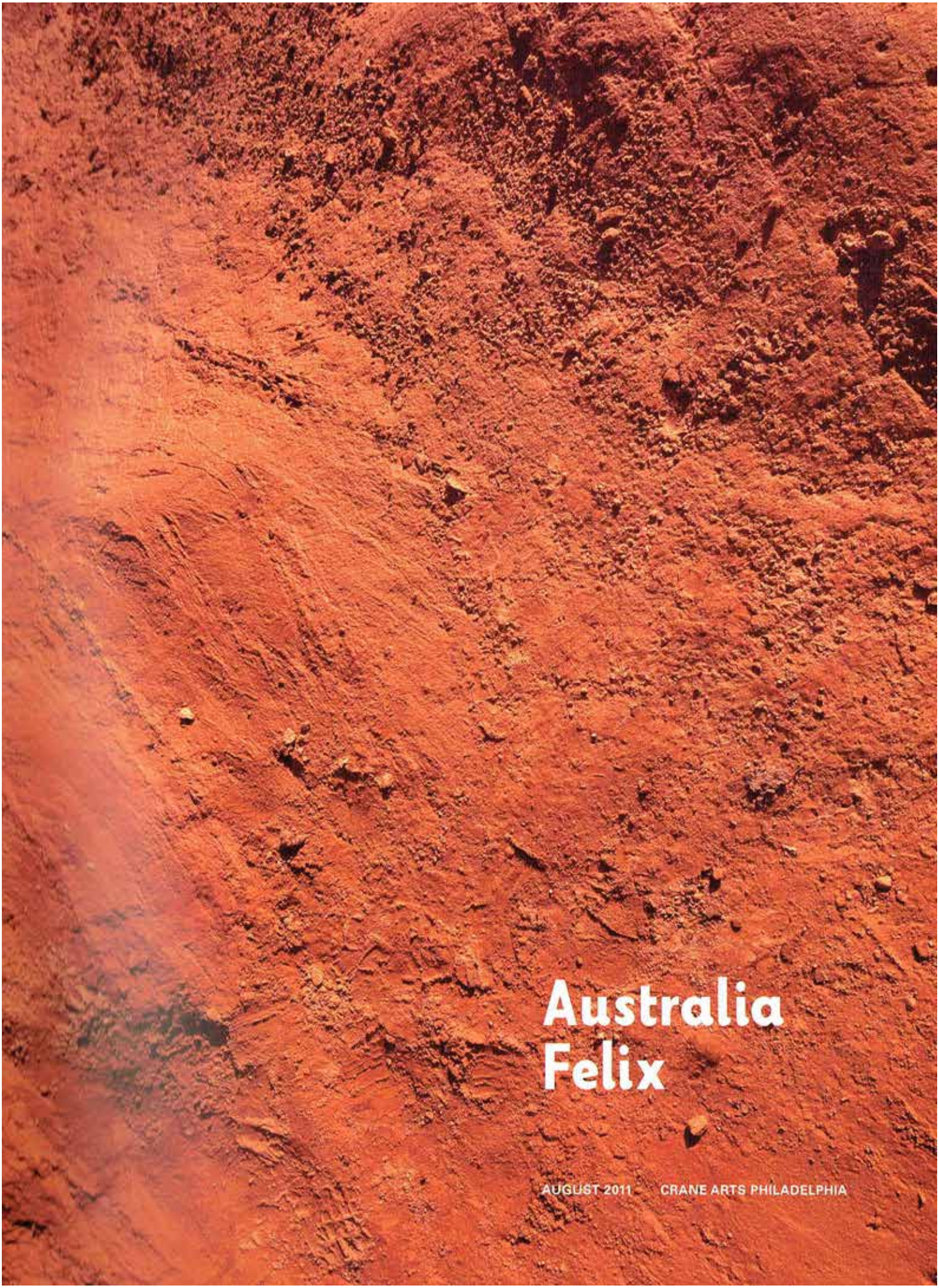

Australia Felix

AUGUST 2011 CRANE ARTS PHILADELPHIA

Foreword

The Queensland College of Art (QCA), Griffith University, is one of Australia's oldest art schools. After its inception 130 years ago, QCA occupied a number of different premises before finally moving to the current purpose-designed campus on the South Bank cultural precinct of Brisbane City. Long recognized as a leader in studio teaching across all art and design disciplines, QCA, Griffith, is the premier art college in the State of Queensland, and one of the top-ranked art institutions in the nation. The seventeen artists in *Australia Felix* are all staff, postgraduates, or adjuncts at QCA. Collectively, they represent an impressive snapshot of the best senior and emerging artists working in Australian. Adjuncts Judy Watson and Jenny Watson have represented Australia at the Venice Biennale. Marian Drew and Julie Fragar have recently returned from international residencies in the United States and Spain. In fact, a cursory glance through the exhibited artists' biographical notes reveals an astonishing chronicle of exhibitions and residencies around the globe, in countries such as Japan, Canada, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Taiwan, Ireland, England, Armenia, France, Austria, Italy, Germany, Turkey, New Zealand, and Russia, to name a few. Interestingly, at least three, Mostyn Bramley-Moore, Judy Watson, and Debra Porch have completed artist's residencies in Philadelphia at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts or the Fabric Workshop and Museum. Another, Ian Burns, has worked in Philadelphia, at the Tyler School of Art, Temple University. This exhibition will cement these tentative linkages and make a significant contribution to developing further connections and international collaborations between QCA and the vibrant contemporary-art institutions in Philadelphia.

