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the wings, which have more in common with the stabilising crosspieces in a windmill tower than anything aeronautical. In any case, however, it is most unlikely that there is any specific symbolism that can be attached to this creature of Boyd's imagination. One might suggest that it is an angelic avatar, equally equipped to expel us all from paradise as to hover over the death and destruction of a catastrophic flood, but it could never be more than a suggestion.

There is a widely believed legend that Nolan once took Boyd to see an exhibition of contemporary abstract painting and that, on seeing the work, Boyd commented that these were the kind of paintings best viewed with one’s eyes shut. It would be interesting to know whether he had this reaction to the work of John Olsen (b.1928), who often took his exuberant abstraction way past anything attempted by the Heide artists. His abstract landscapes give the character or the experience of place but little of its form or colour. Olsen, however, has always been keenly responsive to the forms and moods of the landscape in a manner not too dissimilar to Boyd.

His *Fallen Trees* (1977), appears at first to be a view downwards onto a forest clearing with leafless trunks, blackened from a bushfire and leaning at extraordinary angles. In fact the ‘clearing’ also has the characteristics of a trunk sawn through and the animate tree forms have all the abstract surreal energy of a painting by Miro. As always with Olsen, the canvas surface does not correlate with any particular viewpoint. It is rather an open field in which any number of incidents might be noted as part of a decorative system. The strikingly articulate curved forms in the upper right-hand corner seem to have less to do with trees and branches, and far more to do with the artist’s decorative impulses, as do the blotches of grey-brown and ochre on the tree trunks, though no doubt they have their origins in peeling bark.
Unlike Olsen, many canvases of Fred Williams (1927-1982) clearly present a view down onto the subject rather than a plane with little or no specific orientation. Williams’ version of the Australian landscape had begun in London in the 1950s when he studied at the Chelsea Art School (1951-55) and at the Central School (1954-56). While there, he worked at Sargent’s framers where he encountered many paintings by Braque and Picasso in which the canvas is treated as a table top turned radically upwards. These were usually still-lives, but Williams adapted the format for the landscape and with it the rules of representation, the cubist logic with which forms were to be arranged across the canvas.\(^8\)

This brilliant strategy enabled him to become the first white Australian artist to engage the humdrum, often repetitive nature of what appeared to be a territory unmarked by human use and habitation and to reveal within it an infinite variety of colour and sensation. Like Olsen, he conceived of this sensation as best represented by a microstructure of careful moderated brushmarks, aggregate gestures, many of which half covered those beneath so as to produce a dense visual experience. If Boyd had inherited and grappled with the legacy of Streeton, Williams was the true heir of Tom Roberts, the one Heidelberg school artist who sought to discover a visual structure within the Australian bush through a highly disciplined system of broad brushmarks in discrete tones.

Williams’ *Lal Lal Falls* (1977) entered the University Collection via the Churchlands collection which acquired it from his lifetime dealer Rudy Komon. It is a relatively early small work in the series of large paintings, including some polyptychs and lithographs, which Williams produced of the same subject.

The Lal Lal Falls are a spectacular system of waterfalls near Ballarat, Victoria. They are situated within the traditional country of the Wathawurrung people and have been a significant Indigenous sacred site for thousands of years, one of several recorded sites of Bundjil, the Kulin peoples’ creator spirit. They became a European tourist site in the mid-nineteenth century. Eugene von Guerard’s painting *Waterfall, Strath Creek* (1862) initially inspired Williams’ interest in painting waterfalls, especially the Lal Lal Falls.\(^9\)

In *Lal Lal Falls* Williams uses the double system of waterfalls, one set of curved cliffs above the other, to produce a series of reticulated surfaces across the top two thirds of the canvas. They are cut short by a diagonal dividing line, below which is a single unified manifestly flat area of canvas with a richly worked texture of multicolored brushstrokes. This dramatic shift from a complex articulated system of marks to a fine grained single texture is, first of all, a radical abstract effect, but within it each mark and colour is a carefully transcribed visual sensation, a sensation originally experienced before the Falls themselves.

