presented at the ICA should be (for the want of a better word) experimental or formative and it should be a venue for presentations unlikely to be seen elsewhere, either because of their formative quality or their non-commercial nature. Largely, the ICA responds to approaches from individuals and groups wishing to use the space, although some presentations are promoted by the ICA itself.

Over the last 12 months there has been a significant rise in attendance and public attention. The membership scheme is now 12 months old and membership stands at 84, which is considered satisfactory. The crucial period is the next few months when original members decide whether they are going to re-new their memberships or let them lapse.

There has been a satisfactory development of interchange between sister galleries interstate and the forthcoming Baldessari show will be the first to be shared by the ICA, Ewing (Melbourne), the EAF (Adelaide), the Institute of Modern Art (Brisbane) and the Undercroft Gallery (Perth). Already, the ICA and EAF have combined to bring in the Merce Cunningham exhibition.
In 1975 the ICA sponsored its first documentation - a photographic and video record of Ken Unsworth's Sculpture as Ritual. This was sufficiently successful to warrant further ventures in this area when work of sufficient quality is available.

Finance: The ICA is at present subsidised by two private firms which ensures sufficient income for survival but does not permit of anything but very gradual progress towards our goals. Since the ICA is basically non-commercial, it has little income from its own activities. Occasionally the space is rented out and when artists or performers make any money from their activities at the ICA, they are required to pay a commission up to a fixed rental figure (currently $60.00 a week). However, for fully non-commercial shows or where no work is sold, the space and facilities are available free of charge. At present it costs about $10,000 a year to keep the ICA open and income over the last year has totalled $1800 (including membership fees which are designed only to cover the costs of the magazine and mailing).

Following this resume of activities and policy, the meeting was thrown open to discussion on how the premises may be more effectively utilised. It was agreed that, broadly, two possible choices existed: the ICA could remain at its present size with only marginal developments taking place, or it could develop into a larger and more comprehensive organisation. The latter would, of course, require substantial funding and more sophisticated organisation. The ICA has prepared a comprehensive proposal which has been given to the NSW Premier, Mr Wran and which has received endorsement from a number of key people. This proposal outlines how a full ICA could be developed on the present site and we are still waiting on some response from the government.

Tom McCullough suggested that an important improvement would be a more comprehensive range of literature available for sale and as part of an ICA library. It was also agreed that more lectures could be arranged. Both these things could be done within the present limitations.

As this was an informal discussion, there were a number of other issues discussed which we don't have space to report on here. An important point was made, however, and should be repeated here for the benefit of members unable to attend the meeting. The ICA is a facility available for use by members. Whether or not it is worth the $10,000 a year to maintain will always depend on how much use is made of it by members. The ICA doesn't have the staff or the funds to act as an entrepreneur in any big way and perhaps it shouldn't, even if it could. Its value is determined primarily by the value it has for those who use it - either creatively or merely as a place to visit regularly for the interest which the work presented provides.

The ICA neither receives nor can afford to buy the publicity available to other institutions. This, however, should not be allowed to obscure the fact that work seen at the ICA over the last 12 months has been of consistently high quality and interest and there is every indication that standards will continue to rise over the next twelve months.

Nb...

The Saturday Centre has ceased publication as a poetry magazine and will reappear under the title SCOPP - the Saturday Centre Magazine of Prose and Poetry - later this year. There will be no further readings at the ICA. Any readings in the future will be held privately. For further information about the activities and publications of the Saturday Centre, write to Pat Laird, P.O.Box 140 Cammeray, 2062.

The Women's Art Registry will hold a public screening of the registry at 7.00 pm on Wednesday 27th of October at the ICA.
To enquire about the registry and the screening, ring Barbara Hall on 3582349.

Two plays: Beckett's PLAY & Jack Hibberd's JUST BEFORE the HONEYMOON October 14-23

In The Theatre of the Absurd Martin Esslin notes Samuel Beckett's fascination for the dramatic possibilities of a character immobilised and forced to put all his expressiveness into the words issuing from his mouth. Play was first published in 1964 and demonstrates the rapid development of this formal preoccupation in Beckett's work which began with Waiting for Godot and continues to be a feature of his work. Play is equally representative of certain thematic preoccupations. Esslin comments:

"...the attainment of the release from consciousness, from the need to tell oneself the tale of one's life, seems impossible. For the true release would lie in one's knowing that one is no longer conscious. Yet with death consciousness ceases, so we can never know that we no longer exist. Hence the last moment of a dying man's consciousness can be imagined as remaining suspended forever in the limbo of an eternal unawareness of its cessation. This is the situation dramatised by Beckett in Play. The heads of two women and one man are seen protruding from grey funerary urns. At the bidding of a beam of light, which turns their speech on and off (just as the Opener in Cascando turns on the Voice) they recite the broken fragments of what is clearly meant to be the trivial story of a French bedroom farce that has gone wrong by leading to a tragic ending - three suicides. And here are the three dead characters, the husband, the wife and the mistress, unaware of each other's presence, only dimly aware that they are dead, endlessly repeating the contents of their last moments of consciousness. How can Eternity itself be put on to the stage within the confines of a text that runs to barely half an hour? Beckett has attempted to achieve the impossible by having the entire text of Play spoken twice, identically, except that the words become softer and faster. When the third time round is reached, the play fades from our view, but we remain aware that it will go on, even faster, ever more softly, forever and forever. Told by three characters in unrelated snippets, the story is not easy to take in first time round; hence, the device of repeating the entire play also provides the audience with the opportunity of getting another chance at piecing the little novelette together; thus the use of repitition brilliantly combines the solution of two different problems with which the author of so intricate a dramatic structure finds himself confronted."