Professor Paul Cleveland
Director, Queensland College of Art,
Griffith University

Introduction

In any exhibition, curating is a balancing act between two competing demands: imposing a curatorial agenda and highlighting the individuality of each exhibiting artist. This is particularly pointed when the exhibition venue is in another country and there is a grand theme such as national identity, as implied in my title *Australia Felix* (Fortunate Australia). I would hope that through my selection of artists I have tipped the balance towards the latter pole, so that the impossibility of any consensus in what might represent the so-called "Lucky Country" of Australia is made evident. I have kept alive the ironic connotations of the title's first use, Henry Handel Richardson's 1917 novel *Australia Felix*, which recounts the fictionalized life of Richardson's father on the Victorian gold-fields. In the novel, success or failure brought doubt and anxiety in equal measure.

Obviously, no curator can completely escape the imposition of their own agenda, and the very choice of the exhibition's title fulfils an almost-thirty-year ambition to mount an exhibition in the United States that attempts to represent Australia. In particular, my motivation, which became the rationale for the exhibition, stemmed from my experience of the 1984 exhibition *Australian Visions* shown at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, which was curated by the Museum's Deputy Director at that time, Diane Waldman. Transparent in my intentions, I sent each of the participating artists the following narrative:

In 1984, I was working in the National Gallery of Australia and was on a study tour of museums in the United States. I anticipated that a highlight of my trip would be my visit to the Guggenheim Museum, where I would see an exhibition of contemporary Australian art. Apart from the photographer Bill Henson, the represented artists in *Australian Visions* were all painters, with John Nixon presenting his paintings in installation format. This is probably not unexpected given that 1984 represented the apogee of the international trend of, or claims for, a return to painting, mostly in a Neo-Expressionist style. In other words, the work fitted comfortably within the "Trans-avantgarde International" that Achille Bonito Oliva had identified in 1982. So much so, that an exhibition visitor might have concluded that the selection was made to indicate that Australian artists could compete with the best from around the world in synthesizing European iconography from Classical, Christian to early Modern periods. The dominant landscape represented was the apocalypse in its universal variants of medieval, Gothic, or industrial. The stylistic legacy most evident was all European; Goya, Beckmann, and Malevich, for example. Most startlingly, from today's standpoint, no Indigenous Australian artists were represented and Indigenous art is only mentioned in the catalogue in a list of cliched Australian myths as, "the 'eternal' culture of aborigines' [sic]."

The catalogue contained a brief essay by Diane Waldman and an extended essay by Memory Holloway titled "Bleak Romantics." Holloway does a very good job of attempting to locate the work of the artists within an Australian historical context by evoking bush fires, mining, and industrial wastelands to explain their apocalyptic vision and to locate them within a collapse of stereotypes about the Australian bush and myths of a contented suburbia.

No doubt the private and public sponsors of *Australian Visions*, Exxon Corporation and the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, considered the exhibition a great success since such international exhibitions are hardly ever critically measured beyond the quality of the guest list at the sponsor's dinner. From my observations, it was a dismal failure. When I visited the exhibition it was virtually empty and staff reported that the attendance had been low with lacklustre response from visitors. I also attended an evening public lecture on the show by one of the Guggenheim staff and at that event it became clear why the show was ill-fated. The American lecturer attempted to do the impossible by projecting Holloway's essay onto individual works, thus hoping to demonstrate their Australianness. The audience became restless and I offered my own dissent by suggesting that the art on view made itself relevant to contemporary discourse by avoiding local reference. As a result, the hapless lecturer's position—that the art

represented the essence of Australia—because (ostensibly, despite my only authority being my broad Australian accent. In subsequent conversations with a number of the audience members, I discovered that they had been attracted by the promise of the show's title, *Australian Visions*, hoping that they might catch a glimpse of a specifically familiar or imagined Australia. In the case of several couples who spoke to me, the last time the now-retired male had seen Australia was when he flew out of Townsville during WWII. Naturally, I found myself apologising for the fact that the art on the Guggenheim's walls offered no insight into the Australia of their memory and the place and spirit they had brought their partners to catch a glimpse of, if not to understand. Ever since then, I have remained troubled by the question of how one might represent Australia through contemporary art without recourse to the trite option of a tourist poster or kitsch sentiment. Baz Luhrmann's film *Australia* is surely warning enough of these inherent difficulties. Twenty-seven years on, I'm guessing that few of those American servicemen who visited *Australian Visions* are still around, but it doesn't remove the imperative to test the possibility that an Australian artist (or non-Australian artist, for that matter) could make uncompromising work operating within the boundaries that define contemporary-art discourse and still remain rooted in the local geo-political situation that we know in Australia.

When I sent the above rationale to the artists, I stressed that, whether they were making new work or proposing completed work for the exhibition, I simply wanted them to remain conscious of the issues it raised in relation to exhibiting in the United States under a banner of "Australian". The multiple viewpoints that have resulted—from the intensely personal to the stridently political—are indicative of the range of artists represented. My selection of artists has also deliberately aimed to complicate any deterministic view of a genetic Australian inheritance; the exhibition includes artists with a direct Indigenous connection to this country and Australian artists born elsewhere, along with William Platz, who is a recent arrival from the United States, and Ian Burns who has worked primarily in the United States for more than a decade. In sharp contrast to the 1984 *Australian Visions*, no one medium dominates the exhibition. This reflects the current situation in contemporary art where painting is the minority inclusion in the survey show or international biennale. If there is any anomaly in corresponding to current practice, it is the lack of digital or screen work in *Australia Felix*. This can be accounted for by the fact that an exhibition of work from QCA is scheduled for September 2012 in this venue, which will showcase artists using digital or screen-based mediums expressed through games, animation, and digital design.

