

2009

Waves: the Edith Cowan University art collection

David Bromfield

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ecuworks>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Bromfield, D. (2009). *Waves: the Edith Cowan University art collection*. Mount Lawley, Australia: Edith Cowan University.

This Book is posted at Research Online.
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ecuworks/6797>

Edith Cowan University

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement.
- A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.



WAVES

The Edith Cowan University Art Collection

David Bromfield

Cover illustration:
Marcus Beilby, *In the Shadow of the Bridge* (1995)

The colours used in this design to represent the tones
of a wave are derived from this painting.

WAVES

EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

David Bromfield is an art historian and critic.

His most recent book is

Codes: The Art of Jánis Nedéla 1972–2007.

WAVES

The Edith Cowan University Art Collection

David Bromfield

Edith Cowan University
Perth, Western Australia



Brown Art Consultants
East Perth
Western Australia, 6004
brownart@westnet.com.au



Waves: The Edith Cowan University Art Collection

Researched and written by David Bromfield

Designed and typeset by Pippa Tandy

Produced by Brown Art Consultants on behalf of Edith Cowan University.

Published by Edith Cowan University, 2 Bradford Street, Mt Lawley

© Edith Cowan University, 2009

All rights reserved. Published 2009

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the author and the publishers.

For further information please contact Connie Petrillo, Edith Cowan University Art Collection, 2 Bradford Street, Mt Lawley, WA, 6050.

ISBN 978-0-7298-0673-2

The history of acts is the form they make
toward one another as like waves they break.

Robert Creeley, 'The Story' (c. 1950s), from *The Charm*, 1979

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of the following in the production of *Waves*. The Curator of the Art Collection of Edith Cowan University Connie Petrillo initially approached me with the idea for a broad based introduction to the Collection suitable for the general reader. I wish to thank her for her consistent support throughout the project as its form evolved in response to my research. Professor Clive Barstow, and James Fuller of Corporate Relations at ECU contributed invaluable advice in the development of the project. They were of great help in bringing *Waves* to a successful conclusion.

Pippa Tandy contributed her superb skills as designer and editor to the unfolding and refinement of the book so as to make every work as accessible as possible. She has exercised uncommon patience through its various twists and turns.

Adrian Lambert of Acorn Photographic contributed some excellent photographs at very short notice. John Hartley and his colleagues at GEON Bassendean provided excellent continuous support and a thorough technical overview as the design progressed.

Our greatest debt is of course to the all the artists whose work now constitutes the Collection and all who have cared for it over the years. It has only been possible to include works by a small number of those whose work deserves to be represented.

Waves, however, is essentially an introduction to the Collection. I have no doubt that further exhibitions and publications will explore aspects of the Collection in detail.

David Bromfield

CURATOR'S NOTE

Despite its complex and absorbing history, the Edith Cowan University Art Collection has not yet been represented as a whole in a single publication. I have believed for some years that this should be remedied. This work, *Waves* by Dr David Bromfield is intended to meet that need for a general audience. On behalf of the University I would like to thank Dr Bromfield for accepting my invitation to work on the project and the challenge of writing and producing a history of the Art Collection within the limits of a publication that could not possibly do justice to all its artists and their works. Dr Bromfield has provided valuable insights, highlighted important artworks and also been able to provide a creative and academic thesis to assist a 'reading' of a collection, which has evolved through a complex history and which, at times, has faced an unpredictable future. It has been a pleasure to work with him as his picture of the Collection slowly emerged. I am especially grateful to James Fuller. Without his initial and continuing support I would not have been able to pursue this project to a successful conclusion.