Jack Hibberd is not only one of Australia's best known playrights, but also its best.

continued on page 17

Conversation with Rollin Schlicht, Tony McGillick and Paul McGillick.
Recorded 7th, 20th and 22nd September, 1976.

A CONVERSATION WITH ROLLIN SCHLICHT

The following is a somewhat edited transcript of conversations held on the above dates. Awkward punctuation, misunderstood questions and partial repetitions have been allowed to remain in order to retain as much as possible of the flavour of the conversation in the hope that the views expressed are of general interest.

TM: I'd like to begin by talking about the avant-garde because I was, initially, very motivated by the thought of being 'advanced'. One went and looked at paintings and said: "I want to be the most advanced painter. There are those American painters being advanced, so I want to be like them." Off you go - you're 18.

RS: That's right - it's juvenilia.

TM: But that's the way you get going, isn't it? Nobody goes around for 20 years studying art and then quietly decides to paint.

RS: That may have been one of your preoccupations. I started to paint with the delusion that I understood something which was fashionable at the time. I don't know whether it was avant-garde - like the nature of structure in painting as proselytised by people like Fried. Fortunately, I was stupid enough not to question whether I understood it or not. You must have been quite amazed

when I started to paint pictures. But I thought I understood something which I didn't understand. It was a complete misapprehension.
TM: Retrospectively, I thought of it a bit like Trotsky being a military genius because it was called on him to be one. I mean, there was a movement afoot, whether we contrived it or not, and everyone should participate.
RS: You're Trotsky, of course...
TM: No, I'm not Trotsky - you're Trotsky, because you should never have been a military genius, or a painter, because you were supposed to be an architect. Then you changed the role.
RS: Well, it's truth to self - it's doing what you want to do and it just happened to be coincident that at a certain moment one had the confidence to begin, I suppose.
TM: Do you think it was because you were in an outpost like Australia?
RS: Absolutely. And that's surely why everyone would want to stay here.
I think there is a tenable theory to making art that it is made in isolation and Australia is as isolated as you can get. But then that in itself is a very complicated thing because none of us was isolated. Until the time we arrived back here, we were obsessed with modernity. Almost exclusively - yourself and Mick Johnson in particular - and clever at it, as well, I suppose. But certainly obsessed by it...
TM: Although Whiteley never thought like that. But all the other gang did and copied whatever was up-to-date.
RS: That's right. I wouldn't accept a situation that Brett would perhaps see as a definition of art as a sort of divine gift to be practised by those who have been visited.
TM: Do you think the conditions under which you first engaged with art were avant-garde?
RS: Oh, no. Absolutely not.
TM: Well, the first paintings were fucking similar to Frank Stella, weren't they?
RS: They were to some extent copies of Frank Stella, I suppose.
TM: That's a pretty extreme point to start at, isn't it? Your contemporaries started by doing what they were told - painting busts and bowls of flowers and so on.
RS: I just think the limitations of Stella are so obvious and drastic that it's clearly a possible starting point for someone because the technical skill required is minimal and therefore it isn't very daunting. Whereas if you start trying to paint like Rembrandt, I think that not only would it be impossible physically, but it would be depressing for a beginner. And the avant-garde - which is the excuse on which you are hanging this conversation - the first use of the term...
TM: You've been researching...
RS: Yes, I have been researching it...One of the first uses of the term was by Michelet in 1853 to describe certain contemporaneous writings in France. It was a literary term and I have no idea when it was first applied to painting. Initially, it was a literary conceit and not applied to visual art. I can't imagine that anyone would ever make anything in the notion that they were avant-garde without being rather self-conscious. That would be one of Greenberg's point you would have to agree with - that the Futurists were self-consciously avant-garde.
TM: It seems to me that there was an attitude which began to gather momentum after 1850 which revealed itself in modern painting - painting that was in advance or in some way about premises other than those of art in museums - which is now called avant-garde.
RS: That's the historicist thing, isn't it? That's a very easy statement to make because it's after the event. A major thing happened to art in the 19th century and that was the Romantic Rebellion. Whether that's a definition of avant-garde, I don't know.
TM: Well, the term 'avant-garde' is not going to be of much use unless we accept that a shift did actually happen at a certain time...
RS: Which was when?
TM: I think it was probably Pissarro and Monet. That's when it actually took root. Not just the variances that people may have taken. I mean, Botticelli did the pagan allegories in Catholic Florence in the Quattrocento - was that avant-garde or was it just a daring thing to do?
RS: Botticelli liked painting little boys' bums. Unfortunately, at the time they had to be disguised as girls. Whatever his reason for following his inclination, it wasn't politically motivated.
TM: Kenneth Clark thinks that was a daring thing to do at the time.
RS: Botticelli's a very stylish artist and also very slight. He painted women, but all the time he wanted them to be boys. He painted allegories in a rather stylish, fresh and somewhat whimsical manner, I can't really comment on how the society of the time regarded him.
TM: Well, don't let me deflect you by referring to him. What I'm trying to get at is: do you think there was another kind of psychology to making art -
RS: No, I don't think that Pissarro and the people who were painting around the Ile de France were avant-garde because they became plein-air painters and went outside - that is something that had been done and it was done partly in revolt from academic conventions - the finishing of pictures in studios and that awful French tradition. But how that could be regarded as avant-garde, I don't know.
TM: Well, it is regarded as avant-garde and many of the terms you have just used - revolt, rejection of tradition...
RS: Yes, but they were aware of other people who worked with a reference to nature. Courbet had, anyway. I don't think it was as enormous a shift as it may appear. I think that's a very historicist approach.
TM: If art has always been an ongoing tradition, then the public must have changed,