The pool at the base of the cliff provides the most important sensation. It is wedged in the centre of the painting like a gemstone locked into rough rock. Its small surface area is nearly covered with rich deep blue-grey, carefully applied so as to produce an effect of absolute flatness. This resonant colour has been produced by painting over a lighter semi-transparent greenish blue with the semi-opaque blue grey. Williams has left uncovered the light blue at the upper curved edge of the pool, so that it forms a ribbon at the base of the cliff. This is frequently a part of Williams’ abstract vocabulary but, as always, its formal coherence is based on natural phenomena. Lighter blue might be caused by two phenomena: water grows lighter as it becomes shallower at the edge of any pool, or a cast shadow may be covering most of the water surface.

Every painterly event within the canvas works with a similar double effect, first as an abstract decorative relationship, secondly as a painterly parallel to
Fred Williams, Lol Lal Falls (1977)
the artist's mode of observation. Consider the trees in the upper right-hand corner of the canvas. They are marked by circular shapes made up brushstrokes of mid-green or dark or light ochre. Some of them are surrounded by dark or light lines; others appear partially to eclipse a similar shape beneath them. Each shape has been separately considered as an abstract decorative event and a moment of vision. Every one is ultimately unique within an accessible system. One's eye easily accommodates to Williams' way of noting his sensations before the subject. The very fine distinctions of touch and colour in the lower right corner grow under one's gaze into a symphonic ensemble of encrusted colours.

The Collection also holds an untitled oil sketch by Williams, made in 1968. It shows a red dirt hill beneath a flat blue sky, faded with heat, probably in the north-west. There are patches of scrub made up of elementary notations, brushmarks in faded greens and the bleached white of peeling bark. It offers a simpler, perhaps more accessible way to begin to see Williams' work.

It is interesting to compare Williams' treatment of the waterfall motif in Lal Lal Falls with Boyd's in Shoolhaven River Banks, Rocks & Falls. Both artists have been attracted to the phenomenon of water descending over rocks, its force, energy and its promise of life in a bone-dry land. Their painterly conceptions of the event are, however, radically different. Boyd is concerned with the waterfall as a symbol of life and death, with rocks as a condition for the display of human presence and strength, with landscape as the bearer of a profound mythology. His expressive manner of painting is itself profoundly humane.

Williams, on the other hand, is concerned with the sensations that occur in the presence of landscape. He works with the bare bones of vision, the abstract structures that lie between us and the universe, which he can reveal in the substance of paint. For him humanity is not a matter of symbolism or mythology but of realising the absolute presence of the dry as dust landscape, hot rocks and cool water under a scorching sky. Indeed the very water in Lal Lal Falls seems made of the same stuff as the rocks around it.

There is another painting in the Collection by an artist who was interested in rocks early in his career. It is an untitled study, made in 1962 by Brett Whiteley (1939–1992). In 1961 at the age of twenty-two Whiteley had arrived in Europe on a two year scholarship which required him to spend time in Rome. Nonetheless, over the next two years he based himself in London in the renowned district of Ladbroke Grove, fast becoming famous as the home for Australian cultural expatriates. Whiteley established friendships with a number of the locals, including Nolan and Arthur Boyd, of whom he was especially fond.10

The painting in the University Collection, Untitled (1962), comes from a period when he was reacting to the contemporary art all around him and to the discovery of European cultural history. Unlike Nolan, Whiteley found no
reason to attempt to integrate the doom-laden Australian landscape tradition and its symbolism with his European experience. On the contrary, he found that he was liberated from it by what he saw as the effect of heat in Duccio’s altarpiece panels. In 1979, he commented:

I saw that heat could be a renewal, that it didn’t have to be an unknown or an ending. It didn’t have to be hell or the end of a bushfire. There was an optimism that was not present in Drysdale’s outback colours.\(^\text{11}\)

In the early sixties, artistic London was almost totally taken up with a complicated debate about abstract painting. This was partly because the work of the New York School. Pollock, Rothko, Newman and others had been seen in a series of exhibitions at the Whitechapel Gallery, but more because a group of British painters, including Patrick Heron and William Scott, had drawn their own conclusions about abstraction from the work of Matisse and the Surrealists. One of Whiteley’s friends in London was Tony McGillick, whose extreme abstraction has been discussed above. Whiteley struggled with the ‘non-figurative’ in a series of abstract landscapes until his first show in London in 1962, at which point he rejected it.