The biggest debt incurred by any curator is to their exhibiting artists and I thank them all for their contributions. I was fortunate that Maura Reilly joined the staff of QCA early this year, after holding distinguished curatorial appointments in the United States; she has brought a fresh, critical eye to the project. It is the combination of Maura's essay and George Petelin's contribution that provides the cutting edge to the ironic implications of my exhibition title, along with an essential gravitas in their objective, historical perspective on my narrative experience of *Australian Visions*. I thank them both for their essays. QCA Griffith University Research Fellow, Ian Burns, needs special acknowledgement for the way he has encouraged and facilitated the links between Brisbane and Philadelphia. Finally, I particularly want to express my gratitude to Nick Kripal for the invitation to bring an exhibition to the Crane Arts Centre in Philadelphia.

Professor Ross Woodrow
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Nationality, Internationality, and Indigenous Culture

Pre-eminent Australian art historian Bernard Smith reports that the first time a receptive audience for Australian art appeared overseas was in response to the June 1961 exhibition entitled *Recent Australian Painting* held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.[1] He also notes that "its attempt to select the best of what was available over the whole field ensured, unfortunately, that it would be promoted and viewed as an exhibition of Australian art". Consequently, he reports, "many futile attempts were made at the time to define the essential nature of Australian art".[2]

Sadly, when comparing the discourse found in the 1961 exhibition catalogue to that in the catalogue of *Australian Visions* (1984), a significant United States-based exhibition held over two decades later, little had apparently changed. Both catalogues—and indeed most catalogues of Australian international shows produced ever since—have tended to pursue the same discourse of 'national identity'. In each case, the unique Australian landscape, its harsh sunlight, its geographic isolation, and its convict origins are themes that have been routinely invoked to explain quite different stylistic characteristics in the work being described. Such discourse paints an image of Australians as "wild colonials" who are always on the threshold of a new cultural era.

In the *Recent Australian Painting* catalogue, the curator, British gallery director Bryan Robertson, wrote of Australians' "irreverence to authority and convention" and of Australia's "splendid if unruly soldiers overseas", in order to support his judgement of the "considerable urgency", "shrill sweetness", and "tightly strung lyricism" in the work exhibited.[3] Similarly, in 1984, Diane Waldman, Deputy Director of the Guggenheim Museum, New York, claimed that the work she introduced as curator of *Australian Visions*, "like Australia itself ... refuses to be polite and quiet" and "does not conform to our expectations of a seemly art". Moreover, she judged, it is characterized by "a raw energy" and "a rude sense of colour and form".[4]

As if to confirm such "foreigner's impressions" of Australian character, even in its denial, a young Robert Hughes, in his contribution to the *Recent Australian Painting* catalogue, told the English not to treat Australians as "rough-hewn visionaries" because we were "no longer the wild pets of the supercultivated". He further admonished the Britons that there was "little point in looking at Australian art with the slightly complacent wonder with which Captain Cook regarded his first platypus".[5]

Both Robertson and Waldman used themes of geographic isolation and unique climate to rationalize the particular version of stylistic features that each found in the Australian art of their respective period. Robertson concluded that being deprived of a first-hand experience of European culture's Renaissance roots meant that Australian artists possessed a viewpoint that was not "saturated with the gaze of five centuries of artists" as was the case with British painters. A "self-conscious tactile quality" was judged to be due to Australians' "insurmountable dependence on reproductions". As well as this, he noted that Australian painting in 1961 had "a natural plastic sense fed by the sun and climate ... a harsher, more lurid version of the Mediterranean countries".[6] Waldman, twenty-three years later, wrote that Australian art was "distinct from the humanist landscape and portrait painting that has evolved since the Renaissance" and expostulated about "the heat and the intensity of the light which enhances even the whitest white".[7]

Both Robertson and Waldman, in their respective catalogues, did their best to legitimate the "wild colonials" to their compatriots. As evidence of Australians' acceptability, Robertson earnestly cited Australia's cricketing prowess, and the fact that the then chairman of the Tate Gallery had an Australian wife. Waldman, on her part, drew parallels with the legendary American past; referring to Australia as "the last frontier" and as thus having "much in common with the U.S."[8]

In both catalogues, there is a distinctly optimistic tone that prophesies a newly prosperous era of Australian culture. For example, Robertson celebrates the consolidation of "awareness of Australia's fresh cultural identity" by news of "an extraordinary opera house" and "an ambitious project for a new museum in Melbourne".[9] He goes on to conclude that in the coming decade Australian art would gain "a maturity", and argues that further one-man shows by

Australian artists are "badly needed" and "would be of considerable interest to the London public".[9] In the same document, Kenneth Clark affirms that Australia was "about to add something entirely fresh to contemporary painting".[10]

In *Australian Visions* too, Waldman writes of a "new awareness of and pride in a native tradition" and "a growing recognition on the part of many Australians that they have a special role to play in the world." She concludes her introduction by referencing the "boldness and individuality of current Australian art," which she sees as mirroring "the boundless vitality and variety of an Australian society in rapid flux, poised on the threshold of a new era".[11] Both catalogues thus blend a nationalist and an internationalist theme within a discourse of cultural value and economic promise. Whether this value and promise were, still can, or ought to be, fulfilled, are questions of considerable complexity.

