Edith Cowan University

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to the notion of realism, even perhaps socialist realism, a term that has been unjustly derided over the years. His working method began with almost academic studies, often in brown tones reminiscent of the great nineteenth century realists, such as Courbet—the first artists to search for a poetics of contemporary labour. He then transposed these into the vocabulary and rhetoric of modernity best represented at that time by the post-war work of Picasso. Baker was a great traveller and may well have seen some of this at first hand. His Fisherman (1965), was originally bought for the Graylands collection from the artist. In 2001 he commented:

My interest in painting has been about people in their environment, and Fisherman was inspired by the fishermen mending their nets in Fremantle. This more abstracted version followed the more realist image.\(^6\)

The figure of the fisherman is posed so as to emphasise his labour. His legs are spread out across the lower half of the canvas. Baker makes compelling use of the curves of the net as it hangs between the fisherman’s upturned feet. The rapidly foreshortened perspective of the figure focusses on the relatively tiny gesture of his hands as he mends a small break in the net, his face tilted downward in concentration. Fisherman is a perfect summary of the monumental humanity of labour; endless small, often precise acts add up to the great achievements of civilisation. The forms of Fisherman have much in common with those to be found in Picasso’s Night Fishing at Antibes (1939), and related paintings which were widely exhibited and publicised in the post-war period.

The University Collection also holds a number of studies of asbestos miners also made by Baker in the mid-1960s. They mark the beginning of his long fascination with the subject. He was still making paintings of miners in the mid-1990s. In Blue Asbestos Miners (1964), Baker makes full use of the unusual medium of oil on paper. This allows him an extremely responsive luminous technique that simultaneously retains the hard edges and sharp perspectives of the machine-carved landscape in which he sets his heroic drillers. The Driller Wittenoom (1965), shows a very different approach to figure drawing. The blocky charcoal outlines of the squatting figure are reminiscent of some work by Henry Moore. It is a real sculptor’s drawing, remarkably so for a painter. The pages of a journal that Baker kept at Wittenoom are even more like Moore’s drawings of miners and of some of his less surreal war-time studies of the London Underground. The volume of the figure in action in an enclosed space has always been a challenge of both observation and expression for the artist, one that Baker’s notes indicate that he was eager to take up.

Bryant McDiven was neither a modernist nor a socialist in the manner of Allan Baker, yet he too was touched by the all-pervasive sense of the modern as it slowly appeared all around him. One of the earliest works by him in the University Collection is a watercolour, Quarry Dust (1953). He gave this to the Graylands collection in 1955 while he was lecturing at Claremont. His earliest works are small tree and pool watercolour studies very much in the manner of Linton or Webb. Quarry Dust, however, is different. It shows a downward view on a series of open wood-framed buildings. They are to the right of a road that descends to the rocky rift of the quarry. The entire painting is an exercise in warm and cold greys and hard edges, straight or rounded. The open volumes framed in timbers across the centre of the picture plane draw one’s gaze ever deeper into the stony valley. The jagged lines of human occupation seem to have blasted all the sweetness from nature.

McDiven remained highly aware of this tension between the comfort of the natural world and the harsh abrasive necessities of human existence throughout his artistic career. His best known painting, Narrows Bridge (1959), is also in the University Collection. He originally donated it to the Graylands collection the year that it was painted. In 2001 McDiven remarked that although the construction of the Narrows Bridge was a thrilling technical accomplishment, it was accompanied by the loss of some natural beauty.

This painting was a celebration of an event unique to Western Australia. It was an event which heralded a major change to the way that the public of Western Australia perceived and used its capital city. It was a time of great unhappiness for many people because, although it united two major sections of the metropolitan area, the Narrows Bridge project involved the loss of a beautiful section of the Swan River. The Narrows Bridge was a man-made object of great beauty and represented a significant technological achievement in the use of stressed concrete construction—an innovation for Western Australia. The whole project, whether we liked it or not, brought profound changes to Perth and rocketed Western Australia into the second half of the twentieth century.\(^7\)

He thought that the modernistic nature of his subject, at least for Perth, formed a stepping stone to his subsequent painting, of which the University Collection holds some good examples. It is difficult, however, to follow the relationship between the Narrows Bridge and a painting such as Before Then (1969). Its bleak hillsides bearing fragile classical ruins with little structural logic are more closely aligned to the surrealism of James Gleeson.
Bryant McDiven, *Quarry Dust* (1953)
Narrows Bridge itself appears to have a completely different source, the views of the Seine at Argenteuil, and sites close by, painted by the impressionist Claude Monet in the 1870s. A number of these show a yacht in full sail close under the arches of a newly built bridge, in this case a railway bridge.