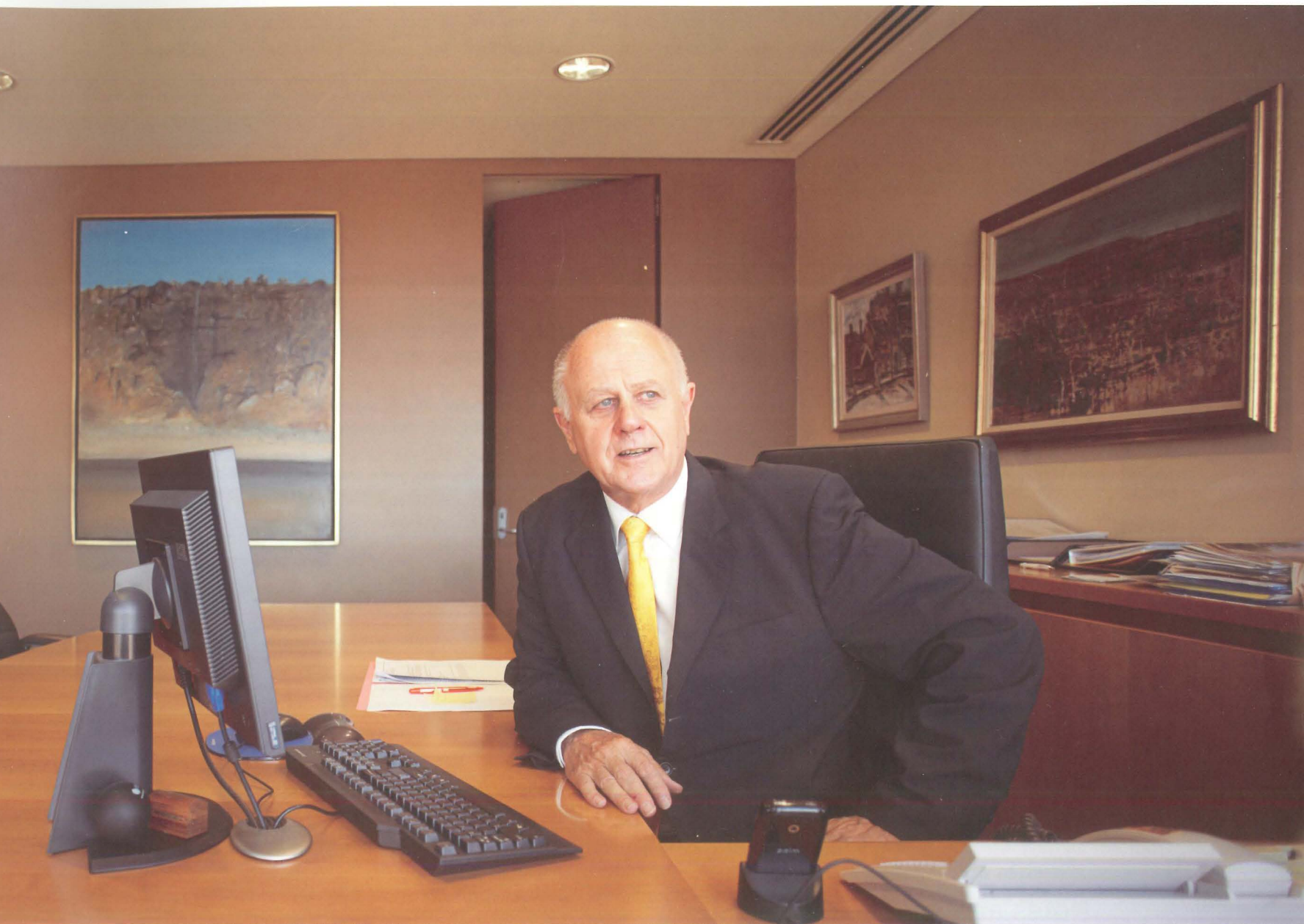
Since its inception, all of the curators have contributed to the richness and diversity of the Art Collection. As the most recent curator I thank each of them for their significant contribution. As the title *Waves* suggests, each of them built on the efforts and projects of the past. They developed touring exhibitions that presented the Art Collection to a broader audience through thematic displays. They sought donations to ensure that the Art Collection could represent as many artists and periods as possible. Above all they have maintained a constant and lively presence of contemporary art across all campuses of the University.

There are many aspects of the Art Collection which cannot be represented here. Nonetheless this book is a significant select overview of seventy years of collecting by several institutions, and an accurate representation of the substance of the Collection. I hope that you enjoy exploring the collection as much as I have over the years.

Connie Petrillo, Curator, The Edith Cowan University Art Collection

CONTENTS

| | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----|
| | Foreword | ix |
|  | Landmarks: an introduction | 1 |
|  | One: Growing together | 7 |
|  | Two: Finding a way | 29 |
|  | Three: Jewels in the crown | 57 |
|  | Four: Shape and space | 79 |
|  | Five: Catching the wave | 99 |
|  | Six: The triumphant years | 119 |
|  | Finale | 181 |
| | Notes and suggested reading | 182 |



FOREWORD

Art in its many forms, as an expression of human creativity, has been with us forever. It is therefore appropriate that universities give high priority to inclusion of art, in a range of forms, in their activities. Here at Edith Cowan University our engagement with art is through our highly regarded Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA) and the School of Communications and Arts, through our extensive Collection of artworks and through education, training and research in the performing, visual and creative arts. This book profiles our extensive Collection of artworks which the University (and precursor institutions) have been accumulating and enjoying now for more than seven decades. The Collection contains artworks by many iconic Australian artists including Sidney Nolan, Rover Thomas, Queenie McKenzie, Howard Taylor, Brett Whitely, Hans Heysen, John Coburn, John Olsen, Turkey Tolson, Fred Williams, Robert Juniper, Guy Grey-Smith and Arthur Boyd.

There are many other artists, some of whom are at formative stages of their careers and others who will be immediately recognisable. Since the ECU Art Collection is so diverse and rich, this book represents only a very small sample of our Collection. The ECU Collection is displayed prominently throughout our three campuses (at Bunbury, Joondalup and Mt Lawley) and is intended to be a source of inspiration and enjoyment for our students, staff and visitors. The University also loans a number of our significant artworks to local and national exhibitions and has regularly mounted exhibitions for display on-campus and for touring throughout Western Australia and indeed, throughout Australia.