In terms of international cultural value, if we are to believe the later catalogue, the first era of promise was not consummated. According to Waldman, Australian art in the 1970s, "prior to this resurgence … produced little of lasting value".[12] However, in terms of international marketing, history indicates a different picture. The decade following *Recent Australian Painting* saw many Australians taking up temporary, and in some cases permanent, residence in London, conducting successful shows, and generally paving the way for Australia's participation in the world market. Hughes, who had, in addition to his 1961 catalogue essay, exhibited artworks in the *Recent Australian Painting* exhibition, abandoned painting and went on to international fame as a critic.

While both exhibitions predominantly featured figurative art, almost mid-way between these shows an exhibition of Australian internationalist abstraction titled *Ten Australians* (1974–75) toured Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy. Its catalogue contained the standard themes and their denial, this time by Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, and Patrick McCaughey, then Professor of Visual Arts at Monash University, and subsequently director of the National Gallery of Victoria. Although writing about some of the most abstract paintings ever sent by Australia overseas, McCaughey gave tribute to figuration, the Australian Impressionists of the Heidelberg School, and the Australian Expressionists, for shaping "an Australian consciousness". He then went on to acknowledge that, while "to many Australian artists of the present moment, Australian consciousness is either an embarrassment or an irrelevance", the art in *Ten Australians* "embodies an authentic Australian experience".[13] Unimpeded by this apparent parochialism, McCaughey went on to direct the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, and then the Yale Center for British Art.

While this demonstrates that Australians have contributed to international culture despite clichéd interpretation, it does not rule out the possibility that something intrinsically Australian remains to be witnessed within an international showing of Australian art. The problem is that it requires patient observation and more than passing familiarity with Australia to see it. It seems incomprehensible to Australians, for instance, that New York audiences failed to recognize landscape and instead saw abstract expressionism in the sparsely distributed brushwork of Fred Williams at MoMA in 1977.[14]

What the early clichés also failed to recognize is that, as well as "wild colonials", Australia contained those who were colonized by them. Although the Papunya school that introduced Aboriginal acrylics on canvas began in 1971, it was not until the mid-to-late 1980s, with exhibitions such as *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia* (1988), that Indigenous culture began to characterize Australian art overseas. The comfort with which Aboriginal art sat on gallery walls alongside contemporary European art problematized previous notions of 'authenticity' associated with ethnographic artefacts. Aboriginal painting began to be recognized as being as contemporary as any other art form and that it belonged to a dialogue with international trends. And, at the same time that central desert art moved on to canvases to become an international commodity, urban Aboriginal artists started to make their mark on Australian culture. In 1984, Contemporary Artspace in Sydney brought together Aboriginal urban-based artists for the first time, in an exhibition called *Koori Art*.

Full recognition of contemporary urban Indigenous art came when Trevor Nickolls, an art-school-trained artist who began exploring his Indigenous heritage from the late 1970s, was selected along with remote-area Indigenous artist Rover Thomas to represent Australia at the 1990 Venice Biennale. In the same year, the Queensland Art Gallery mounted *Balance 1990* curated by Michael Eather and Trevor Nickolls's wife Marlene Hall, the first state-gallery exhibition to embrace a unity of urban and remote-community Indigenous art and non-Indigenous contemporary art.

Balance was more than an exhibition. It was a catalyst for intercultural social networking and for social change. The associations that resulted from *Balance* included a chain of Indigenous art organisations, a university Visual Art degree course based on indigenous principles, the Bachelor of Visual Art in Contemporary Australian Indigenous Art (BoVACAIA) at Griffith University, and what may be argued as Australia's most vigorous contemporary-art group: ProppaNOW.

As I have written elsewhere, "as central desert art becomes ever more tourist-corrupted and shallow, ProppaNOW represents the Australian art wave of the future."[xvi] Its focus is to contribute to contemporary artistic debate from a unique indigenous perspective. Its members, Richard Bell, Tony Albert, Laurie Nilsen, Gordon Hookey, Bianca Beetson, Jennifer Herd, and Vernon Ah Kee all have two things in common: an Aboriginal heritage and a grim sense of humor about the tragic history of colonialism. Their work draws on many international influences but always retains something inimitably Australian. What that is may well still be "rude and unseemly" and, once again, "poised on the verge of a new era," but it cannot be reduced to clichés. Look at the pictures and see for yourself.

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Notes

i Bernard Smith, *Australian Painting 1877–1970* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1971), 302.

ii Ibid., 346.

iii Bryan Robertson, "Preface," to *Recent Australian Painting* (London: White Chapel, 1961), 5, 8.

iv Diane Waldman, "Impressions of Australia," *Australian Visions* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1984), 10.

v Robert Hughes, "Introduction," in *Recent Australian Painting*, 13.

vi Bryan Robertson, "Preface," 11.

vii Diane Waldman, "Impressions of Australia," 9.

viii Ibid., 9.

ix Bryan Robertson, "Preface," 6.

x Ibid., 7.

xi Kenneth Clark, "Australian Painting: Whitechapel 1961," in *Recent Australian Painting*, 4.

xii Diane Waldman, "Impressions of Australia," 10.

xiii Ibid.

xiv Patrick McCaughey, "The Australia Experience," in *Ten Australians* (Canberra: Australia Council, 1974), np.

xv See William Lieberman, *Fred Williams: Landscapes of a Continent* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1977).

xvi George Petelin, "proppaNOW," in *proppaNOW 2004–2008* (Brisbane: QIAMEA, 2008), 13.

Un-Australian Visions

From 1978 to 1987, the Exxon Corporation sponsored nine exhibitions at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. The series purported to be a presentation of the newest work from countries as varied as the United States, France, Italy, Britain, and Australia. Over this nine-year period, the series introduced a total of eighty-five artists, some of whom are well-known today, among them Sandro Chia, Enzo Cucchi, Giuseppe Penone, Barbara Kruger, Martin Puryear, Dale Frank, and Bill Henson.