In 1979 he remembered:

I could see what abstraction was. It was a culmination of something in which one had served a tremendous apprenticeship and had gone through a terrific amount of experimentation. It was also a very slow process of whittling at which one arrived. . . at a visual equation in which everything else had been stripped away and reduced. What you were left with was this peculiar essence or summary, this hieroglyph of everything you had tried to achieve.

His great fear was that, as an abstract painter, he would become a mere cliché.

I think a person only gets to this sort of point once or twice in his lifetime. Kline and Newman, Rothko and Scott all reached those peaks and then they rubber-stamped the same picture in different sizes, different variations and different colours. The equation each arrived at was a once.\(^\text{12}\)

Whiteley concluded that painting required frequent reference to the external world. After seeing a show of Scott’s work he commented that Scott, “would have to go back and have another look at the table top or whatever he was painting to get some more life and energy back into his work.”

The work in the Collection shows all the elements of his attempt to grapple with abstraction. It appears to be an abstracted landscape with a high horizon and a series of rock-like forms in white, black and ochre piled up through the centre of the canvas against a segmented plane of deep warm browns stained roughly into the canvas so that the traces of the brush remain fully visible. It may be part of a group of paintings inspired by the beach at the French coastal resort of Sigean where Whiteley spent his honeymoon in 1962.

The key concerns of British abstraction included hard and soft edges, the use of outline and line drawing, usually in counterpoint with form, and the relationship between opaque paint and translucent stained surfaces. There was also a tendency to add graffiti or scribble to the image. Whiteley is experimenting with all these, wondering out loud, as it were, whether particular forms should touch, overlap, become transparent or have a loose or a tight charcoal outline. It is a process that allows the viewer to imagine what the work might become.
Brett Whiteley, *Untitled* (1962)
As is often the case with this kind of abstraction, the forms also appear to be related to the human figure. There is a pair of female knees and thighs at the base of the canvas and in the centre the curved scroll form suggests a towel hanging over someone’s head. Whiteley’s exuberant use of paint in this work suggests that he was thinking of the American Arshile Gorky and of Francis Bacon, whose use of the figure fascinated him. “You use me like I use Velasquez,” Bacon once told Whiteley. More than anything else in the Collection, this remarkable work opens the door to the concerns of painting for the next four decades.

The Collection also holds two paintings by another great maverick of Australian art, Lloyd Rees (1895-1988). Rees was of an earlier generation than any of the other artists discussed in this chapter. He had little or nothing to do with them. For most of his career he pursued a unique but relatively conventional vision, centred on paintings of subjects around Sydney Harbour and supported by his brilliant draftsmanship. It brought him great success and esteem. In his last twenty years, however, he developed a much more open manner. His subjects sometimes appeared to dissolve into broadly brushed planes of muted primary colours.

_Tasmanian Hills_ (1973), stands at the beginning of this time of change. It was originally purchased by Graylands College from Lister Gallery in Perth in 1975. Its muted colours, dull brown autumnal sky, dark outlines and shadows and lightly over-stressed but conventional hillside composition are typical of Rees’ earlier style. There is, however, a misty dusting of bright yellowish green over the trees in the foreground that is a sign of things to come.

_Sunshine at Caloola, South Coast N.S.W. (1980)_ is a landscape made of nothing but colour. A pinkish-red tree shape sits above a pool of bright blue shadow slightly to the left of the canvas. Behind the tree is a gold, silver and grey aura produced by brilliant sunlight. The composition bears comparison with Monet’s haystack paintings but the technique is uniquely Lloyd Rees’. In order to ‘knock back’ the colour to produce a consistently brilliant surface without discordant hotspots, Rees worked with thin washes of grey and some semi-opaque hatched strokes of grey-white and yellow which he wove across the image. He allowed the washes to run down the canvas and cut into the underlying paint. The trails they left have become part of the overall effect of brilliance. This is one of the most audacious works in the Collection. The sun’s sudden presence is the next thing to violence.
Lloyd Rees, *Sunshine at Caloola, South Coast N.S.W.* (1980)
This chapter has reviewed a group of outstanding works that found their way into the Collection perhaps as much by good luck as judgement. With the exception of Lloyd Rees, all the artists concerned knew each other; some were close friends for many years. In 1993, Barry Humphries, another one-time resident of Ladbroke Grove, wrote “A New Ode to Arthur Boyd, affectionate doggerel to be read aloud and not subjected to close intellectual scrutiny,” for Boyd’s retrospective at the Denis Savill Galleries. In this section he sums up the work of a generation of painters.