because there is a definite consciousness that's been at large all this century, that there is an advanced or avant-garde art.
RS: Yes, that's possible and it's possible that it's been completely wrong. As I understand it, there is meant to be a direct and linear development of art from Cezanne through to Cubism and that is always underpinned by the reported statements of Cezanne about the fundamental nature of spheres cones and cylinders and the observation of them in nature. This, then, would appear to have led to something like Cubism which, although it was nothing other than an attempt to explore reality in a much more total way than had been done within the conventions of perspective, was an excuse for abstraction. I think that is an untenable point of view because the last pictures of Cezanne - which are among the most amazing ever painted - are attempts to come to terms with one of the oldest and most persevering subjects in the history of European art: figures in a landscape. They do not lead to Cubism in any specific way, notwithstanding artists like Mondrian who I think pursued a legitimate theory in the way that Seurat pursued a theory for its own sake and made great art but removed themselves from the mainstream, as it were, of painting...and I think the only thing that is important is that mainstream. There are, admittedly, always interesting people outside it on its extremity, but I don't see any time or point when people other than the Futurists (who were remarkably self-conscious anyway because they wanted to do all sorts of things other than make pictures) took up any position which you could classify as avant-garde.
TM: If that's the idea you have, then it's worth disabusing us all of avant-gardism as a proposition, isn't it?
RS: I thought I'd already said that.
TM: O.K. What is this mainstream? Is it figuration, is it referential painting...is Mondrian mainstream?
RS: No. I think that he's not...quite ob-

viously not. He's on the extreme edges of any possibility that exists in painting. But the important thing with Mondrian is the capacity to pursue his particular idea and his particular notion of what painting was to the very beautiful and fragile end to which he pursued it, without melodrama and without an overload of distraction - and at the same time, presumably, with an enormous amount of conscience - an enormous amount of real struggle.

TM: Who would best demonstrate the mainstream in the 20th century?

RS: Matisse - who continually referred all round him to things that were visually important to him. I would hold - and this is not very novel - that the people who are important in art were those concerned with some sort of record - either of the world around them or with a record of their response in understandable terms to their situation. I would say that the most false premise of abstraction is that you are asked to believe in the power of the person who made those pictures to interest you in his emotional involvements - which is both conceited and one-dimensional. Bacon says that better than I do in his interviews with David Sylvester on the nature of art. I think it's quite easy to demonstrate that abstraction is an indulgence in that respect.

TM: What about the late Matisses such as the paper cut-outs - they may have a trace of local flora and fauna, but are nevertheless total sensational experiences of colour and shape and fairly abstract components?

RS: That's true, and Muslim art excludes specific reference to humanity and relies totally on its facility to achieve decoration to carry whatever message it carries. The papiers decoupees are a major part of Matisse's work, but they are not the only part of it. He was a constant experimenter except for 20 years of Nice interiors.

TM: But what about the art itself becoming the subject. This is heavily implied in the late Matisses, which withdrew simply into the components of making a painting - the colour, shape, feel, size, the limits of itself - in a sense self-referring. Making art about art?

RS: That statement springs out of the unfortunate remark of Emile Bernard about all painting being nothing but colours on a flat plane, or some such simplification.

TM: If anything has highlighted modernist painting, it has been the reference to its own process. Cubism, at least, is definitely a self-descriptive activity. The Cubists deliberately took colour out, changed the shape of paintings, used bits of newspaper and so on, to emphasise the process.

RS: It's a comment on reality.

TM: This seems implied by Pissarro and Monet and others. But the difference between an implication and a definite bias can be seen in the senior Impressionists. They might claim to be referring to light in the South of France, but nevertheless, no other paintings exist with such determined objectivity. And that's the central thread - all avant-garde painting is self-referring.

RS: The Impressionists were undoubtedly concerned with effects of light and made enormous and diligent attempts to capture them. The best example is the repetitive series of Monet. Now, the fact that they are amazing objects individually as well as in series is indicative of his greatness as an artist, not his obsession with avant-gardism. And Impressionism didn't lead to Cubism initially. There were a great many other things that came after or before or were concurrent with Impressionism.

TM: Up until the Impressionists you had examples like Piero della Francesca who was highly abstract, but who no one for a moment would suggest was concerned with anything other than telling a story and getting his religion across, but after, say 1850, there was a change in the idea of what art was.

RS: That's right - in a hundred years, people do change their ideas.

TM: Was that the crucible of the avant-garde? Nobody again painted realistic pictures of any consequence - not even Matisse.

RS: Are you including people like Picasso? The Blue Period is well into the 20th cent. Matisse painted representational paintings all his life...they are much more directly referential than, say, the Picassos of the 1930's, which I think are stunningly good pictures.

TM: You do, though, have to look at their shift from a referential way of working, towards a rather casual concern for the anatomy and the nature of location.

RS: That's rather different. You were talking about referential painting. The fact that the focus of those pictures is not academic or related to the idea that Ingres may have had about it, goes without saying. Cezanne didn't even subscribe to that sort of accuracy, any more than Delacroix did. They were prepared to depart from rigid formulae.

TM: Any penetrating look at a great painter makes you realise that he's changed the nature of things to achieve his own ends. You only have to look at Piero and Michelangelo to see it.

RS: Yes, but you were even inaccurate about Piero because the importance of Piero in that he is telling a story, is that he manages to focus on these stories in such an extraordinary way that they are completely transformed. No other painter at that time had those particular insights into those subjects. Perhaps the most startling of them is The Flagellation, where what is presumably a crucial part of Christian theology and an extremely painful episode for Christ is happening in the background of the picture. That's in complete contrast to the normal and formula approach.

TM: But that is a literary device - it remains a literary painting.