In writing this foreword I am delighted to recognise the extraordinary generosity of donors and supporters of the ECU Collection. Their gifts have made it possible for the University to assemble over the years a marvellous collection of Australian art with an appropriate emphasis on Western Australian and Indigenous art. I also acknowledge the fine work of our curators over the years including Connie Petrillo, who provided the inspiration and drive to create this excellent book. I do hope that this profile of the ECU Art Collection stimulates and supports your interest and appreciation of this very long-lived form of expression of human creativity.

Professor Kerry O. Cox, Vice-Chancellor, Edith Cowan University.



LANDMARKS
an introduction



Lapsley, *Old Mill at South Perth Point* (1917)

Landmarks

This book is about a Collection that has barely begun. Collections of artworks grow together over time, through ambition, generosity, learning and good fortune. Public collections also face an inevitable politics, the continual need to restate the reasons for their existence to a new generation, to re-inscribe the memories and experience that their artworks carry with them. Over time the collection will become a landscape, a pattern of objects and events that speaks to the viewer and the community as a whole, whenever they are displayed.

The essay here offered constitutes an early exploration of the emerging landscape formed by the Collection of Edith Cowan University, through a critical engagement that charts some of its major landmarks in the context of the Collection as a whole, its history and the various uses made of art in Western Australia. In a sense it is an attempt to map the outcome of cultural acts as complex and multi-dimensional as the waves in Marcus Beilby's painting. It is a history of sorts, and a narrative of sorts.

This Collection has only existed as single entity for just over three decades at the most, even in the visionary imagination of its founders. It was in 1981 that the Western Australian College of Advanced Education, the forerunner of Edith Cowan University, came into being from the merger of a number of separate colleges. In 1984 David Hough became the curator of the WACAE collection with the task of bringing together the works of art then owned by its various constituent colleges. Three decades is scarcely enough time for an art collection to grow to maturity, to find its unique place in the heart of the community and the world at large. Three centuries might just do it. That is why universities, our longest lasting institutions, are the best places for such collections.

The artworks that came together in the initial collection were almost all originally acquired by several separate institutions with the intention, or at least the hope that they would, first of all, be of educational value, rather than for their inherent worth as works of art. This is, and always has been, the worst way to begin any collection, public or private, especially if one hopes that students and the community may learn from it. Only excellence and delight can persuade anyone that art is worth even a little of their valuable time. Art acquired to illustrate some point will soon become pointless. Works bought as 'good examples' are likely to end their days as bad jokes.

From the beginning, the common notion of art in Western Australia took for granted the value of art as a means of self-improvement. Education, not inspiration, was the *raison d'être* for art here. The watercolour landscapes and local scenes that form the bulk of the early acquisitions emerged as a result of similar worthy sentiments, which could be found uniquely in Western Australia. Elsewhere in the Federation, excellence and delight were all the rage but here the artist was to be a genteel amateur, with a mission for self-improvement and a minor talent to amuse.

There is, however, one early work in the Collection that points to other reasons for engaging with art, way beyond worthiness. It is *Old Mill at South Perth Point* (1917), by Lapsley. An inscription on the back informs us that it was owned by Edith Cowan herself: "Given to me Xmas 1920—by Rosie—E. D. Cowan." The work, once owned by Edith Cowan, offers an opportunity to explore several ways in which art can be enjoyably engaged.

First we should note that the work was a gift and is therefore located in private memory. It is also a depiction of a familiar and popular sight of the times, the Old Mill at South Perth, which is still to be seen today. Several other artists are known to have treated the same subject, including George Pitt Morison in a water colour, and A.B. Webb, whose lithograph shows the massive building from a lower and much closer viewpoint, screened to the left by a rambling leafless tree.

The decaying brick mill tower, its lower half clothed with an irregular bulging outer circuit of wooden beams, was therefore an icon of the history of Perth, an early marker of civilisation and progress, lodged in public experience and memory. It is striking and a little surprising that a society as dedicated to 'progress' as that of early twentieth century Perth should have been fascinated by the artistic possibilities of the romantic ruin. Certainly contemporary Perth has

little or no respect for the heritage of its built environment. Perhaps it was the very absence of ruins, the lack of any evidence of historic presence that led artists to co-opt what remains there were, however recent.

Lapsley's version carries both private and public significance and unites them in one's experience of it as a work of art. It is not a great work nor is it a 'good example' but it is a delightful and slightly fantastic composition. The mill and the building that clusters close to it are set solidly to the right. The pattern of trees over the cottage to the left, render it a half-glimpsed token of former habitation, worthy of those familiar English masters of the bucolic, Morland and Julius Caesar Ibbetson. One wonders if this particular vision of English country life, as transported to Perth, struck a chord with Edith Cowan and if so what this might tell us about her sensibility and temperament, and more generally about the ways in which art was valued here.