Lloyd Rees and Dobell, Drysdale, Nolan, Daws
Have, amongst many mastered the chief facets
Of our homeland’s topographic assets.
Bert Tucker breathless in the wake of Sid
Paraphrased everything the old master did,
Revisiting the familiar Nolan scene
And doing it again in plasticene!
(Inserting a few rosellas and some brolgas)
While Brett Whiteley eroticized the Olgas
Making them writhe like eager female rumps;
Fred Williams helped us see the point of... stumps,
Which, gold framed, hang in boardrooms and in foyers
Or grace the terraces of wine buff lawyers.
Yet who amongst these gifted men recalls
The visions which surround us on these walls?
The images reach out, they seem to touch,
Emblems recur and echo like a rhyme.
The little train, the cripple with his crutch.
Boyd’s memory with our memory seems to chime.

. . .
Walls, without Boyd are merely worthless plaster,
Let us salute our greatest living Master!!

The Collection is fortunate to have important works by almost every member of the most significant generation of Australian painters. They seem nonetheless to be sadly isolated from the rest of its work. There is, obviously, not a single Western Australian artist in Humphries’ list. None of the facile explanations for this appear appropriate. Moreover, none of Humphries’ masters have had any great influence on art in Western Australia. There has been every opportunity for Western Australian artists to engage with these artists. Nolan, Boyd and Williams all held solo shows in Perth when they were at the height of their power.

It seems that Max Harris’ observation that Western Australian artists suffer not from isolation, but from insulation, which they prefer, may well be correct. Given its historical formation, Western Australian art may simply be irrevocably ‘different’ in temper and intent. In any case the presentation of these uneasy jewels in the crown will pose a major challenge for the Collection for many years to come. The art market has changed out of hand since they were acquired. It is most unlikely that it will ever again be possible to buy works of this stature.
Over the last half-century, sculpture has held a unique place in the art of Western Australia. The Collection holds a small group of works by the State's leading artists.
Shape and Space

If a Western Australian artist should join the Australian pantheon alongside Barry Humphries’ nominees, that artist is Howard Taylor (1918-2001). The University Collection holds several important works by him. Some are classified as painting, some as sculpture, but if his overall concerns as an artist must be categorised it is plain that his work is on the whole far closer to sculpture.¹

Taylor studied art at Birmingham College of Art, UK, from 1947 to 1948 after five years as a prisoner of war and a period of demobilisation. He returned to Perth in 1949 and established himself at Bickley, then close to the bush. His early concerns have a lot in common with the work of that other returned POW, Guy Grey-Smith. Taylor too was principally concerned with the relationship between the self-sufficient work of art, its necessary inherent qualities, and nature. He too was influenced by the British version of modernism, as it had evolved in the 1930s; as his career evolved, however, it became clear that he had been far more impressed by the constructivist tendencies in British modernism and in particular the way in which surrealism had permitted Henry Moore and other British artists to dissolve the boundaries between painting and sculpture, art and the natural world.

Taylor began as a painter, but like Grey-Smith he was always concerned with the weakness, the lack of strength and conviction, in purely representational painting. His solution, however, was to transform natural forms into structures that are half-organic parallels of engineering, half-surreal improvisations on natural form. His paintings from the mid-fifties often have the look of studies for sculpture. He recalled this experience in a documentary film.

A lot of the paintings were worked out in quite a detailed sculptural way so that you could take a painting and make a sculpture out of it. . . . This led me to actually make things sculpturally. Some of them were painted because I like the colour plus sculpture combination . . . . so painting and sculpture were mixing together. . . . That’s something that’s been going on all my life really, this interrelation or sameness of painting and sculpture in respect to nature.²

It is striking that Taylor felt the need to explain his creative situation in this way long after the continuity of all art forms had become a commonplace elsewhere. The conventional division between sculpture and painting persists in the Western Australian imagination to this day. This has had a profound effect on the development of art and artists here.