McDiven's choice of viewpoint and motif in Narrows Bridge is an unusual one. He appears to have selected the view from the South Perth bank of the river so as to include references to King's Park and the city beyond. This low, relatively intimate standpoint is characteristic of Monet's views of Argenteuil, as is the position of the yacht. It is not, however, typical of the available images of the Narrows which are nearly all viewed from above, beginning with the well known future fantasy image, Perth in the Year 2029, which was published in the centenary issue of the Western Mail in 1929.

Like McDiven, Monet was also responding to the rapid modernisation of his city, Paris. McDiven probably responded at an intuitive level to the French master's motifs. He had no opportunity, however, to appreciate the technique which accompanied them. Instead he used a great deal of heavy impasto to symbolise, rather than to represent, light falling across massive slabs of concrete. The very clouds seem hard and heavy.

McDiven's greatest significance for the University Collection lies in his enthusiastic support for the acquisition of works of art by the institutions in which he worked as a teacher, first between 1951 and 1958 as a lecturer at Claremont College, then from 1959 to 1969, as Head of Art and Craft at Graylands College.

At that time all educational funds were supplied through requisitions which left no opportunity to create resources for the acquisition of artworks. As he said in 1992, however, McDiven was able:

to work all kinds of rackets disguising art purchases as official requisitions. At different times I acquired some reproductions, limited edition prints, ceramic and glass objects and various woven and hand printed fabrics as part of the annual requisition. These first art works were identified as teaching aids. I often bought works with my personal funds and worried about a refund later which I usually got but not always.\(^8\)

Over time Graylands College got used to the idea that purchases of artworks were of great value to its students. Perhaps it was McDiven's success in persuading his fellow artists to donate or lend their work to the Art Department on a semi-permanent basis that helped to impress the authorities. Among others, Cyril Lander, Allon Cook, Allan Baker, Ernest Philpot and Portia Bennett supplied work. Whilst at Graylands, McDiven was president of the Perth Society of Artists, the same organisation partly founded by John Brackenreg and his colleagues. He was able to make use of his position to encourage his colleagues' generosity to the Graylands collection and other institutions.

In one sense McDiven was a true heir to Brackenreg, as president of the Perth Society and an active advocate for art, at least until the late 1960s. He followed the same general principles, valued craftsmanship and skill, admired genteel professionalism and was committed to versions of realism in art, to the outward observation of the world around one. There can be no doubt that these values came to shape not just the content of the Edith Cowan University Art Collection but also the debates that took place during its formation.

There was, however, another side to McDiven's art life. From 1959 he held five one-man exhibitions at the up-and-coming Skinner Galleries in Malcolm Street. There he mixed with a different group of artists. Some of them were from a younger generation; all of them were well aware of recent developments in contemporary art even if they had no examples to hand in Western Australia. Before he left his post at Graylands, early works by Robert Juniper, Guy Grey-Smith, Brian McKay, Allan Baker and Howard Taylor had made their way into the Graylands collection. Over the years, the complicated evolution of the Collection has allowed it to gather up a number of objects which are of value more for what they reveal about the times in which they were made than simply as artworks.
Bryant McDiven, *Narrows Bridge* (1959)
How Things Were

Two competent watercolours by Rolf Harris (b. 1930), a one-time student at Claremont Teachers College, who later became famous overseas as an entertainer, give a good impression of the kind of work that was encouraged in the Art Department.

*Shipyards* (1950) is a view of an old tugboat beached amongst various pieces of equipment and materials connected with ship repairs. It is a finished sketch made in front of the subject. Harris has followed a traditional mode of watercolour composition in which the subject is in the light, surrounded by shadow. This effect is achieved by overlaying transparent washes until the shadow area becomes dark enough to create the illusion of a veil of deep blue over part of the image. In 2001, Harris remembered making the painting with his friend and later lecturer, Norm Madigan.

I went painting with my friend Norman Madigan, also at Claremont Teachers College at the time, and the shipyards provided a wonderful subject—lots of chaos and great shapes, and lit by blinding West Australian sunshine.\(^9\)

*Shipyards* was bought for the college collection. Twenty years later, left lying around the college, dirty, with its glass cracked, it was found by Norm Madigan, who had become a lecturer. As he wrote to Robert Vallis, he was tempted to keep it.