The 1984 Exxon International *Australian Visions*, curated by the museum's then-Deputy Director, Diane Waldman, was a personalized selection of works meant to epitomize Waldman's vision of Australia. In her vision, Australian art of the 1980s was superior to the previous decade, which was described as having "little of lasting value." This new art was dominated by gestural and figurative painting influenced by European Neo-Expressionism. The "difference" between her chosen examples and the European ones, Waldman explains, is that the Australians responded directly to the "overwhelming presence of the land" that is specific to their country, and that they represent "apocalyptic" landscapes. In sum, this is their "unique contribution" to contemporary art.[1]

Waldman's catalogue essay is particularly troubling. Not only does she refer to Australia as having a "convict culture" and being a "pioneer in social reform" (an alarming comment, given the ongoing plight of Australian Aboriginal people), but, her phrasing throughout harkens back to romantic, colonialist ideals of a paradise lost, the "last frontier." (Indeed, she uncritically quotes a problematic, albeit lyrical, passage from 1789 written by Charles Darwin.) She describes the Australian landscape as "unruly", "lush", and "fertile", all of which smack of the kind of descriptions made by Paul Gauguin on Tahiti in his 1893 book, *Noa Noa*! Considering her outdated romantic vision of Australia, it should come as no surprize that as a curator-explorer Waldman "discovered" artists that ostensibly epitomized the specific "raw energy" she sought. With this context, it would have been unsurprizing if she had presented Aborigines as 'noble savages'. Instead, they were jarringly altogether absent. And, while the exhibition was commended at the time for being the only Exxon show to include a reasonable number of women artists (three out of nine), nothing in the surrounding criticism highlighted the lack of Indigenous artists—a reprehensible omission on the part of both curator and art critics, to say the least.[2]

History has demonstrated that most of the Exxon shows were not well received critically. As Roberta Smith explains in 1987, "One has the sense that, above all, the Exxon shows occurred faster than their curators could comfortably research and select them, that the money would have been better used if spent more slowly." While Smith singled out Peter Booth's *Painting 1984* as a "sprightly reprise of Neo-Expressionism" (and reproduces it), she describes the rest of the shows as "visual inertia." (Ouch.) Yet, when Vivien Raynor reviewed the exhibition in 1984, she called it "a strong and truly interesting show", and commended Waldman for having done "a first-rate job of capturing the essence of the country."[3]

While the exhibition was seriously lacking, it must be stated that Waldman set herself up with an almost-unachievable task. To organize an exhibition of works epitomizing an entire nation is truly a curatorial impossibility. In other words, while admirable in its aim, *Australian Visions* was doomed to failure. Yet such 'specialized' exhibition models were common then. During the 1970s and '80s, there were countless exhibitions worldwide that sought to represent *the essence* of nations, or of minority groups—with examples including not only the nine Exxon shows, but also innumerable ones devoted to Latin American Art, African Art, Black Art, Queer Art, and, of course, Women's Art.

The problem with exhibitions such as these is that they are often characterized by gender and/or cultural essentialism. Since the 1970s, feminist and post-colonial theorists have been critiquing the former, arguing that it effaces heterogeneity, and does not account for cultural differences between women. These same theorists argue against a monolithic definition of *woman* and, by extension, that of a global sisterhood, definitions that assume a sameness in the forms of women's oppression regardless of local circumstances. Analogously, according to Uma Narayan, cultural essentialism "often equates the values and worldviews of the socially dominant group(s) with those of all members of the culture."[4] Opponents of cultural essentialism ask questions like,

What is an American? An Australian? A Saudi? An Egyptian? An Indian? How is it, they argue, that a heterogeneous group of individuals, of different sexes, races, classes, religions, sexualities, and nationalities, can somehow unequivocally 'represent' the essence of a country? And how, in the context of art production, is it that these disparate individuals can express a visually similar national identity?

The current exhibition, *Australia Felix*, curated by Ross Woodrow, addresses these questions head on. As such, it is a direct curatorial response—and 'corrective'—to the 1984 exhibition. What is most refreshing about this exhibition is that it does not presuppose an essentialist definition of Australia. The works in no way reflect a 'national identity' or a recognizably similar formal style. Instead what unites the exhibiting artists is that they are all loosely associated with the Queensland College of Art in Brisbane—as instructors or alumnae. This is the only thing they share—a résumé notation. Some were born in Australia, others the United States, and others the UK. Not all of them identify as being an "Australian artist." In other words, this is simply a representative sampling of 'art (shipped) from Australia', not 'Australian art'.

There are no apocalyptic landscapes in this current exhibition. Instead, we experience contemporary art (again, 'shipped from Australia') as one characterized by the use of multiple media (unlike its predecessor, which emphasized painting) and innumerable artistic themes, ranging from animal rights, fairytales, self-portraiture, migrant communities, and Indigenous politics through gestural abstraction, kineticism, and lyrical works about memory.

Australia Felix is not an attempt at a facile nationalism that would claim to speak for all Australians worldwide. Instead, it recognizes that identity "*itself* [is] a constitutively multi-voiced arena of struggle,"[v] and that no one person can speak for, or represent, the whole. Instead, this exhibition examines the complex relation between and within the centers and the peripheries, the local and the global. *Australia Felix* practises a relational curatorial approach, or what Chandra Talpade Mohanty has called a "comparative studies model,"[vi] which aims to dismantle restrictive dichotomies (us/them, center/periphery, white/black, east/west) in favor of examining themes about the individual and their collective experiences of individuals cross-culturally.