RS: I'm just saying that, in telling the same story that many others such as Bellini did, over and over again with absolute power and certainty, in identical poses, the thing that distinguishes Piero is not that he's telling the same story, but the way he chose not to tell it; his capacity to validate the act of painting.

TM: You seem not to want to deal with what I'm saying: that there was a shift from those kinds of restrictions of realistic representation of actual or supposed events, no matter how they were modified.

RS: That's right - even Fauvism which paints the sky red when we all know it is blue. That's a deliberate, self-conscious gesture, flying in the face of reality.

TM: Doesn't that imply another proposition?

RS: That's right - it's embracing another set of rules. That's the story of Western European culture: it doesn't stand still, it doesn't exist in a series of absolute refinements of rendering rainy washes on silk screens for century after century. It's an avaricious, rapacious and ever-changing culture and it has covered more ground in something like 500 years than any other known form of art.

TM: You don't think there was a moment of significant shift?

RS: No. I think there are people who make significant discoveries in the context of their culture - and it can be in painting or poetry or almost anything - and as soon as that discovery is made, it is acted upon. The little journey that Picasso and Braque started on was suddenly extended to include I don't know how many artists of the School of Paris - but not really any great time after the events we are talking about...it was simultaneous.

TM: Do you think there was at least an assumption that an avant-garde existed in recent times?

RS: Somebody important would have to have said that was the case. The only person who might have taken this position, and whose work I think mediocre, was Duchamp. He concerned himself with series after series of self-conscious comments on the nature of art without managing to commit himself to the problem of constructing it in a traditional sense. If you like he cuts certain intellectual ground away from the construct of what art's about, but it's really of interest whether he's a major or a minor figure,

and I would suggest that he's ultimately rather minor...in the same way that Paul Klee is minor because his works don't suggest anything other than a set of inhibitions, they're not life-giving or life-enhancing or celebrants of man's intellect in any way. They're clever in commenting upon aspects of creativity, but who themselves are not given to that intensely human insight that, say, Chardin or even Corot have.

TM: I do have to press you though - there is a sensation of being avant-garde. People either think they are or not.

RS: I don't care what people think.

TM: Yes, but these are the conditions in which you exist now. The art scene as you experience it is always in tune with what's up-to-date.

RS: Being up-to-date s not necessarily being avant-garde.

TM: Then you'll have to tell me what avant-garde is, won't you?

RS: I don't have to tell you anything. I've already suggested that I don't think it ever existed.

PM: It's fairly clear that the conceptual movement refers back to Duchamp. Has conceptualism just been an aberration or has it been a hard sell at the expense of other areas of art activity? Or is it a significant phenomenon?

RS: It could be, as you say, a significant phenomenon - a bit like an eclipse. I wouldn't have any perspective which would enable me to comment on it. But whatever it is, it hasn't got anything to do with what I consider to be the real nature of art which is the mysterious production of visual responses to reality and to certain intellectual problems of seeing and then presenting those things which are seen in the framework of painted canvas. I don't deny the validity of conceptualism or the fact that modern music is musical, but it starts out from a set of values which are taking it out of the area I'm concerned with. To me it seems an obvious confusion to mix conceptualism with any kind of art historical context because it ought to be regarded as something separate. This is because it cuts out that pulse, that man-made thing. The point about most art is that it has a grip on reality through its craft connotation. Now, that is one of the most low levels at which you can make art - in a craft context - but it is a part of art by the fact that it has been made and seen to be made and that the tenderness of it is imprinted in the process of its manufacture. If you don't have that, you don't have art in the sense that I understand it.

PM: You choose between two different sets of premises then: either you accept that the conceptualist has logically followed a paradigm to its conclusion, or you don't accept his premises to begin with - which you obviously don't.

RS: No, but I can see that it is a possible exploration. In the same way that, being granted insight, one regrets the rigidity with which Mondrian pursued his particular vision. But you can't really regret it, because it was necessary in order to create that particular impasse in painting. What I object to is the construct that is put upon Cubism - they didn't become abstractionists and it didn't give them any easy options for making art. In fact, a lot of people would say that after 'Demoiselles d'Avignon, Picasso in particular never really did anything as good again. I don't altogether agree with that, but it is possible to make a case, with possible exceptions like Guernica.

TM: What is your measure when you talk about art - is it to do with value according to the society which currently estimates its value, or another kind of value?

RS: I don't think that art was ever estimated in any sense by a concensus in society at the time it was made. Artists often didn't hold the same position in society as they held as artists.

TM: Not then. But now we have a whole scanner behind us to look at what's counted and what's not. It's highly recorded. How many times have you seen that Warhol Marilyn Monroe on the back page of a magazine? We've been programmed into counting that as major art.

RS: In the Victorian era, The Last Time I Saw Fatherwas a very much promoted work of art, but it didn't do it much good.

TM: But we have to take some account of what has been programmed to us.

RS: Why?

TM: Because it affects us.

RS: It doesn't affect me at all. Andy Warhol doesn't affect me in the slightest.

TM: Well, I have to suggest that he does, because the sensation he participates in causing provides for you the whole scheme of the scheme in which you exist.

RS: I can't find any connection in what you are talking about with Andy Warhol. I'm sorry, I think you've lost yourself there.

TM: I haven't lost myself because I think Warhol is one of the better examples and major influences in the general tone of a scene which you don't reject out of hand. By being in it, you're in its context.

RS: Well, I'm alive...I'm alive, aren't I? You're making a basic mistake in relating something which is a general context for all our existences to specific examples within that context. I can quite honestly state that whatever the situation is - and I wouldn't deny that I'm affected by it any more than you are because we're alive and earning our livings - Andy Warhol is of no significance to me at all in the sense that he has some influence on what I do. I allow myself the luxury of rejecting his particular examples, as I find myself unable to relate to and therefore reject the sort of jokes in art of Duchamp for whom I have a greater respect than Warhol. The effect of people's production on you can quite fairly be excluded from the context in which those productions are going on. You have to make judgements. You have to survive and that implies a certain amount of acceptance and a certain amount of rejection.