Recently, in conversation with family and friends, I had told how on a Saturday in 1950, Rolf and I had taken our painting gear down to the docks at Fremantle and we both selected dry dock tugs as subjects. In my usual careful style I copied what was in front of me, while Rolf, in his spirited confident style, went at it, making a picture. Some months later he held an exhibition and the College bought his watercolour of the tugboat.

Twenty years on, I was back in Claremont, Art Education. One day, mucking about in the attic in the tower amongst the dust and filth, I came upon shattered glass and a smashed picture frame. The little picture was undamaged. It was Rolf’s tugboat. It took me back. I imagined getting it re-framed and hanging it alongside my own little effort in our lounge room. I got as far as taking it home but realised I would never be able to look at it without it plainly telling me that it wasn’t mine and I’d pinched it. I took it straight back to College.

Some years later, on the eve of my retirement (1977), I told a friend and colleague of the incident. (No names, no packdrill.) “Take it home!” he urged. “It means much more to you than to anyone here; and nobody’s going to miss it.” I was perhaps even more sorely tempted, but of course the situation hadn’t changed. So that was that! Now of course I’m glad, and very happy that Rolf’s picture is on display to be appreciated and enjoyed.\(^{10}\)

This incident points to the difficulties of maintaining a collection before the adoption of the various college collections by the University. Neglect, temptation and opportunism can easily eat away much of value. Changing tastes can relegate important pieces to obscurity for decades. No doubt some works have vanished without trace. It is vital for a Collection to
continue to reflect its history, otherwise it will become soulless—a few outstanding masterpieces alone in a corridor, with no visible means of support.

Like Shipyards, The Old House Bassendean (nd), also by Harris, was retained by the college as an example of good student work. The suburb of Bassendean was the artist's birthplace. One can imagine that this old house had been a familiar sight from his childhood onwards. This work also appears to be a sketch made on the spot. It is, however, more in the manner of the traditional landscape formula that was central to Western Australian painting from the time of A.B. Webb.

Norm Madigan (b.1917), who had accompanied Harris on his sketching trips, was also an accomplished draftsman with a strong desire to draw people in “natural everyday situations.” He left a group of sketches of some personalities of the Art Department. They too help to provide an impression of the environment in which art was taught in the early fifties. His drawing of the Student Council (1950), now in the University Collection, shows a group of men in suits with Oxford bags and a solitary woman in what appear to be tweeds. Their smiles betray a genial optimism, a conservative desire to fit, to be part of life around. This is confirmed by a sheet of sketches of Student Life (1950). Their art would never be a criticism of life. Bryant McDiven also made caricatures. He enjoyed the challenge of reconciling the personality of the subject with a recognisable likeness. As a student, Ray Montgomery (b.1929), later also a lecturer, made caricatures including one of McDiven. These works also point to a very different idea of a life in art to that of today.
The Western Australian Secondary Teachers' College was founded in Nedlands in 1967. In 1970 another college opened in Mount Lawley. Several artists had returned from Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. All four of the Perth teachers' colleges now had small art collections. They all supported the first generation of local contemporary artists. They brought first-hand knowledge of European modernism and current practice in the UK. Their attempt to find new forms for Western Australian experience challenged the orthodox professionalism of the Perth Society. The Skinner Galleries, Perth's first significant commercial galleries, opened in 1958.
Finding a way

The institutional collections that were to become the University Collection slowly found their feet through the 1960s. Their collecting became accepted, almost a habit. Moreover, it was clearly something to be enjoyed by everyone involved. This was terribly important. The new generation of Western Australian artists had themselves formed a community, a creative network which meshed and overlapped with those who supported institutional collections and the small but growing number of private collectors. It was through this network that a new, and far more generous way of engaging with the visual arts became the norm. The institutional collections benefited greatly from this. The University Collection holds a first-rate group of the early work of the sixties generation.

The new generation were sympathetic with and committed to modernism and, with one exception, to the modernist premises and practices which had developed in Britain between the wars. This is hardly surprising since most of them had been in the UK after working to support the war effort. The two most significant, Guy Grey-Smith and Howard Taylor, were both seconded to the RAF, and spent years as prisoners of war.