The mill appears isolated in the landscape, closed in by the curved red dirt track to the lower left and by the harshly-lit sky of fading blue with grey clouds edged with streaks of sun. Lapsley's pinkish gold palette also suggests something slightly fantastic, as if the mill were a stage set for some unknown drama, yet another indication as to how Cowan and others might have understood themselves and their times. The painting was a Christmas gift; perhaps it was also painted for the season, its slightly ruddy tints a reminder of winter sunsets 'back home'.

It might be thought that a private relationship to a work of art such as this can have nothing to do with the possible connection one might have with a work in a public collection, but in fact it is often very similar. One can delight in a work in exactly the same way; in addition one can become part of a dialogue around it and other works. This is the virtue of a university collection. A work of art can become a landmark in one's life. One might first delight in it as a young student then revisit it many years later after all kinds of experience. These possibilities are open to everyone in the University community. Works are also the outcome of human action. As Creeley observed, our actions come together to change the world and art is an essential part of this action, a way to joy, liberty, freedom of knowledge and action.

This essay is, in part, an attempt to explore the patterns and purposes of the University Collection, to describe the many ways in which the experience of artworks over time can contribute to successful learning of all kinds. The Collection is now at a crucial period in its development when excellence and delight will rightfully become the chief reasons for its existence. All the works we have selected for discussion are both excellent and delightful. The University has every reason to take pride in its Collection and the possibilities it offers.



Performing Arts Collection (1)

William Hogarth (1697–1764), *The Beggar's Opera* (engraving; 1728)

The University Collection was formed from the collections of several separate colleges which contained specialist collections relevant to their different teaching interests. These passed through a number of hands, each with special interests. It is not possible to provide detailed accounts of them all, but significant examples from these collections will be shown between chapters of *Waves*. The Theatre Collection is one of the most comprehensive.

Hogarth was in the habit of making engravings of his remarkable original paintings of sights of London life in the early eighteenth century. *The Beggar's Opera* commemorates the performance a ballad opera of that title by John Gay in 1728. It premiered at Lincoln's Inn Fields on 28 January 1728, and ran for sixty-two consecutive performances. This was the longest run in the theatre up to that time. The original idea for the opera came from Jonathan Swift, who wrote to Alexander Pope on 30 August, 1716, asking, "what think you, of a Newgate Pastoral among the thieves and whores there?" Their friend, Gay, decided that it would be a satire rather than a pastoral opera.