The Collection holds an important early work, a painting by Taylor which is a perfect example of the continuity of plastic form and ideas in nature that he sought throughout his artistic life. The Webs (1957) was bought for the Graylands collection in 1964. Its origin in nature was the sight of spider webs on the trunk and branches of a tree burnt black by bushfire. Its form, however, depends almost entirely on constructivist conventions.

The six circles of white impasto paint which mark the end of the cut or broken tree branches lie flat on the panel like circles in an engineering diagram. A polyhedron of gauze-like translucent white paint applied over background branches is stretched between them like a network of spider webs. The ‘tree’ itself has the look of circuit diagram or an aerial array. On the left of the trunk the blackened surface encloses an open circle which rhymes with the smaller white circles. Every extremity of the tree is connected to the approximate centre of this circle by a fine weblike white line. Similar devices can be found in the work of Picabia, a painter obsessed with the machine, and Ben Nicholson, the British constructivist painter.

Taylor’s ‘painting’ has been deliberately limited to two textures of colour and tone, one black for the tree and one a purple pink for the background. He has limited his visible brushstrokes to a repetitive short mark, clearly intended to eliminate any ‘expressive’ qualities. This was to be true of all his subsequent painted work.

Opposite: Howard Taylor, The Webs (1957)
In a previous work, *Bush Relief Web* (1956), Taylor had stretched wire between iron pins driven into the end of a rough section of jarrah trunk. This produced an informal work, reminiscent of the improvised assemblages of Giacometti and other Surrealists in the 1930s. Taylor’s aim was not to shape his materials but to bring them together in a revelation of the relation between natural and man-made objects. *The Webs* is an extension of this idea into the more deliberative context of painting.

A decade and a half later, Taylor achieved the complete integration of painting and sculpture. In the Collection’s *Circles and Segments II: Tree and Sky* (1973), he used a wooden column over two and a half metres high and half a metre wide which he painted black and then over-painted three slender sectors taken from three slender circles of different diameters with a bright sky-blue. This produces an effect similar to looking up at a summer sky from underneath a tree trunk burnt by fire. Also, however, *Circles and Segments II: Tree and Sky* has the look of a piece of engineering; the black shape at its centre stretches upward in the manner of a supporting arch. There is always something of the improviser, the bush mechanic about Taylor’s work.

In 1977, Graylands College acquired *Screen* (1976) direct from an exhibition at the Undercroft Gallery. It is a two metre high ensemble of twisted pieces of wood eroded and perhaps blackened by wind and weather. Taylor fitted them into a vertical rectangle of natural brown milled wood that not only frames the composition but endows the ensemble with an almost human presence. This statuesque effect is a constant in Taylor’s work from the 1960s onwards. The curved forms in the upper half of the screen suggest the origin of the black form in *Circles and Segments II: Tree and Sky*. 

Howard Taylor, *Circles and Segments II: Tree and Sky* (1973)
Howard Taylor, Screen (1976)
Screen also recalls a number of formal strategies in the work of Henry Moore, in particular his ‘interior form’ works.

The following year, 1978, the Claremont Teachers’ College bought Fool’s Target (1978), a polyhedral painting on board showing a cylinder set diagonal against a flat background set in a dull sap green with translucent Van Dyck brown shadows. Taylor had become interested less in illusion than in the perceptual mechanics of light, which he related as always to the muted diffused light effect of the forest floor. The extraordinary ribbons or ridges of light-green to darker brownish colour which cover the entire panel and model the cylinder are arranged in a radiating sequence from light to dark, like multiple ridges of vegetation in rainforest country. The thin bright line which bisects the composition suggests once more the bush engineer holding his work together with a piece of bailing twine.

By the 1990s Taylor’s interest in perception had evolved to a point where he required only the simplest sculptural forms. The Collection holds an excellent example of this phase of his work. Internal Cylinder (1994) is a rectangular column a metre and a quarter high with a square cross-section, made from marine ply. Taylor has painted the four surfaces of the top two thirds of it with carefully graded greys, from black at the centre of each face of the column to pure white at the corner. This produces the effect of an internal cylinder hanging in the ‘empty’ rectangle of the column. Such an inscription of form is much more than simple illusion. There is a grandeur of the imagination, a frisson of revelation when one discovers one form contained logically inside another.