The British had been slow to accept European modernism. Consequently it was possible for the critic and philosopher Herbert Read and the artists associated with him and with Circle magazine in the 1930s to propose a systematic view of modern art and an eclectic practical modernity. Read was to lecture in Perth as part of a British Council tour associated with an exhibition of the work of Henry Moore in 1958.

Grey-Smith and the new generation took this eclectic modernity and developed it so as to fulfil their desire to incorporate contemporary Western Australian experience into a modern practice. This usually, though not always, involved the local landscape. It is as if the generation of the sixties had deliberately set out to replace the luminous, often fragile landscapes associated with the watercolourists of the Perth Society of Artists with a robust formal practice, a style in which the abstract eclecticism, and the glowing flat shapes of their oil paintings proposed a tough but lyrical vision of the local land, humanised more by style than subject. This was the step that Bryant McDiven and his colleagues were never able to take. McDiven appreciated the modernity of the Narrows Bridge but could not understand the implication of those forms for the painter’s vision.¹

Guy Grey-Smith (1916–1981) was the most determined and original of the group. It was clear from his return to Perth with his young family in 1947, that he intended to make his life as an artist in the modern sense, a life of absolute commitment to the making of art. In 1945 he had studied at the Chelsea School of Art under Henry Moore and Ceri Richards. Moore influenced him chiefly as an example of how to be a modern artist. Formidably curious and eclectic, he always understood the making of a work of art as problem solving, the product of intuition and experience, informed by a practical logic.

Ceri Richards may have had more direct influence, but initially it was the synthetic modernist vision of painters Paul Nash and Ben Nicholson which most interested Grey-Smith. In 1946, he visited Paris but never directly acknowledged that the work he saw there had a direct influence on his artistic development. The work of Cézanne, however, was frequently discussed, with his approval, in relation to his work. In September 1950 he gave a lecture to the Group on the work of Matisse. In 1953 he embarked on an eighteen month tour of Europe during which he saw a major exhibition of Fauve paintings, including work by Matisse. In 1961 his work was included in the massively influential exhibition, Recent Australian Painting, at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. Brian Robertson, the curator, had visited Perth to see his work.

His Dongara Flats (1950) was originally in the Claremont collection. At first it appears more like a sketch than finished work. It was undoubtedly painted on the spot. In 1965 Grey-Smith described the efforts he made to make it possible for him to respond directly to what he saw before him.
Ten years ago I was very keen to be with nature itself, observing very carefully and recording, as it were, directly on to the canvas; often I used to rig up a kind of cover and work under that, day after day, watching, observing and putting down...  

Each patch of colour across the canvas is made up of one or two extraordinarily spontaneous and varied brushstrokes. The bushes in the lower half of the canvas are composites of such marks. In the foliage of the bush to the left the tracks of the artist's brush can be traced in the relatively thin paint. Each animated mark from deep-brown at the base to a light-emerald where the leaves reflect the sunlight is a direct record of Grey-Smith's reaction to what lay before him, a delirious transcription of a virile sensibility, contained as it were in a tightly controlled formal structure. The long blue horizontal of the sea, wedged below the horizon by dunes to left and right, is as much the product of a series of spontaneous marks as is the foliage. The translucent liquid edge of each overlapping stroke settles the ocean perfectly under dense light-pink of the creamy cloud at the base of the sky.

This rhyming of response and structure runs throughout the canvas. It is held together by Grey-Smith's superb painterly sensibility. Thick or thin, translucent or opaque, placed quickly or slowly, it is the sole source of the vitality, the sense of well-being that radiates consistently from the canvas.

Throughout his career Grey-Smith thought of himself as an artist engineer, a view of the artist advocated in the UK by the constructivist sculptor Naum Gabo and much admired by the Circle Group including, for a time, Henry Moore. The University Collection also holds Tree Dongara (1950), an ink and watercolour study related to Dongara Flats, also from the Churchlands collection.

The energetic lashes of thick and thin ink lines which demark the branches as...
they sway round the open trunk, as if caught in a twisting wind, suggest that the artist may have read Paul Klee's Pedagogic Sketch Book. The curved oval of ink lines smudged on the ground beneath them might have been traced by their tips swinging back and forth for decades. The yellow and black stains and smudges of the sun and its after image as it collides with the fringe of the tree are remarkably reminiscent of Ceri Richards' Cornish studies.