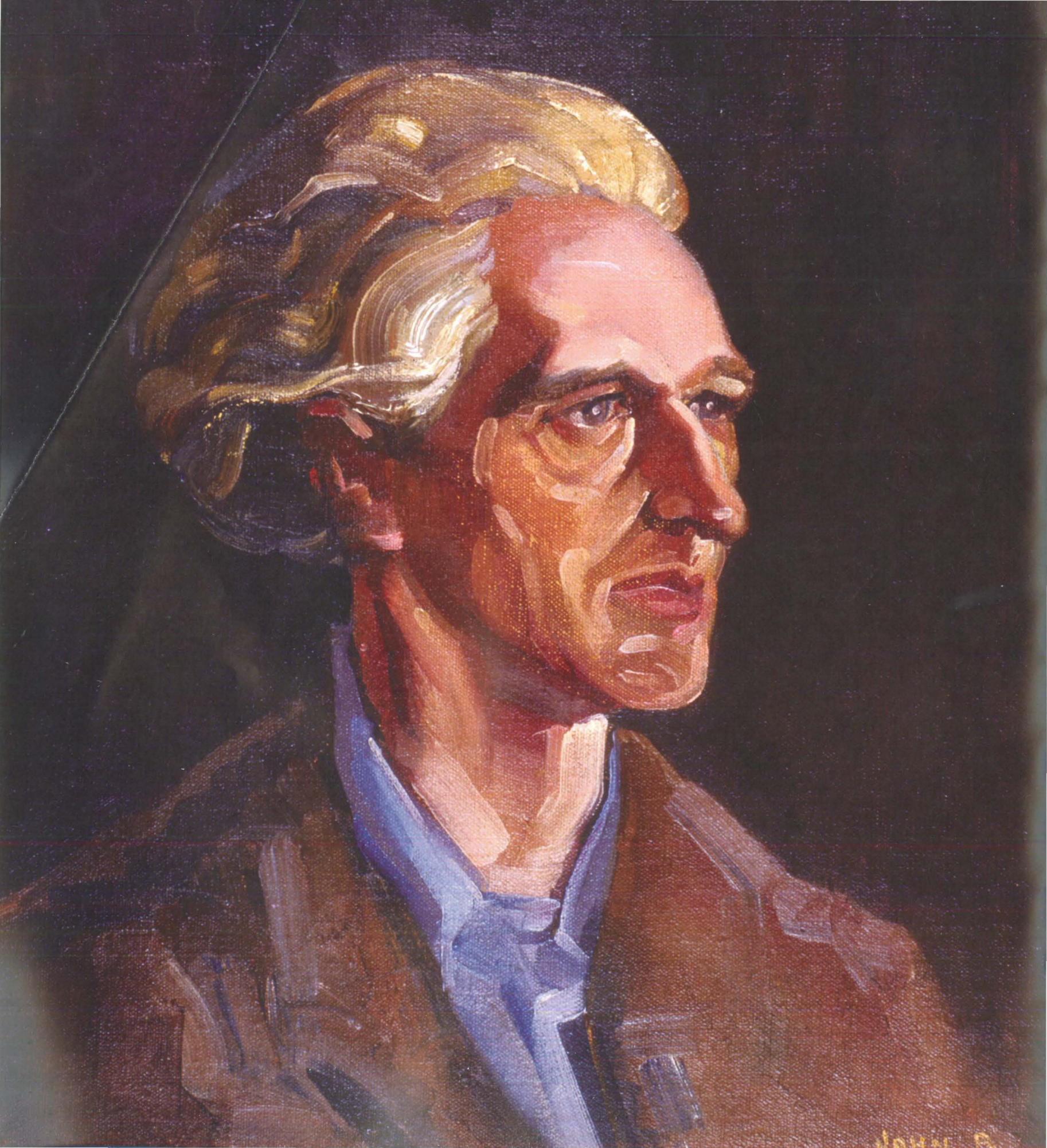


Joseph Harker (1855–1927), *Ravenswood: The Library* (1890)

This is a setting for Act II, Scene Three, of *Ravenswood*, a play by Herman Merivale from the novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*, by Walter Scott. Presented at the Lyceum Theatre, 20 September 1890, by Henry Irving, with Ellen Terry as Lucy Ashton. This study featured in the souvenir programme for the first night along with others by Harker and two other artists, J. Bernard Partridge and Hawes Craven. An inscription on the back of the drawing indicates that the two figures were painted by Sir J. Bernard Partridge.

ONE

Claremont Teachers' College began an art collection intended to enrich teaching and the experience of staff and students in 1947. It consisted almost entirely of the work of local artists. Five staff from Claremont, transferred to the new Graylands College, began a similar collection in 1955. The artistic values which informed the work in both collections were first formed in the early 1930s, with the foundation of the Perth Society of Artists in 1933. A community of local artists slowly formed around the colleges.



Growing Together

The Edith Cowan University Collection contains a few rare reminders of the unique origins of art in Western Australia. One is a small sketch portrait of a prematurely aging man around fifty years of age made by an artist almost two decades his junior. It is clear that the subject is also an artist, or at least a bohemian. His striking long hair is most unusual for the mid 1930s when this painting was made.¹

He is A.B. Webb (1887–1944), the nearest thing to an all-round artist to have worked in Western Australia to that date. In the 1920s, Webb had settled in Nedlands, where he undertook commercial design and made the remarkable watercolours and woodblock prints of views of the Swan River and its environs for which he is best remembered. He succeeded James Linton as head of the Art Department of Perth Technical College (Perth Tech) in 1932 but resigned in 1934 as a result of ill health. In 1936, when it is likely that this portrait was made, he had founded the A.B. Webb School of Art which operated until his death.

For John Brackenreg (1905–1986), who made the portrait, Webb represented the only idea of the complete artist available. He painted Webb quickly, with brusque dynamic strokes and broad schematic lighting that stress his angular features and visionary gaze. The clearly separated tonal sequences across them suggest that this is more of a spontaneous sketch than a finished work, as does the turn of the head to the right. This way of painting, by using separate areas of carefully balanced flat tones, was then regarded in Perth as the most up-to-date method of painting. Perth was not to see modern art until the late 1950s.

Brackenreg became an influential figure in the development of Western Australian art. He ran his own commercial gallery, Australian Arts, in Pastoral House on St George's Terrace. He had been a key figure in the opening of the Newspaper House Gallery, also on the Terrace in the old West Australian Newspapers building. He was exhibition manager and honorary secretary of the Perth Society of Artists until he moved to Sydney in 1938. This was the key venue for local art until the mid 1950s. Brackenreg helped to shape local taste in the visual arts by inviting Elioth Gruner, Robert Jackson and other well-known landscape artists from the eastern states for sketching and painting tours, in particular of the South West. Their work was then shown in his gallery.²

Brackenreg also persuaded Hans Heysen (1877–1968), and other well known artists with national reputations, to become exhibiting members of the Perth Society. To this day Heysen is held in special regard by Western Australian collectors. It is likely that some, if not all the group of works of his that have found their way into the University Collection, via the Churchlands Teaching College and elsewhere, entered the state through the Society's annual shows or from Brackenreg's gallery.