PM: Stephen Spender in The Struggle of the Modern defines modernism as the confrontation of the past with the present through forms, idioms and sensibilities which are essentially the product of our own time. He goes on to say: "The significance of the modern movement...is not just that it produced some mastpieces, nor that it extended the boundaries of idioms, techniques and forms, but that in certain works a fragmented civilisation was redeemed within the envisioned memory of the greatness of its past. To achieve these poignant states of remembering great unifying beliefs and art while confronting chaos and destruction, safe positions of sheltered certainty were avoided, whether they were based on the kind of reasoning which goes with belief in progress or on religious dogmas." Do you think that's a reasonable definition of modernism and do you see yourself as working within that kind of definition?

RS: Yes, I think that's a reasonable definition of modernism. It seems to me that that statement is concerned with one era - redefining the same values and presenting them in a context that is understandable, rather than functioning within the limits of an historical style. In other words, the obsessions of humanity are continual. Spender, however, has a fairly bleak vision of our time. He sees it as a trauma. But I just see it as an ongoing thing: modernism as the redefinition of perpetual obsessions in terms of whoever is making them at whatever time. The actual subjects change very little. It's just the presentation or bias that people give to them or the importance they attribute to those obsessions.

PM: I've been reading George Steiner's In Bluebeard's Castle which is a very pessimistic book. Steiner sees us living in a post-culture where we have lost faith in the remedial and enlightening potential of culture. Would you be as pessimistic?

RS: I don't understand the state of mind which could get you to the point of saying that. Therefore, I don't agree with it. But it certainly would be possible. You get that sense of deep despair reading Solzhenitsyn. You get the sense of an enormous and fundamental depression. But I certainly don't have it.

PM: For example, Steiner mentions that men like Hans Frank "who administered the 'final solution' in Eastern Europe were avid connoisseurs and, in some instances, performers of Bach and Mozart." Others read and loved Goethe and Rilke, but it did nothing to mitigate their barbarianism. We have so far assumed, along with Voltaire and Matthew Arnold that culture and education make us better human beings. Steiner feels despair because it has been proven otherwise.

RS: I don't think that's a very profound proof. Because a person may have a rarified sense of value in one area, it doesn't mean he is a fit member of society. Criminals and athletes have a very highly keyed consciousness towards certain areas of excitement or frissons, but they don't necessarily have any more social conscience than a Nazi. It's possible to cultivate extraordinary areas of knowledge and at the same time have no common sense or morality in which to apply them. It's unusual, I suppose, that those particular virtues of liking Bach and Rilke are allied with a kind of brutish mentality, but it has to be possible. It is hard to imagine the type who, after a hard day at the ovens, placates his conscience with the soaring spirit of Bach.

PM: I'm wondering whether it's not all based on a misapprehension of what art's supposed to be about anyway - a kind of Victorian, materialist and progressivist notion that art should improve, which is perhaps not the role of art at all.

RS: I don't think you can ever demonstrate that art improves, it just alters...it alters its focus, it shifts whatever it thinks is radical in its nature. I can't imagine that any 20th century or previous artist has ever painted something as passionate as Giotto's Judas kissing Christ (The Arrest of Christ in the Garden of Olives). There is nothing more passionate in the history of art than that particular piece of unholy action. It's never been done more tellingly, nor will it be. But its equivalent will be - again and again. Perhaps Guernica is a moment of passion in 20th century art which is comparable in its emotional overtone to that particular episode painted by Giotto. Goya's war pictures are another moment of revelation as are the Black Paintings in the Prado or Rembrandt's late portraits.

PM: I'd like to return to the idea of modernism. Joyce is a modernist and Anthony Burgess asserts that Joyce writes for and in the language of the common man, but mixed in with a keen awareness of an ongoing literary tradition. This seems to relate to something you said, namely that art should be accessible.

RS: I can't remember saying that, but I'm sure that art is accessible. The best illustration of that is the recent refutation - if that's what it is - of most New York painting and its vanguard in The Painted Word. That's a very good essay on an art which has become inaccessible in that the reactions of all the people who are supposed to be looking at it are sublimated to a system of ideas which has nothing to do with what is on the wall. I think that art has to be accessible in the sense that it is always a registration of sensitivity of consciousness and it always has a constructed base on which it expands. But when you say it is accessible, I don't think that means it has to be easily understood.

PM: But it should have the potential?

RS: Eventually, yes.

PM: Do you think that art should be self-referential?

RS: What happened in New York was that the literature of art substituted for what purported to be art. It was a curious reversal of the situation. Painting now doesn't have many literary overtones, but there is certainly a deal of literature attached to it.

PM: The earlier the art, the more strong the literary overtones. With hindsight you could say that with Piero painting begins to refer to itself.

RS: Yes. Painting has illustrated the great myths of our culture. It is surprising though how abstract that has become. Consider the apparent impossibility of understanding even the most recent past. Try to imagine what it was like to exist in 1940, let alone 1900 and you rapidly get into an area where you are relying on sociological documentation and snippets of information gleaned from films, novels or photographs - none of which has anything to do with the reality of what it was like to be around at the time. When I look at the art of the early Renaissance, I appreciate it as generally illustrative of Christian mythology. But it has a glorious abstraction in that it is removed from all the social problems existing during its production. It is seen to be dealing with metaphysical ideas more than it probably was. A lot of it was in response to commissions which were presumably directly carried out with some simplicity. But now we look at it with overtones of later knowledge. We don't see it in the way it was made, nor do we understand in a real sense the circumstances that surrounded its making. - except in a conjectural way. That's why I think the redefinition of traditional themes by people like Morandi is always interesting as are the altered values we attribute to its high art survivors. It always tends to cut across barriers which are thought of as avant garde. They often don't exist in the way people think they do.