To appreciate the originality of Grey-Smith's insistence that structure and intuition must always inform each other in detail, it is useful to compare Dongara Flats with another work in the Collection, Evening by Ernest Philpot (1906-1985), originally from the Claremont Teachers' College. Philpot, a stalwart of the Perth Society of Artists, was a modernist manqué. His studies of Perth suburbs with their geometric roof patterns and the carefully delineated volumes of his still-lives indicate that he was temperamentally inclined to formal abstraction.

If, however, one studies Evening for a short time it is clear that it remains an exercise in the conventional format for a nocturne, despite its relative formal simplicity. There is a winding receding road and smoke rises from the roof of a cottage that is mostly obscured by the descending curve of a hilly paddock to the right of the road. This enjoyable painting is essentially an attempt to 'modernise' a traditional landscape formula in the manner of a tourist poster or an illustration. Philpot was trained as a signwriter and poster maker. He was a very successful artist with a long run of successful one-man shows. He was fascinated by abstraction. In his 1953 exhibition he explored the idea on his own terms. Even so, he was never able to grasp that abstraction is always more than a sequence of design formulae. It requires the direct imaginative engagement of the artist.

The University Collection owns another work by Philpot, Clumsy Man (1949). This was first exhibited at the
Ernest Philpot, *Evening* (nd)

Ernest Philpot, *Clumsy Man* (1949)
Claude Hotchin galleries in November 1949. It is believed to be one of the earliest acquisitions of the Claremont Teachers' College collection.

The painting shows a blue china milk jug that has smashed to the floor. Large curved pieces of broken china surround a pool of milk. The upper part of the canvas shows the shadow cast by the edge of the table from which it fell and that of a plant in a pot on the table. Philpot delights in the sharp edges, the internal volumes and the curved shadows of the three main sections of the broken vessel. This is the closest that he came to understanding the relationship between structural engineering and abstract painting that so excited Grey-Smith. The abstracted pieces of broken china reveal the design principles of the jug and the intimate relationship of its form to the human requirements without which it would not exist.

There is, needless to say, an anecdote about *Clumsy Man*, which explains its existence in terms of a minor catastrophe in modern living. Philpot accidentally dropped the milk jug and was immediately struck by the outcome. His daughter thought that *Clumsy Man* was the last of his mimetic paintings before he began a journey to total abstraction. If Philpot was only able to recognise the modern in the world by accident, Guy Grey-Smith set out to produce a modern painting that paralleled the procedure and attitudes associated with modern technology. His modernity was an essential part of his practice. He could not have painted without it. The example of one artist in particular, Nicholas de Stael, a friend of Braque and former fauve, helped him to pursue his goal of a totally structured painting. De Stael developed a form of abstraction built up from thick slabs of brightly coloured paint. From the early 1960s Grey-Smith produced paintings that closely resemble De Stael's striking technique. It has been assumed that he first encountered the Belgian artist’s work at that time. He may, however, have been familiar with it at an earlier period. In 1963 he stated:

Nicholas de Stael is a great influence on me, because he is structurally interesting to a painter and basically we are structural engineers if you like—in paint, and that is what interests us about earlier painters.... We look to see how paint has been constructed by those before us.4

Grey-Smith wanted to make paint say what he wanted to say. He sought “enjoyment of expression” in the physical qualities of paint. His work, moreover, was always derived from the Western Australian landscape. It was never a pure abstraction. His relationship to the work of De Stael was, in practice, no different to his relationship to Cézanne and Matisse. They all prompted the realisation of an absolute equivalent in paint to the Western Australian landscape.

The University Collection holds a fine example of Grey-Smith’s later style, *Malimup Headland* (1976), a transcription of a massive rocky cliff at the southern extent of Western Australia. Grey-Smith constructed the rearing rocky slab that lurches out from the left of the painting in sequences of brilliant yellow, orange and red, scraped into solid vertical rectangles. These are built up from several layers of impasto each slightly smaller than the underlying layer so that each rectangle appears to float across its underlying colour. This sparks off a number of painterly events, moments of perception that bring the whole landscape to life.

For instance there is a small rectangle of bright light-blue close to the top of the cliff made by a single downward drag of the knife. There is a larger dark red rectangle immediately below it. This sparks off the contrasting shapes across the cliff. Grey-Smith was also a master of the sudden shift of direction and intensity. The chord of saturated dark blues and blacks in the centre left of *Malimup Headland* clearly parallels the sensation of deep shadow in bright sun, but its odd disjunctive placement also animates the entire image through purely painterly means. Grey-Smith believed that all his paintings were ‘derived directly, really directly from nature, they are realistic in so far as they have a truth to me.’5 This is certainly true of *Malimup Headland*, a rough-hewn landscape reborn as paint.