During his long career Heysen brought a detailed and resourceful knowledge of European landscape conventions to bear on the Australian landscape to form his unique antipodean version of the pastoral. He was especially attached to the Dutch manner. His breezy early oil sketch, *Holland Landscape* (1901), with its broad blocky treatment of the wind-driven clouds in a high sky overarching a landscape of flat fields and small settlements quilted with patterns of sunlight and shadow, irresistibly invokes the work of the seventeenth century Dutch landscape painter, Jakob van Ruisdael.

Heysen is best known for his compositions of groups of trees in bright light, such as the fine watercolour *Ambleside* (1941). It is a typical composition of massive eucalypts leaning towards each other in the foreground. Their trunks have shed almost all their bark to provide a surface that can both reflect the sunlight from the brilliant blue sky to be glimpsed between their branches, and pick up the seductive irregular curves of their purple and blue shadows as they fall across the flesh-like timber. One trunk rhymes beautifully against another. Sheep graze between them on the valley's dry foliage. Their rounded woolly backs fade through a diminishing perspective across to the hazy golden grey and brown eucalypt tones of the wood on the far hillside. A soft grey charcoal and gouache drawing, *Gums by Moonlight* (1918), is a



Hans Heysen, *Ambleside* (1941)

reminder that Heysen was master of all kinds of atmospheric lighting. The silver glow that radiates over the surface of the paper seems to exist independently of the trunks and foliage that crowd across it.

Heysen's etchings invoke the same pioneer pastoral. In *Gums and Sheep* (nd), he constructs the vertical mass of a huge eucalypt from a tangle of engraved lines. No doubt he elaborated on the example of Rembrandt, whose etchings of trees also emerge from bundles of rhythmical marks. Sheep busy themselves in the vegetation at the foot of the trees, half lost in its line and dwarfed by its bulk.

Heysen occasionally allows his eucalypts to embrace human habitation in the manner of the German romantic painters of the nineteenth century, most notably Friedrich. In *Hahndorf Cottage and Bake-oven* (nd), the roof leaves and half-timbered walls of the upper half of the building sink in a massive wedge of wood and vegetation. The irregular folded rhythms of the timber fence that laps in and around it suggest a timeless human presence locked forever in the natural world. It is a unique illusion strikingly similar to the view of South Perth Mill once owned by Edith Cowan.

The University Collection also contains an aquatint view of *Perth* (1921), by Henri van Raalte (1881–1929) that was received from the Claremont Teachers' College. Bryant McDiven thought this may have been the first work to be acquired by the College in the early 1950s. The view of the city across the River Swan from King's Park is framed between two ranks of eucalypts which lean in above it so as to form a bower in which the city seems to nestle. Van Raalte was a fine printmaker who spent some years producing prints showing views of Perth and the South West. Although he lacked his fellow South Australian Heysen's instinct for the human mystery to be found in the shifting light and shade of any landscape, as a printmaker, his eye for detail, texture and topographic structure was second to none.³

The 'historicised' urban vision of Van Raalte's *Perth* adds further to the sensibility that is indicated by Edith Cowan's painting, a devoutly desired sense of permanence, a human presence born from a pioneer pastoral, in which artistic skill and imagination seeks to overcome the all-pervasive sense of impermanence in the youngest state in the Federation.

The University Collection contains a work by the Western Australian artist James W. Linton (1869–1947), that was also acquired via Claremont Teachers College. Linton was the head of the Art Department at Perth Tech from 1902 to 1931, when he was succeeded by A.B. Webb. In the 1920s, he developed a unique response to the forms and light of the Western Australian landscape. His watercolour *South Bunbury* (1926), is typical of many similar late afternoon and sunset landscapes. He invokes the ruddy golden light of early evening with a carefully applied wash of transparent scarlet, balanced against the broad strokes of liquid green which model the forms, silhouettes and the internal shadows of clumps of trees, spaced along a dirt road. A distant hut to the left, little more than flat planes of grey and a pile of firewood, a fence and a half-glimpsed chimney framed by leaves to the right, link this early twilight moment to a sense of human existence through time. The deep ruts on the empty road contribute a paradoxical but powerful sense of habitation.

As we shall see, the University Collection was not to achieve a recognisable identity until the 1980s. From the post-war era until then, artworks, such as the group by Heysen and others discussed above, were acquired sporadically by the educational institutions that were later to become part of the Edith Cowan University, as and when individual teachers or administrators judged this to be a useful thing for themselves or their students. Nonetheless it is possible to use them to come to terms with the notion of art and artists that prevailed in Western Australia up to the end of the 1950s and to appreciate the limits of this sensibility and the limits that were thus set on any attempt to acquire works for educational or other purposes.

From the late 1940s onwards, a number of artists developed various possibilities of the landscape sensibility that emerged as a result of the work of Brackenreg and the Perth Society of Artists. Several of their works have made their way to the University Collection.