PM: How do you mean, 'cuts across barriers seen as avant-garde'?

RS: Well, while you've got a situation where there's someone with the obsessions that Morandi had and able to contribute to the value of our culture generally, again it tends to make the pursuit of avant-garde attitudes look rather self-conscious. I would have thought that one way you get to be avant-garde is to so totally seep yourself in our culture that you could then take it to another level. But the Futurists, for instance, were more interested in trying to destroy the base of our culture in order to create what they imagined would be something new which was nothing other than a state where no previous culture existed. Why they thought that would generate something new, I don't know. It's a bit like a scorched earth policy - you're still left with human beings and the problem of reconstruction. You don't really change anything. You just make life a lot more inconvenient and - if the Futurists had had their way - visually less beutiful.

PM: How do you arrive at the proposition of Matisse's greatness?

RS: I'm not very interested in prophecy as a rule, but Gustave Moreau, who was a teacher of Matisse, made the prophetic statement while Matisse was still a student that he was born to simplify. I thin that's what Matisse initially set about doing. If you look at the Matisses which were painted immediately after the Cubist period (in which he really took no part, except for a few flirtations), he went straight from being what the critics would have us believe was the avant-garde of Fauvism through a fairly interesting period of looking at reality. Then after the immense complications of Cubism, which he avoided, he started producing those extraordinary pictures like The Moroccans and The Dance and he was able to celebrate a sort of bourgeois set of values in an extremely new way, in that he always took subjects like la luxe and found new visual equivalents for them. He avoided what I think is an impasse that has led to a lot of excuses for abstraction and remained very attached to the humanistic value of Western art. I think he was at the extremity of an idea when he did that and he chose an uncomfortable way of doing it in adopting a scale of work that became fashionable in the 50's and 60's for its giantism. And again the work that led up to The Piano Lesson - he would have carved out an area for himself even with that work, let alone the continuing obsession with the artist and his model, with that inverted playing with the subject matter of art which he practised all his life and the continual simplifications and focus on colour that began to happen in the 40's leading up to the cut-outs. It's a continual re-investigation of the problem of making visual icons in the profound and generative way that only Titian and few other

artists have been able to do. You don't see that investigative and open-minded attitude in the late Picasso. In Gilot's book there is an interesting account of Matisse being confronted by Picasso late in his life with some reproductions of Jackson Pollock which Picasso maintained were rubbish - and God knows he may be right - but Matisse was prepared to look at them and accept them as an extremity of the expression of painting. Gilot reports him as saying that they may represent a position in painting that he had not been able to get to - whereas Picasso was inclined to dismiss them as puerile. I think that is illustrative of how open-minded Matisse was. One of the most interesting statements in Kramer's book (The Age of the Avant-garde), is an attempt to evaluate the cut-outs in relation to sculpture rather than painting - which is an accute perception of what they were really doing. Even the way they were made - pinned on walls and so on - almost asking with their scale and their simplifications that they be placed in space because they generate such an enormous amount of space anyway, which the closed Nice interiors obviously don't - their fixed to the whole issue of easel painting.

PM: This seems to conform to Spender's comment about avoiding safe positions.

RS: At times in his life, that's what he did. He didn't do it all the time because you can't live on the edge of danger. He chose key moments in his life to step outside the issue of safety and focus on other things. I think it's similar to but a much more remarkable focus than Morandi's, who chose to limit his focus but refine it to an extraordinary degree which is equally acceptable. Matisse was often inclined to be revolutionary, but it's a revolution founded on very strong academic grounds - a soundly based knowledge of what art's about.

TM: Do you think the future necessarily has to be with easel painting?

RS: Yes. I don't think there's another alternative. The beauty of it is that it is the ultimate abstraction...you start off with a white canvas, a metaphysic, a certain ground and it's what you develop from that hypothesis. There's no alternative if you wish to be understood by other men. That's another part of European thought that I'm attracted to - that it is understandable. What I don't find understandable is something like 3000 years of unchanging Egyptian art where things got bigger or smaller, or more focussed on Isis and less on something else. I can't understand that failure to progress - that failure for iconoclasm. It comes down to the fragility of one man's response, one man's gesture in the face of reality. It doesn't have to be easel painting in the sense that it has to be 3 x 4 feet, as long as it is a made object. It offers you enormous opportunity for contemplation.

TM: Do you think it has to have permanence?

RS: It obviously has to last for it to be recognised. The longevity of tokens or icons is assured by their intrinsic intellectual merit. One of the points about Western art tradition is that art objects are fixed - they're fixed in time, they're visually static and their value is always judged by their capacity to involve you again and again despite that fixed and static quality - that's the history of European art: it does nothing to reassure you. Im not interested in men being tied up or serialised photographs.

TM: But you are if it's painted by Caravaggio.

RS: Yes, because the gesture has been frozen. It's immutable and you have to face up to it in absolutely concrete terms. It's conceived as being fit for contemplation.

TM: After Morandi and Matisse, are there any artists you would put in the pantheon?

RS: Gorky would certainly be one. He took abstraction to an extraordinarily strange and lyrical level. His pictures manifest themselves as presences and vulnerabilities of the human spirit in a way I don't altogether understand. There are others who are not as easily seen now. Soutine is an important artist in his capacity to communicate his angst, his problem in making pictures. Picasso's protean gifts are beyond refutation. The 20th century rests entirely between Picasso and Matisse. But it does allow for people with a narrower focus like Morandi, Soutine and possibly Derain. You would probably have to include some of the stranger American artists like Hopper and Milton Avery. It could be that Ernst and Miro are important, but I'd like to be more acquainted with their work. Arp, for instance. I mean, how much does one know about their work? Giacometti...very interesting part of the humanist tradition.