Taylor undoubtedly deserves his place in our national pantheon. He is a uniquely important figure in post-war Australian art with a shrewd and original grasp of the options offered by modernism. He was able to merge
constructivism and surrealism in the context of an optimistic attitude to the cultural role of technology and of the specific experience of the West. Taylor never felt the need for a myth of the outback in the manner of Nolan or Boyd. For him the bush is part of a material practice which gives rise to a unique perception and poetry. His art lacks the problems, the ideological baggage which goes along with the well-known 'Australians' of the forties and fifties. In recent years his country-wide reputation has grown, but this difference of outlook and circumstances continues to pose a challenge to those who arbitrate our national taste. Over time, the continuing presence of his works in the University Collection will make a major contribution to his prestige.

Taylor is something of a one-off in the development of Western Australian sculpture which did not achieve any coherence until the late 1970s, when a small group of highly committed artists emerged from what was by then Claremont School of Art. They were inspired by Tony Jones (b. 1944), who began work as a lecturer there in 1976. Like Taylor, Jones was committed to a hands-on, craft-based view of sculpture as the foundation of creative practice. From the beginning, however, he found that the lack of sculptural tradition in Perth had resulted in an absence of any technical infrastructure. He played an important role in making this available, particularly in conventional forms such as bronze casting.

The Collection's After the Human Tree (1978) is one of a group of small bronzes produced as a result of experiments in his backyard foundry. In 1994 he remembered:

I don't know how I got away with it. I even cast things for students there. I'd teach them at school and they came home to cast the work. We used a portable gas burner. . . .
I just wanted to make things. I wanted to have the capacity to make things. It was like doing a really nice etching, I suppose. You almost want to work through a traditional medium to some other end, I think. I had the objects and ideas in my mind and I wasn't moved to get involved with the priorities of the time, in terms of installations or post-objects or anti-bronze or whatever.³

After the Human Tree is a simplified version of a motif common to the work of Brueghel and Bosch. A drawing by Bosch shows a cracked egg-like carcass as torso, balanced on two tree trunks each 'rooted' in a small boat. A group of people can be seen drinking at a table inside the egg. A head, with a hat bearing tree branches and roosting birds, emerges from the other end of the egg. The egg and tree are symbols of human life while the drinkers signify the corruption of all things human.

Jones acknowledged the influence of Bosch to his former student and assistant, the sculptor Akio Makigawa (1948–1999) while he was assisting Jones with the fabrication of After the Human Tree. It is a highly simplified version of the
original drawing, simply a cracked egg, a ladder and two heels arranged like a unicycle. Jones benefited from the example of the Surrealists, Giacometti and Max Ernst, as he developed his central creative method in which he combined diverse three-dimensional objects and forms to produce sculpture that moved from the particular to the universal.

Jones' Japanese student Akio Makigawa brought a different attitude to materials to his complex sculpture, derived initially from his ancient Shinto culture and a love of sailing which he had in common with Jones. His Untitled (1980) is one of a series of mixed-media works using steel, wood, stone and rope, in forms that echo their ceremonial use in Shinto sculpture and architecture. He used his knowledge of sailing and sail-making to add to the range of his forms. In 1995 he commented that his work was by no means traditional Japanese art, but observed that:

Japanese are always Shinto anyway. In a country town, such as the one where I grew up, Shinto is unavoidable. It was an important aspect in my life too: I had to go to the temple to clean headstones and other things. This work was based on memory. Red is a very Japanese colour.4

Makigawa went on to become a sculptor of public commissions. His work includes Gate II—Coalesce (1980), the black and white marble gateway outside the Western Australian State Library.

Another of Jones' students, Stuart Elliott (b.1953), also became a teacher at Claremont and elsewhere for many years. He developed Jones' attitude to materials, using a principle of simulation of material and images that he referred to as 'fakeology'.5 Elliot pioneered sculpture which drew on the imagery of local popular culture and industrial folk memory for its themes and subjects, and the distanced and distorted vision of life elsewhere provided by the local media. He was an electrician by trade and drew on his experience of working life and leisure in Western Australia. His work often appears as a cross between fairground art and a museum specimen. He described it in 1991.

My work has dealt primarily with humans and their relationships with technologies, environments and other humans. Ritual and cross-cultural references within these relationships have been specific areas of concern.