Because it should always be contextualized and located, any strict definition of "Australian" in this exhibition has been kept open and supple and has not been considered an easily delineated term., e.g., not all Aussies 'come from the land down under', surf, drink VB, or say 'g'day mate'. As such, it is an exhibition that de-essentializes "Australia"—and in so doing demonstrates the complexities of contemporary art, and respects the multifariousness of identities (class, racial, ethnic, gender, sexual), in a way that is not limiting. This is an exhibition about the polyvocal—a cacophony of voices—not a monologue of sameness.

Professor Maura Reilly
Professor of Art Theory,
Queensland College of Art,
Griffith University

Notes

i Diane Waldman, "Impressions of Australia," *Australian Visions* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1984), 9.

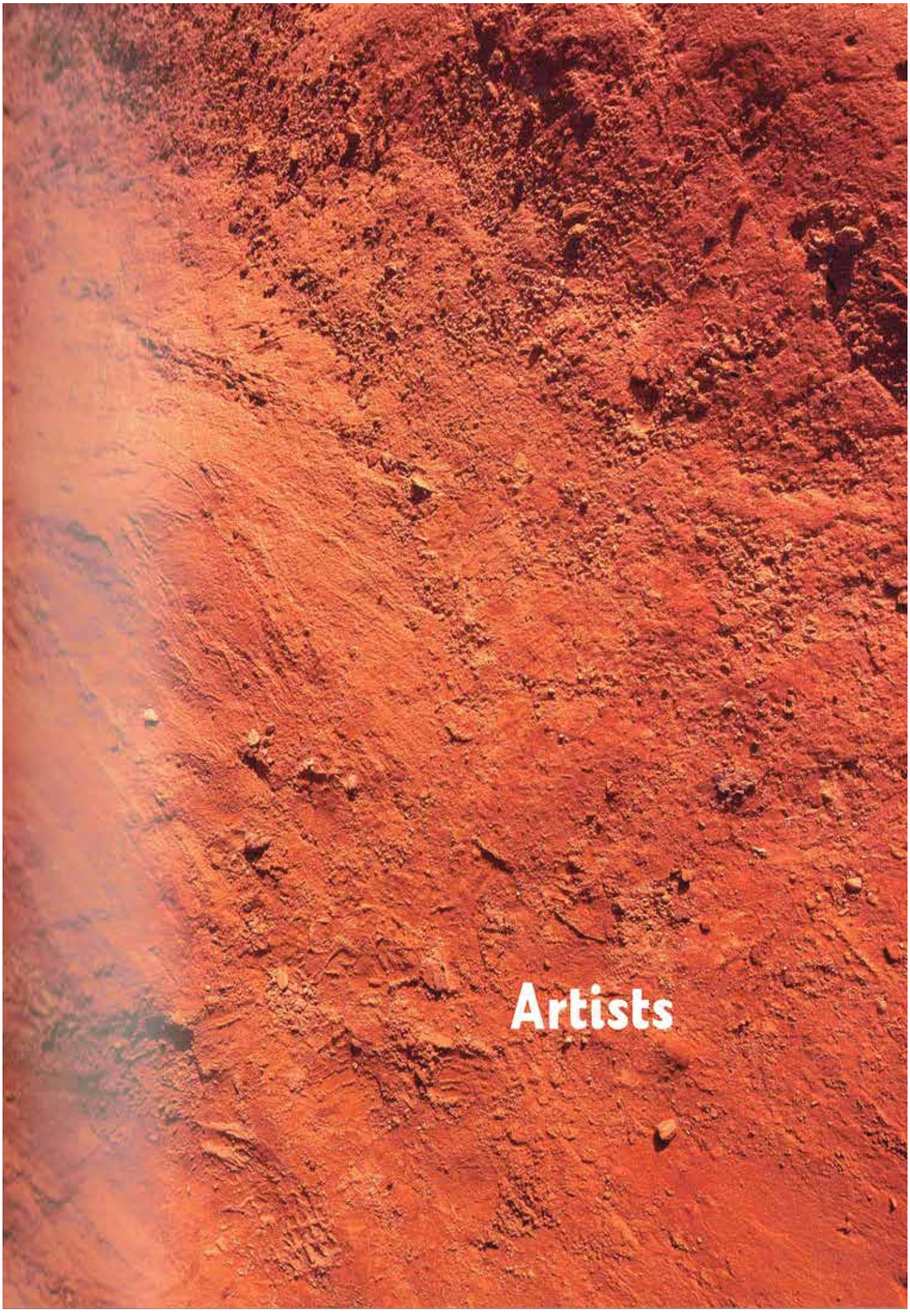
ii Grace Glueck, "At the Guggenheim: 7 Italian Shows in One," *The New York Times*, 2 April 1982.

iii Vivien Raynor, "Capturing Essence of a Remote Australia," *The New York Times*, 5 October 1984. As an aside it is worth noting Australian author Memory Holloway's essay in the *Australian Visions* catalogue; Holloway argues against Waldman's assertion of an 'authentic' Australia, stating that "There is no one Australia. It is more accurate to view this place, its culture and its art, as Meaghan Morris has recently characterized it, as 'a compilation culture of borrowed fragments, stray reproductions and alienated memories ... what we have to begin with.' And to go from there." Memory Holloway, "Bleak Romantics," *Australian Visions*, 11.

iv Uma Narayan, "Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism," *Hypatia* 13, no. 2, (Spring 1998): 89.

v Ella Shohat in the introduction to her edited volume, *Talking Visions: Multicultural Feminism in a Transnational Age* (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 16.

vi Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggle," in her *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 242–44.