TM: What is the tradition?

RS: Whatever the tradition is, it is something which to me would suggest that anything you construct must have values which are intrinsic to that structure, so much so that they relate organically to the life of the people and to the scale of the position occupied and that they don't need cosmetic additions, because the technology and the whole achievement of our time doesn't have that relationship to reality or art.

TM: Another contrast people are making now would be, for example, with interim buildings, meant to last 30 years. Whereas buildings in Florence or Siena were meant to be as permanent as possible.

RS: That's correct, because they represented such an enormous logistic and human problem in their construction that they encapsulated human values and the technology that was available was such that they have a human scale. As soon as you throw that away and I don't see why you shouldn't throw it away, you have to change your orientation vis a vis those particular things. One of the gross mistakes in architecture and areas of civic responsibility - and I find it a slightly humorous mistake - is this attempt to produce the Renaissance balanced environment of the sculpture placed in relationship to a civic space or building, none of which has any of the values, scale relationship or human possibilities that was offered at the time Michelangelo, Donatello and Ghiberti were working. It is incredible that intelligent architects and clients still persist with this myth that what we have now is the continuation of that tradition. If you want to see the total abortion of it, I think Australia Square is the classic example of a fairly meretricious building with a joke sculpture and joke wall hangings. If you like, the Opera House is an example of something which is self-sufficient. I don't particularly admire it as a building - it's a little too fantastic for my taste - but it makes a statement about what architecture can be; it certainly doesn't need the kuxtaposition of contemporary sculpture or the imposition of bad murals on unsuitable spaces.

PM: I would like to propose that modernism actually is the tradition. That's not just characteristic of the period since 1850, but that modernism as a response to the past in contemporary terms is the tradition of Western art. The Western tradition, vis a vis other traditions, has been a profane tradition - that is, a tradition of empiricism and the challenging of accepted values. This would be true even as far back as pre-Classical Greek art if one looks at the simultaneous technological and intellectual development of pottery and sculpture; with the possible exception of the Dark Ages, there has been a constant development.

RS: Yes, that's correct. With the pantheism of the Greeks you had enormous strides until their political and social collapse. After that you get a very long and slow awakening of Christianity until you reach the sophistication where one man is able to communicate his wisdom to another in a universal sense, which is the Renaissance. Then you immediately set about the destruction of all those previous years of touching and often joyful examples of faith. As we don't share those spiritual values any more, it's often hard to be ultimately sympathetic with them and imagine why they lasted so long. From the Renaissance through Mannerism into Baroque and into the 20th century, you have this extraordinary galloping production. It's a perpetual tradition of modernism.

PM: Good, I'm glad you accept that. Try

this one. I have a little quote here from Max Kozloff, who says: "It would seem that tradition continues to be a living force in an artist only when he was not conscious of it." (Renderings) Would you agree that avant-gardism is self-conscious modernism and that true modernism is unself-conscious?

RS: That's right. I think that everyone who has written about Duchamp from Greenberg through to Hilton Kramer is suggesting more and more that he is a very trivial, fairly unimportant artist who worked on such an edge of an intellectual idea about art that he was unable to contribute. He cut off his capacity to contribute as soon as he stopped painting. Whether you like it or not, you have to contribute in those terms. No matter how you define your position, if you're interested in art, if you're interested in painting, you have to paint pictures and the only advances that redefine that position come out of that act. As soon as you retreat into conceptual or post-object art, you're talking about another ball game. You're talking about a possible contribution, but you're not talking about the pursuit of Western culture in terms that I'm interested in.

PM: It seems to me that conceptualism is nothing more than an extended gesture...

RS: The conceptualist takes what has always been an aspect of anyone making anything - which is the idea central to its making - and then sets about finding ways of not commiting himself to the productive gesture so that all you're left with is the idea. That's ludicrous because that's always been in art anyway. Whether it be the attempt to come to terms with light or form or whatever. Those intellectual ideas and preconceptions have always existed in European art.

PM: I'd like to read you just one more quote. It is a comment by Gustave Courbet: "I have simply wished to base upon a thorough knowledge of tradition the reasoned and independent feeling of my own individuality. To know, so as to be able to do, such was my idea." What is your response to that as a painter?

RS: The sentiments, I think, relate to anyone who's trying to make anything. But the point is that Courbet and people up until that time were able to relate to tradition in the way that they were trained, in the standards of the society they were a part of, and that is no longer available to us. For whatever it is worth, the years from 1850 onwards which everyone conveni ently defines as the beginning of the avant-garde, one of the things that has happened has been the destruction of the academic values which had persisted until that time. Courbet, Delacroix, Gericault - that generation of artists, together with Manet who I see as the last of the great academic artists - I would have liked to have been part of that emotionally reassuring tradition. I feel very much that I am not, although I'm very drawn to it. On the other hand, what that period represents is certain freedoms. One of the freedoms is that you are not expected to be academically competent. Now, how you come to terms with this in making art, I don't know, because I think that is intrinsic to it. Even though, in a case like the early Miro, there appears to be no normal academic virtue, there is a sense of underlying values which I would hold to be eternal - if you wish to use a rather loaded term. One of the things which I think could now be done is a re-definition of those possibilities. I'm talking here in the classical sense. There may be areas of focus that are becoming available to us with the overload of Freudian anxiety and its contradictions and expansions. There may be some way that we can get out of the paper bag we're in at the moment. That's what I believe art is about : the continual tearing open of whatever it is that represents the restrictions - for Courbet it was certain academic and social things; for Millet it was other things; even for Rubens it was being revolutionary within a social context that he couldn't afford to offend and thereby lose his princely position.

from page 4

Among the reasons for this is both the quantity and range of his output. Not only does his work demonstrate a broad thematic and formal range, but it also invariably demonstrates an assurance in handling that broad range.