I tend to use metaphor or allegory as way of coming to terms with some of these facets, endeavouring to avoid the documentative or pure narrative. This will often result in work resembling totems, fragments or artefacts from a familiar but ultimately alien museum.6

His Solicitor (1992) was originally part of an ensemble of wheeled figures entitled Entourage, inspired by the hypocrisy and absurdity of public life as seen on local television news, specifically Princess Anne's visit to Lockerbie after the air
disaster, and Ronald Reagan waving from the steps of his helicopter. *Entourage* was an attempt to represent “the reptile in us all.” Elliott described *Solicitor* in some detail in 2001.

The solicitor is sitting in a pseudo-leather-bound chair. It’s a bit battered and worn so there’s this illusion that it’s somehow respectable, that it’s a comfortable tool being used by society. The wood panel plinth opens, because inside are disturbing implements of interrogation. We don’t do that stuff anymore, we have video surveillance and home detention, we don’t have the pigs beating the crap out of somebody in the back room any more or doing awful things to them to get confessions—so the notion of brutalising miscreants is put in the museum context. It’s ok to look because it doesn’t happen anymore.

The solicitor has a blonde wig that might be a judicial wig. On the other hand does that mean that a solicitor must go into bat for someone unspeakable because of their professional ethics. Where they have to say, “Okay this person might be a monster but let’s be professional about it.”

So round the back of the solicitor, what looks like a tanned multicultural kind of face from a distance, as you get closer is almost visceral, bloody. Venomous animals are découpage onto it like redbacks, bull-ants.

In fact the back of the head is split open by a wide grin, a shark-like jaw with a row of bloody teeth top and bottom. As Elliott observed:

“Show me a poor lawyer and I’ll show you a poor lawyer.” It’s absolutely important for all sorts of reasons, generally ego-driven and compounded by money, that they win.

Elliott’s use of assemblage has a lot in common with tribal fetishes and totems, mediaeval religious sculpture and fairground art. Like them his work exists in the context of the popular imagination. *Solicitor* is a public icon for our times. There is a very close relationship between painting a fake surface on sculpture and painting the object as a two dimensional image on a panel. As with Howard Taylor, Elliott’s sculptural instincts led him to work as a painter. The
Collection holds a work from 2001, *Container Series III*, which consists of seven large scale plastic liquid containers cast in clay, painted black and over-worked with graphite to add density to their colour, and a triptych of panel paintings titled *Elevation*, in which the same container shapes are assembled into a monumental form, like the city walls from a science fiction epic, garlanded with flexible snake-like hoses in acid red and green.

The unbreakable link between two and three dimensional artmaking that so concerned Howard Taylor is restated in the luminous city, in the relationship between the black container forms and their monumental avatars in the softly glowing monument behind them. Elliott has made a number of such paintings all concerned with the link between a seductive lurid metropolis and the blight which it spreads over the land. Ultimately that city is the Perth which he saw rise from the Swan valley from his home in the hills.

Elliott's work has influenced a group of sculptors who live and work to the east of the city beyond its industrial fringe and the ever more genteel outlying suburbs of Midland. He once referred to them as the East Bloc. Peter Dailey (b.1957), is one of the most consistent of these but even he has little interest in the sinister social virulence that is central to Elliott's practice. As his *Circus is in Town* (1996) suggests, Dailey and his associates are more interested in the imagery of the fairground than the chamber of horrors. In 2001, he commented:

This work relates to the blockbuster art circus with gift shop etc. Anyone can strap on an artist-cam and play along. We all choose to what degree we wish to participate. Participant or spectator, we're all a part of 'the big picture' even when we're in denial.
The huge blockbuster exhibition, with an even larger gift shop was a phenomenon of the late 1980s and 1990s. It was a solution to the funding problems faced by many public galleries and the ambitions of curators to represent a particular artist or professional concern in contemporary art on the largest scale possible. Sponsorship with its corporate apparatus, media obligations and high entrance charges inevitably forced a misrepresentation of art as pure entertainment, much like any other branch of show biz. There was no place left for critical and engaged scholarship. Media promotion, hooplah and special deals for the undeserving and over-privileged reduced art enthusiasts to mere consumers. Artists themselves began to view themselves primarily as entertainers.