Artists

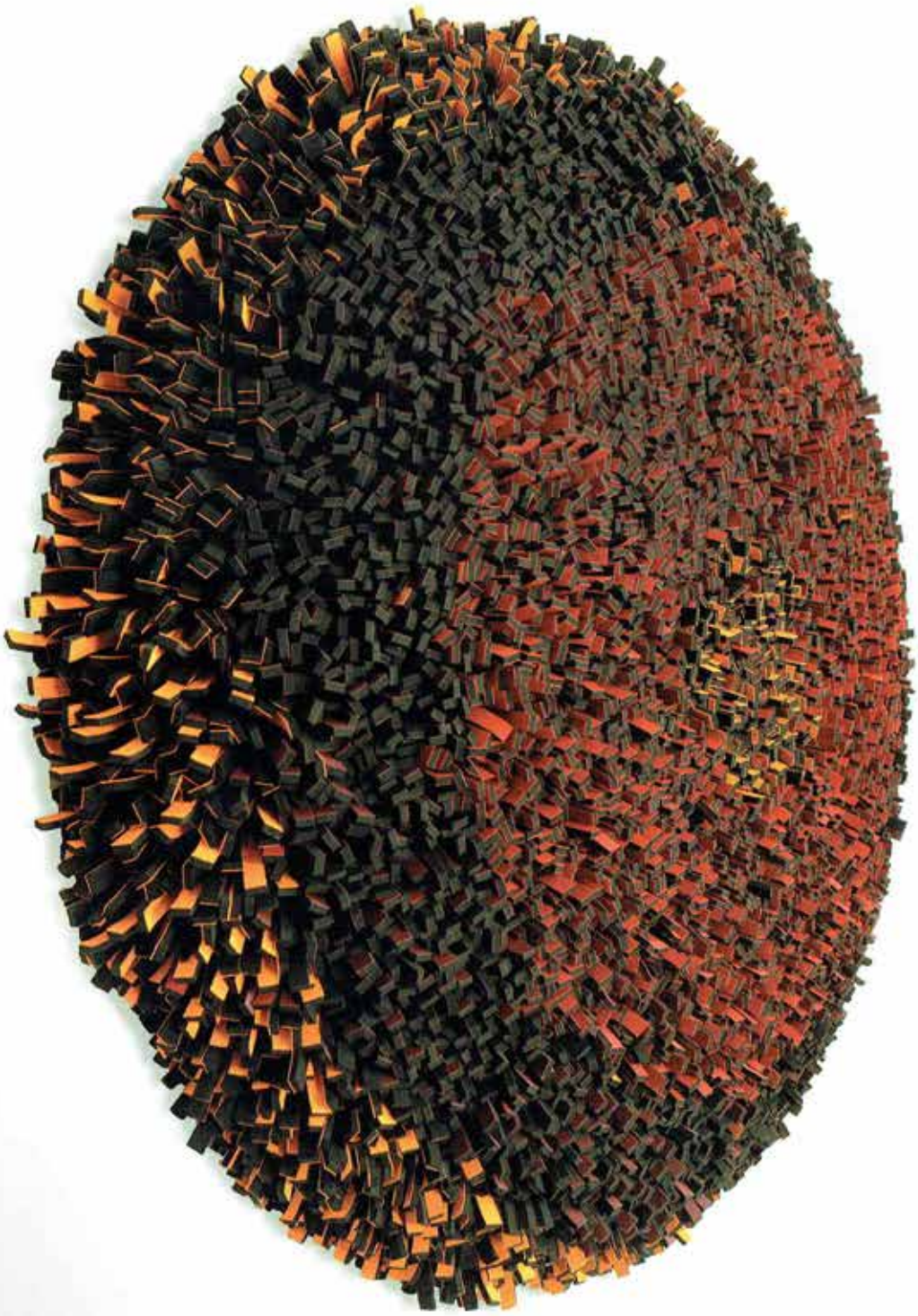
Sebastian Di Mauro

Sebastian Di Mauro is a prolific Australian artist; since 1987, he has held over forty-five solo exhibitions, and been included in excess of 100 group exhibitions held in Australia and overseas. He is regularly selected in the major Australian sculpture awards and exhibitions. He has been awarded residencies in Australia and overseas, including one at the British School, Rome, through the Australia Council.

Di Mauro has also completed a number of public-art commissions including a major commission for the Brisbane Magistrates Court at 33 Charlotte Street. He has collaborated with architect Alice Hampson on several public-art projects, including Logan Community Health Centre and the Gabba Member's Area (Woolloongabba Cricket Ground). In Adelaide, Di Mauro completed a commission during 2006 for Taylor, Cullity and Lethlean Landscape Architects and in 2011 he completed an ephemeral public artwork for the Adelaide City Council.

He is the subject of two monographs, *Between Material* (1998), and *Footnotes of a Verdurous Tale* (2009), and a survey exhibition of his work was held at Queensland University of Technology Art Museum, Brisbane, in 2009. His paintings, sculptures, artist-books, and installations are featured in the collections of many of Australia's key art institutions, including the Queensland Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Western Australia, McClelland Gallery and Sculpture Park (Victoria), Bendigo Art Gallery (Victoria), Besen Collection (Victoria), Artbank (Sydney and Melbourne) University Art Museum, the University of Queensland Art Museum, and Deakin University, Melbourne.