One of the most important functions of any substantial collection of art works is to make it possible to appreciate the relationship between the work of different artists confronted with a similar range of experiences. The differences between Philpot’s understanding of modernity as a progressively more abstract form of representation and Grey-Smith’s belief that reality itself is constructed in the act of painting are central to the development of art and the audience for art in Western Australia.

The paintings of Elise Blumann (1897–1990) offer a modernist view of the Western Australian landscape that is very different to Grey-Smith’s. Blumann had fled Germany in 1934 with her industrialist husband. They arrived in Perth in 1938, when she began work as an artist. She trained at the Berlin Academy with the German impressionist Max Liebermann after the first world war, and had seen work by nearly all the great masters of early modernism in Der Sturm and other Berlin galleries. In Perth her painting was often described as Expressionist. She strongly objected to this. Her chief influences were the *jugendstijl* artists of her youth and the aesthetic writings of Rainer Maria Rilke, who was for some time secretary to the sculptor Rodin.
Elise Blumann, *Riverside Melaleuca* (1948)
Blumann's modernity was therefore complex and qualified. In essence, however, it was concerned with the vitality of nature and the unique quality of the local landscape. Blumann understood the local fauna in terms of their duration, their ancient origins and unbroken presence in an ancient land. In a letter to the *Melbourne Sun* in 1946, she defined her aims clearly.

Posters aim at catching the eye with a glimpse. A picture wants to be studied better and loved before it can reveal itself to the onlooker. I learned to forget my studied technique and concentrate until my subject revealed itself in clarity and simplicity.

There is a big difference between eliminating details of surface to achieve a poster-like impression and concentrated experience of a subject enabling the portrayal of its essential spirit. Nuances and details can become essential to accentuate sound construction. It should take little time to discover them in my pictures.6

Her best work was done in the late 1940s. It included a long series of views of melaleucas and other trees on the banks of the Swan River, close to her home in Nedlands. One of these, *Riverside Melaleuca* (1948), is in the University Collection; it came originally from the Claremont Teachers’ College.

Blumann thought of the forms of the melaleuca as a direct inscription of the fundamental rhythms of existence into a material form. She interpreted them with bold dark strokes, at once outlines and the central substance of the tree. Complex, knotty entanglements of marks make out the clusters of leaves and the primitive arbitrary connection of branches to trunk. The tree is set in a landscape constructed from chords of dynamic brushstrokes that give each element of the image a life of its own. The glimpse of the river to the left and the sky are presented as sets of independent blue brushstrokes each with an uncompromising vitality. Nonetheless they hang together as moving water and shimmering sky.

Blumann is often linked closely with Guy Grey-Smith and Robert Juniper (b.1929), but this is little more than an inappropriate impression caused by her unique modernist vision of the landscape. Her painting certainly anticipated their work and their spirit but the artistic revelations that she had to offer went largely unheeded.

On the other hand, Robert Juniper, the most successful Western Australian artist, was closely associated with Grey-Smith, together with Tom Gibbons and Brian McKay, through their common membership of the Perth Group, founded by Grey-Smith in 1957, and their common involvement with the Skinner Galleries. While Grey-Smith chose a career independent of the gallery, Juniper became the most important member of the Skinner stable; he too had been in
the UK during and after the war. He had studied at Beckett School of Art. His work was also shown in the epochal Recent Australian Paintings (1961) and in a subsequent exhibition at the Tate Gallery in 1962.

Abstract Cottages (1960) is the earliest of his works in the University Collection. It was originally purchased in 1960 for the Graylands collection. In it Juniper is also attempting to use contemporary painting methods to build his own vision of the Western Australian scene. Unlike Blumann or Grey-Smith, however, he is attracted to the lattice-like space that first originated with Cubism. The cottages at the centre of the canvas have become a set of separate though interconnected planes that fold inwards origami-like so as to make a three-dimensional centre to what is otherwise a gestural abstraction set on a single plane. Juniper's use of dense pinkish-red rectangles to demark the cottage roofs is reminiscent of Grey-Smith; he was never to develop this as a central mannerism in his work, however.