By 1946 when he painted *Spring Time* (1946), Harald Vike (1906–1987) had, more or less, abandoned the modernism which flourished briefly



Hans Heysen, *Gums by Moonlight* (1918); *Holland Landscape* (1901); *Hahndorf Cottage and Bake-oven* (nd)





James W Linton, *South Bunbury* (1926)

Opposite: Henri Van Raalte, *Perth* (1921)



Harald Vike, *In the Public Library* (1938)



Allon Cook, *Darling Escarpment Landscape* (1933); *Australian Bush* (nd)

in Perth in the mid-1930s. He had just moved to Melbourne, where he developed a version of post-impressionism that he associated with the social realism that he had espoused during the modernist years in Perth. *Spring Time* is a Melbourne outer suburban landscape probably painted outdoors, at the site, so as to allow the artist to match the colours before him with broad flat strokes of oil paint.

Spring Time is not too dissimilar to the early paintings of Parisian suburbs by Vincent Van Gogh. It too links post-impressionist technique to a strong social symbolism. A sludgy creek or canal winds through a group of allotments to one of the last houses on the fringe of the city. Vike captures its dull greasy polluted surface movement with a few masterful strokes. Two trees to the right of it explode with pinkish white blossoms. Smoke rises to the threatening sky from vegetation being burnt off in a field to the left of the water. Dirty, brownish-grey clouds shed rain, indicated by bars of thick oil paint diagonally slanted from left to right.

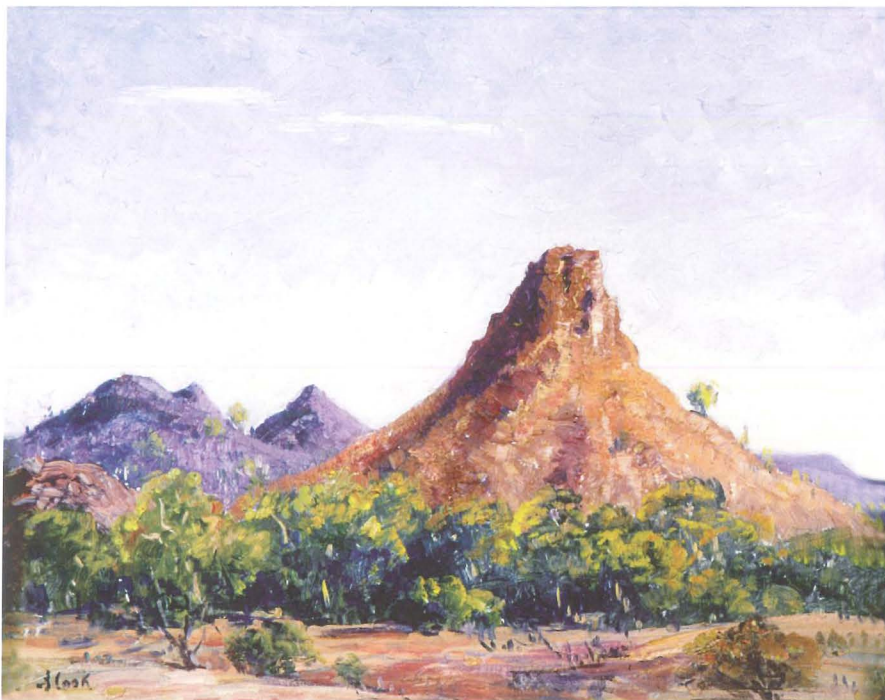
This is the next stage in human occupation of the land after the pioneer pastoral of Heysen and other pre-war landscape painters. Its composition has some formal resemblances to Linton's *South Bunbury*. Vike, however, presents the grim, uncomfortable aspects of life on the fringes of the city. On the horizon, two sets of goalposts reach up to the rainy sky. They mark the limits of an invisible football field stretched along the horizon. This is the only indication that thousands of people live tightly packed in the haze beyond the water and smoke.

In Perth during the 1930s, Vike had studied urban dwellers at close quarters. He made hundreds of drawings in pen and ink and pencil, many of them in the public library in Beaufort Street which was just across from his flat in the then Trades Hall. Vike combined his commitment to artistic modernism with a social activism born in the Depression. The library provided a refuge for many of the unemployed. A sketch, *In the Public Library* (1938), arrived in the University Collection from Claremont Teachers' College. It shows a group of late middle-aged men dressed with the formal respectability of the day. Vike has observed the figure on the right holding a newspaper in great detail. The crumpled suit, the glasses and the slightly battered hat suggest a long period of genteel poverty.

While Vike only spent a decade in Perth, landscape painter Allon Cook (1907–1971) lived his whole life in Western Australia. *Darling Escarpment Landscape* (1933) is the earliest of his works in the University Collection. It was originally part of the Churchlands collection. The Darlington hills were to become a familiar subject for many painters in the post-war period. One generation of artists was to make them its home. This image, however, shows hills empty of all habitation with the view down to



Harald Vike, *Spring Time* (1946)



Allon Cook, *Bungarra Hill* (1960)



Cyril Lander, *Early Morning Murray Street* (nd)

the Swan Valley, glowing in the midday sunlight. The rising slope of the facing hill is bathed in blue shadow from the curved tops and left sides of the trees which cover it. It rises above their shade to catch the light in a series of irregularly patterned shapes of light green. Cook develops the foreground, distance and bright sky using the same familiar principles of light and dark contrast, carried in shapes that, despite their imprecise rounded silhouettes, convey a surprisingly accurate impression of the hills landscape.