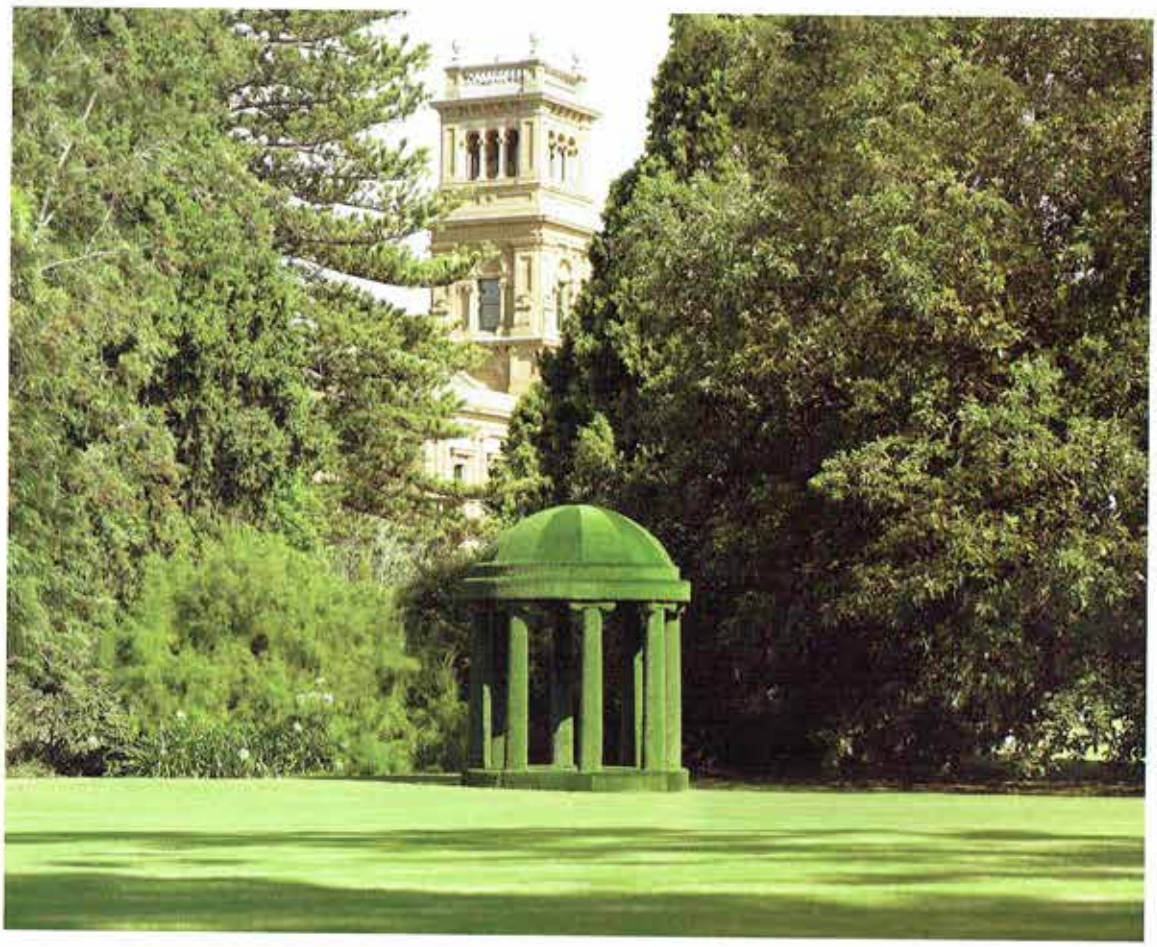
BELOW
Blind Spot
2008, woven neoprene,
fiberglass, dimensions variable



LEFT
Drift
2005, cast aluminium, installation,
33 Charlotte Street, Brisbane,
Left: 120 x 130 x 300cm,
Right: 360 x 250 x 150cm

BELOW
Folly (Themeda triandra syn, Taustralis)
2007–08, polystyrene, artificial grass, steel,
timber, 336 x 210cm diameter

RIGHT
Welcome Mats
2001, artificial grass,
dimensions variable



Welcome Mats

Welcome Mats addresses notions of immigration, diaspora, and assimilation, and is informed by Sebastian Di Mauro's Italian heritage. His grandparents arrived in Australia from Italy in the 1920s. This work speaks of immigrants' search for 'greener pastures', of arriving in a new land with hopeful hearts and dreams of a life better than the one left behind. After being in Australia for a number of years, Di Mauro's grandparents realized that most of what they dreamed had not come true and that what they had left behind was not too dissimilar to what they were experiencing in the new country. Language was one of the most difficult things they had to come to terms with, and they had little communication with people outside their immediate family. As a result, their world was very limited and the words they spoke often combined both English and Italian. In *Welcome Mats*, Di Mauro incorporates a combination of Italian and English texts.

Made from artificial grass, the nine mats include five Italian words in terracotta turf cut into the green artificial grass and four English words in green grass at a slightly lower pile cut into the green grass. The Italian words are: MEZZANO, PORTA, ALTRO, LONTANO, and VERO. The English words are: FLOAT, EXOTIC, DESIRE, and FUSE.

Of the works, Di Mauro states, "Welcome mats are so clichéd; they welcome people into a home and at the same time are used to wipe their shoes clean before entering. I find this a very fitting metaphor for the many immigrants that enter Australia. We welcome them to our shores but we ask them to leave some of the customs and beliefs behind." Many Italians who immigrated into Australia in the early part of the twentieth century have assimilated into the culture, but it is important to remember their unique contributions to the community and the ways that they have enriched Australia.