Instead he followed the example of Paul Klee and the requirement for an absolutely flat picture plane that was the fundamental tenet of the New York school. He occasionally remarked in conversation that he was an abstract impressionist. By the 1970s this version of contemporary abstraction had become familiar in Perth. Juniper adapted it to suit his needs for a means to make large scale landscapes of Western Australia. His marks, both drawings and painterly gestures, became incidents within this flat continuity. In 1963 he declared:

My ‘aim’ is to express aesthetically in an evolved and personal language, a pattern of ideas and memories; the haunting remoteness of the West Australian landscape.

His River Valley (1974), which was originally bought from the Skinner Galleries in 1974, is an excellent early example of this way of working. The canvas is initially stained with silver-grey and dark-brown with a central blue section which bleeds into the surrounding grey much as water in a soak permeates the surrounding paddock. Juniper used the process of painting the flow and dispersal of the pigments across cloth to evoke natural processes. He then drew with a thin brush over the stained structure which was still partly wet and added small areas of red pigment. The result was a set of soft gestures and odd collections of what appear to be unknown flora or the wrecked remnants of some metallic human artefact. The land and the structures within it seem to rust together in the dusky evening shade.

Juniper's version of a modern landscape was not motivated by the desire to address some essentially painterly problems along the lines of Blumann or Grey-Smith. Like them, Juniper was fascinated by the physical qualities of paint but his purpose was more poetic, more illustrative. He wanted the paint to vanish into the sensual image for which he aimed. Paint itself was never the prime vehicle for sensuality.
In Erotic Landscape (1978), originally from the Churchlands collection, the silver-blue moonlight screen of the canvas bears a series of lush sensual marks in rich dense paint, coloured flesh-pink and gold. This is the landscape of one's sensual dreams. The dark dancing ink-like blobs which suggest trees in motion are a perfect figure for the merging of consciousness with reality in a sensual half-dream. This is a nocturne of the spirit.

Brian McKay (b.1926), Juniper's colleague in the Perth Group, shared some of his painterly concerns as can be seen in his Greek Form (1965), which was bought for the Graylands collection from the Skinner Galleries in that year. He worked as a graphic designer in Gibneys, Perth, in the 1940s and 50s but then in 1964 he travelled to live in Greece for a year.

McKay too was fascinated by the obdurate presence of the material world but did not look to paint to stand in for the reality around him. It was the worn down surfaces of that world that fascinated him. In a 1979 catalogue essay he commented:

worn marble flagstones, a white-washed wall, the patina on the limbs of a fig tree or the burnished bronze of an ancient copper door—these are the reserves which I carry within my innermost self and in which my imagination flourishes.8

It was the longing for a world filled with the marks of time which had led him to the Greek islands. Greek Form is worked with an overall texture as if the entire image was inscribed on an ancient worn slab of marble. The composition relies on a grid of planes not unlike work from the middle years of Georges Braque, but in this landscape the air is filled with grey dust and the farm buildings are almost indistinguishable from the rocks on which they are set. McKay's work is always concerned in some way with labour, the need to work so as to endure. His technique is always engaged
Brian McKay, Greek Farm (1965)
so as to leave traces of the work he has undertaken making the picture.

After his time in Greece, McKay spent time in London from late 1966, where he was exposed to large scale original works by Joseph Albers, Frank Stella, Ellsworth Kelly and others. This suggested a radical simplification of approach.

The sheer scale of the works had a liberating effect on me and I embarked on a series of large experimental pieces using a combination of pure colour and built-up pigment.\(^9\)

McKay wanted his work to contain, "general and inherent aspects of a phenomenon and not its individual or accidental aspects."\(^10\) *Tetuan* (1969) shows the simplification that he sought. It is a relatively large work so the panels of blue and green and the heaped up whitewashed buildings to the right are sufficiently extensive for the qualities of each surface to read clearly, much in the manner of the abstract works that he admired. McKay had visited Morocco and sketched buildings along the coast. In 2001 he recalled:

This work was inspired by a visit to Morocco in 1968. It was completed in London from colour notations and drawings made in Tetuan, a mediaeval town on the coast some twenty kilometres from Tangier. In many instances a sense of history can be communicated by studying the surface texture and colours of ancient buildings; this painting was a response to such an environment.\(^11\)

McKay was able to work very precisely on the textures of this work because it is painted on board not canvas. The depth of shadow in the green hills and the brown stains and blue grey depths of the city wall are beautifully elaborated.