As *Circus is in Town* shows, Dailey is an excellent craftsman whose careful contemplative work is in itself a protest against this omnipresent banality. There is no gift shop present but there is a beautifully painted cart that might have belonged to an ice-cream seller or to the clown who used it to push his various tricks into the circus ring. The performance drums next to it suggest the latter.

On top of the cart is a brilliantly modelled circus complex, two yellow and blue striped tents and an open air arena dominated by a large screen on which appears the slogan, “Prime time this show sponsored by.” The screens of the six facsimile television sets, painted panels hung behind the cart, carry variations of this message alongside a clichéd image from some familiar but pointless entertainment spectacle.
Hans Arkeveld (b.1942) is not usually associated with the critical stance taken by Dailey and the East Bloc. His sculpture is usually concerned with the figure cast in metal. His *Transmigration* (1990), which entered the Collection in 1992, is a rare exception. It is a model cargo boat, a coaster carved in wood, almost a metre long, set on plinth with fake fretwork waves painted bright blue as if it were in a maritime museum. The details of the masts, deck and bridge, including the anchor ventilators and other gear, are beautifully observed and finished, with white-painted guard-rails carefully weathered with rust patches. This emphatic detail lends the necessary conviction to the work which concerns, as Arkeveld stated in 2001:

displaced people, refugees, people fleeing persecution and human rights abuse. The way these people are treated like export sheep or cattle and the attitude of the Australian government towards them which is very much relevant today and, in fact, is worse.¹⁰

Arkeveld himself had been a migrant when a child. He and his family left Holland soon after the Second World War. The Dutch had had a tough time so *Transmigration* includes a profoundly personal dimension. The carved wooden figures lined up on the deck resonate with recent events such as the *Tampa* incident. Arkeveld had the skills to distinguish the features of each individual. He chose, however, to generalise them as men and women weathered and worn in the way same way as the boat itself.
Theo Koning, *Two Dogs Fighting* (1989); *Figure, Animals and Cage* (1998)
The work of Theo Koning (b.1950) follows another range of possibilities. He works with found materials, almost always pieces of wood, and then assembles them into figurative and non-figurative sculptures. He changes the original form of the wood as little as possible. For some time he collected driftwood from the beach between Fremantle and Swanbourne. Two Dogs Fighting (1989), shows two dogs fighting over a bone. The figures of the dogs will only stand up if their two heads are engaged on the bone over which they are fighting. Koning allows the original shapes of the driftwood to suggest the forms of his sculpture, which usually turn out to be figurative. The use of 'found objects' in this way was an important technique for Henry Moore and other British sculptors and for the Surrealists. Koning's Figure, Animals and Cage (1998), which was originally part of Zoo, an entire exhibition of improvised animals, shows how the qualities of found objects can lead the artist to quite surprising, even radical innovations that at the same time remain in keeping with his subject.

The work of Kevin Draper (b.1958) also evolved from the material context in which he grew up and worked, the family farm at Narrikup, thirty kilometers from Albany. Unlike Koning, however, Draper adapts the materials and techniques of his rural background—notably blacksmithing and welding, to produce large scale objects in steel and iron. These occasionally parody agricultural implements. Draper's Harrow (1989), was originally bought from the Beach Gallery and later donated to the Collection. It has the look of a chain harrow but it is supported by steel rods at every joint. Each one bears a web foot.
A campus provides many excellent sites for sculpture. The University has occasionally commissioned pieces for the Mount Lawley and Joondalup campuses. *Disjecta Membra* (1996), by Lesley Duxbury (b.1950), is one of the most successful. It was commissioned for the Library on the Mount Lawley campus. Duxbury, whose main interest is in printmaking and the landscape, as bearer of romantic and metaphysical truths, improvised a brilliant series of pseudo-hieroglyphs in clay. These were cast in aluminium, lead or zinc alloys, to produce symbols that suggested the mystery at the centre of all learning, a half-grasped alchemy or magic, the ancient runic quality that accompanies all texts, all knowledge.

Sculpture has a special place in the Collection. The monumental and communitarian aspirations of sculpture fit precisely with the aspirations of a university, an institution in which a community of individuals are dedicated to researching and recording the way things are and have been.