Cook maintained the same style throughout his long career. His *Australian Bush* (nd) features a group of large grasstrees stretched across a small section of a ridge in the hills. Again his soft irregular brushwork echoes the pattern of sunlight as it is scattered by the ungainly 'primitive plants.' *Bungarra Hill* (1960) is the most recent of Cook's works in the Collection. By the sixties he had moved beyond the hills to paint desert landscapes filled with red oxide under bright blue skies. It was acquired directly from the artist for the Graylands College collection and from there arrived in the University Collection. Cook was by no means a great artist. Nonetheless he succeeded in pursuing the project of depicting the local landscape begun by Brackenreg and others in the 1930s.

Another member of the Perth Society of Artists, Cyril Lander (1892-1983), carried on the local watercolour tradition which had developed in the thirties. *Early Morning Murray Street* (nd) is typical of the urban studies that many members produced as they observed the slow modernisation of the city. Apart from the brightly lit cliff of harbourside buildings, it shows a parked car and a tram. It came originally from Claremont Teachers' College.

His *Winter Sky* (1959) is a magnificently gloomy study of a winter's day across the Swan river towards East Perth. It came originally from Graylands College. The cylindrical structure in



Cyril Lander, *Winter Sky* (1959)



Rent well

silver

Back top
rust old

green

rust
to hull
& rigging

Frank Norton

Bunbury 61

blue star caps

the centre is the old gasometer which dominated the area until the 1980s. The pools of water in the foreground are represented by untouched white paper. It is the subtle manipulation of the edges of each wash which surrounds them that convinces the viewer that this is indeed water. Lander's intuitive handling of the liquid dark-grey watercolour is superb. He allows it to pool in darker areas where shadows are required or to break up into thin streaks to indicate light and threatening rain in the clouds.

Lander restored furniture to fund his art work, following the common pattern of the older generation of artists, who lived through various forms of craftwork. By the early sixties this was to change. Commercial galleries became more common, beginning with the highly influential Skinner Galleries in 1959. Many committed artists found employment in college teaching or as curators in public institutions. It was this group, particularly the teachers, who began the process of buying art for their institutions, which was eventually to lead to the University Collection.

Frank Norton (1916-1983) was an excellent marine painter. He was an official war artist with the RAN and the RAAF during World War II. In 1958 he was appointed director of the Art Gallery of Western Australia after a long period teaching at East Sydney Technical College. At that time it was not considered unusual for him to have a studio set up in his office, where he worked regularly on his paintings of Fremantle and other marine subjects.

His watercolour and ink study, *Bunbury Harbour* (1961), however, was done on the spot. It shows a view of some refuelling tanks and silos next to a line of coastal shipping, beyond the ridge of a large dune and a dry creek bed. It is clearly a study for a finished painting as the artist has left a number of notes about colour in the foreground washes.

Norton's fascination with harbours and other industrial landscapes was shared by many of his generation. The impact of human activity on the land, which was rapidly changing the landscape as a subject for art, fascinated them.

When Elizabeth Durack (1915-2000) painted *Golden Wedding* (1947), she was already recording a relationship to the land that was rapidly passing. In 1981 she told Patrick Hutchings:

The characters in *Golden Wedding* are old and had grown old in a life that was anything but golden. . . I was at Ellendale Station in the West Kimberleys—Mr and Mrs Bell-Blay sat very patiently while I made the drawings for this painting—they wanted me to 'get' them on their Golden Wedding Day. . . It was October—hot and dry—their galvanised iron dwelling an oven—the red earth and the boab tree through the open door formed a sharp rectangle between their shoulders—just off centre of this hard geometric composition—there was no gold anywhere—except the bond between them through all the years.⁴

Indeed the work itself seems to have been remade in later years as the artist attempted to accommodate to the more contemporary vision of the younger generation.

The Collection holds a group of works by two of the most important members of the Perth Society of Artists, Allan W. Baker (1921-2004), and Bryant McDiven (b. 1923).

Baker had been a curator at the Art Gallery of Western Australia. In the mid-1960s, he was appointed Curator of Pictures at the University of Western Australia. In both roles he was deeply committed to art education. As a painter he concentrated on images of labour in various contexts. His choice of subjects included beggars, stockmen, fishermen, miners and children.⁵

Like Harald Vike and other early modernists, he associated modern art with socialist and communitarian ideals. His modernism therefore was always linked



Elizabeth Durack, *Golden Wedding* (1947)

1958