Hibberd has become established with the public largely through the success of Dimboola and to a lesser extent, A Stretch of the Imagination, described by Margaret Williams as the first Australian classic. His preoccupation with popular theatre has tended to obscure some of his early work which is both excellent in itself and also provides an insight into his current work.

Hibberd is a modernist, and this quality is evident in all his work, particularly in the less well-known prose and poetry. The modernist base is reflected most explicitly in the early plays, such as Who and later Stretch.

In the Introduction to the Currency Press edition of Stretch, Hibberd writes: "...it is imperative to exorcise from thought and sensibility the feral figure of Samuel Beckett. Indeed, Stretch of the Imagination can plausibly be viewed as an indirect riposte to that increasingly taciturn and impacted gent. For Monk O'Neill, though a self-willed exile and part-time misanthrope wrestling obsessively with his own imminent death, is ultimately on the side of growth and human perpetuity."

It is, of course, possible to argue with Hibberd's implication that Beckett is not "on the side of growth and human perpetuity" but it is important to note Hibberd's disclaimer of Beckettian derivation. This is not because he hasn't been influenced by modernist stage writing - he has: Hibberd re-presents a tradition and points up a possibly fatal rift between contemporary man and a tradition of stable and acceptable values (signposted by his penchant for arcane words and turns of phrase and a generative use of language) and his characters are typically seen responding to their environment rather than imposing on it.

However, Hibberd has distinguished himself among contemporary Australian playrights by his understanding of the principles of modernism and by his ability to transmogrify them in his work into an Australian context with characteristic speech and behaviour patterns. Thus, even in his earliest work, Hibberd is far from being a superficial imitator of post-war theatrical devices and any debt he owes to Pinter, Beckett and Brecht would be better understood as an intelligent empathy with characteristically contemporary problems and formally appropriate solutions to those problems.

Just Before the Honeymoon is an early work (1967) and one of his best from that period. It is clearly conceived and tightly realised and has the additional interest of highlighting some of the starting points which have since led to Stretch and A Toast to Melba.

This season, presented by the ICA Theatre Group, will be performed Thursday to Saturday. Performances start at 8.00 pm sharp and latecomers will not be admitted until a break in the programme. Performances will be downstairs and admission is $2.00 or free for members.

JOHN BALDESSARI

JUNE 1 – 18

George Paton Gallery
Melbourne University Union

JUNE 28 – JULY 16

Experimental Art Foundation
169 Payneham Road
St. Peters. Adelaide

JULY 26 – AUGUST 20

Undercroft Gallery
University of Western Australia
Perth

SEPTEMBER 5 – OCTOBER 3

Institute of Modern Art
24 Market Street
Brisbane

OCTOBER 11 – 29

Institute of Contemporary Art
1 Central Street
Sydney

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You may have this magazine posted out to you every three months by becoming a member of the ICA.
By joining, you can also help maintain the ICA as a venue for experiment and as a venue for artists whose work might not be seen but for the existence of the ICA.
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The ICA is a charity and all donations over $2 and membership dues are tax deductible.
You may join by sending your name, address and $10 to: ICA, 1 Central St., Sydney 2000.

RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP...

Membership is still only $10. The ICA Magazine is sent only to financial members, so if you wish to receive this magazine every three months and if your membership has lapsed, you should renew your subscription immediately. We do send out reminders, but if you have overlooked yours, the renewal date is 12 months from the date printed on your membership card.
The financial support from membership has been invaluable over the last 12 months, but we still need your support - not just to maintain our present level of activities, but to try and develop and improve the facilities and services available.

Diego Latella

Exhibition 76 is a development of works all highly influenced by Anthony Caro, Phillip King, David Smith and Ron Robertson-Swann - whether non-presentational or more constructional.

In Caro's work I am attracted to its strength and monumentality. Some pieces in particular have preoccupied me - Side Step, Sun Feast, Orangerie, Cleve and Strip.

Equally important to me is the work of David Smith. In his 34 years of sculptural activity, Smith developed Cubism to previously unrealised limits. Of particular interest to me are his new use of sculptural materials and his working methods.
He abandoned the old sculptural base and displaced the traditional three-dimensional volume and central cone of sculpture in favour of surface, open structure and colour, thus arriving at a new vitality.

The work of Ron Robertson-Swann has also been of importance - his use of a constructive approach, his use of cones, cubes and discs, and the use of balancing together with the slabs which provide a quality of stability.

I find that sculpture is as free as the mind and as complex as life.

November 3-27

BIOGRAPHY

Born in China,
1973-4 - studied etching at East Sydney Tech under Rose Vickers.
1973-4 - studied Window Dressing at Ultimo. Presently working as a Colour Tinter.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1973- Contemporary Art Exhibition.
1974- Farmers RAS Sculpture Exhibition, Blaxland Gallery.
1975- Sculpture Society Members' Selection Show.
1976- Participated in NSW Travelling Art Scholarship.

ONE MAN EXHIBITIONS

1973- Holdsworth Gallery.
1974- Sculpture Centre.
1976- Seymour Centre - outdoor display.

AWARDS

1974- Awarded Second Place - NSW Travelling Art Scholarship.
1975- RAS Show - First Prize.
1975- Camden Arts Festival - First Prize.
1976- RAS, Highly Recommended.