

ORIGINS OF IRRELEVANCE

THE FINE ARTS IN AUSTRALIA

by

Lawrence S Finn GDipVA

Submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Art

National Art School
December, 2006

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree at the National Art School or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the dissertation.

I also declare that the intellectual content and visual record of studio work of this dissertation is the product of my own work, except to the extent that assistance from others in the project's design and conception or in style, presentation and linguistic expression is acknowledged.

signature and date

This dissertation may be made available for loan and limited copying in accordance with the copyright act 1968.

ORIGINS OF IRRELEVANCE

THE FINE ARTS IN AUSTRALIA

LAWRENCE S FINN

One day a wag—What would the wretch be at?—
 Shifted a letter of the cipher RAT,
 And said it was gods name! Straight arose
Fantastic priests and postulants (with shows,
And mysteries, and mummeries, and hymns,
And disputations dire that lamed their limbs)
 To serve his temple and maintain the fires,
 Expound the law, manipulte the wires.
 Amazed, the populace the rites attended,
 Belive whate'er they cannot comprehend,
 And inly edified to learn that two
Half hairs joined so and so (as Art can do)
 Have sweeter values and a grace more fit
Than nature's hairs that never have been split,
 Bring cates and wines for sacrificial feasts,
And seel their garments to support the priests.

Father Gassalasca Jape, SJ

Table of Contents

<i>Preface</i>	6
Origins of irrelevance – the fine arts in Australia	8
<i>An Examination of the Social Function of Art Institutions and their Role as a Benevolent Societal Force in Australia.</i>	
The origin of the art galleries in Australia	10
The origin of the art schools in Australia	14
<i>Artists and Academia</i>	
The university and economics	17
The modern medieval embrace	20
<i>Art and Government</i>	
The non fiscal value of art	29
<i>Summation</i>	
In defence of artistic antagonism to the status quo	33
<i>Endmatter</i>	
Figure 1	37
Notes	38
Bibliography	41

Terror Mythica – Exhibiton of works

<i>A History of the Bastard Children of Empire</i>	44
200 Years – A History of the Bastard Children of Empire	
Colonial Period – A conga line of Suckholes (Kangaroo)	
WW1 – The Myth of Nationhood Revealed (Simpsons Donkey)	
WW2 – Cock Fighting Cousins (Merino Sheep)	
Vietnam War – The Hot Cold War (Calf)	
American Iraq War – George Bush's Poodle Farm (Camel)	

A History of the forgotten gods of the Antipodes 45

A History of the Forgotten Gods of the Antipodes – Antipodean Man

Fenris

Jesus

Muhammad

Mythis

Sidhartha

Shadows Under a Blood Red Rock (by book section)

An Empty Land 46

The Lucky Country 47

The Black Heart 48

The Assimilation Dream 49

Hope 50

Lieutenant Governor Davey's Proclamation Poster 51

External Examinors Statements

Alex Trompf 52

Graham Marchant 54

Preface

Before you examine the more academically regulated thesis, I feel that it is important to explain the framework within which I have attempted this work.

I have attempted to maintain academic rules of writing and of empirical relationships, which is in direct contradiction to the intention of the thesis. In the thesis I am essentially, postulating that art, to have a social value must exist in opposition to the currently dominant economic imperative.

Consequently, I believe that art will have to start again to build spaces outside of the dominant scientific and fiscal methodologies, if it is going to renew itself and offer processes and concepts, which will be of real social value. After modernity art is no longer bound by aesthetics, but certainly harnesses aesthetics as a tool within which it is able to create space for the individual while criticising, illuminating and expanding feeling and knowledge.

The subtext of this thesis (which owes much to the ideas of the Situationist International and Theodor Adorno) is that art as culture is now a regulated product (Adorno, 1991, pg.17). A product, which pretends a revolutionary aspect but in reality is fed to us as a substitute for real revolution. I do not believe that I am putting forward a conspiracy theory but I am attempting to describe an organic process, which is a consequence of too much emphasis and value being placed upon a particular mode of thought. I am arguing that western civilisation is dominated by an empirical methodology, which although largely unacknowledged is subservient to a greater economic imperative. I am arguing that this potentially heralds dire consequences for the fine arts (and by inference human society).

I acknowledge that this is both a difficult and unpopular position to argue. The pitfalls of being viewed as a polemicist or propagandist are many. I maintain that because writing about arts political potential is so condemned within contemporary academia (particularly since the fall of the soviet state and the absorption of communist china into the economic system), that this is of itself a support to my argument that artists are no longer allowed to pursue ideas that fall outside of "artistic orthodoxy". It is my belief that art has never feared to walk in unfashionable or obscure paths and so I have felt buoyed to pursue this inquiry regardless. Art for me is an investigation, why then ought my writing, conforming to academic convention, be singularly about the construction of a conclusion when my art is not?

In spite of this, I have attempted to maintain the structures of a thesis and also to avoid some of the pitfalls of academic writing, which James Elkins describe as a *'skein of evanescent allusions'* *'... which just stands in the*

way clotting the work with unjustifiable opacities' (Elkins, 2003, pg.26).

Although there has been pressure to write this as an exegesis, I have deliberately avoided doing so, partly because I feel that, the academic artistic arguments in support of the exegesis are based on convenience. This convenience has more to do with the relationship that the art school has to the university requirements than the contribution that a master's level student ought to make through a *'significant investigation and exploration of the materials available to them. An investigation, intended to produce independent & original research'* (Slade School of Fine Art, 2005-6, pg.23). To my knowledge, the exegesis is not a generally acceptable academic form outside of theology and the fine arts ¹.

Attempting to contextualise my work within the framework of art history is not appropriate given that my work does not inhabit in any significant sense the society within which I live and work. Currently I see it as a conceit to attempt to place my work into that larger framework. Another reason for not attempting an exegesis is that I have previously done so during my post graduate year at the *University of Sydney, College of Fine Arts*. I concluded from the onset of this course that reinventing my exegesis for academic convenience is not the way to go forward as an artist, or as an individual. I have instead sought within my artwork and the thesis to understand the framework of the world that I live and work in.

I have learnt much over the course of my studies and I have been privileged to spend time with artists, art historians, critics and theorists who are invigorating and intellectually stimulating. I have found their assistance of outstanding worth and I would like to thank them for what they have given me. I look forward to honing the knowledge and reinvigorating the inspiration that they have imparted so that I will contribute more eloquently to the debates conducted within contemporary Australian society and the art world.

I would also like to express my love and gratitude to Alexander Terrance McNamara 1923-2006 who has been my most avid supporter although he has never seen a single piece of art that I have created.

Origins of irrelevance – the fine arts in Australia

'The author should shut his mouth when his work begins to speak.'

(Friedrich Nietzsche)

This thesis will establish that there is a crisis in western society's academic and philosophical structures. This is between the humanities, in particular the fine arts, and the broader enlightenment program which sustains contemporary academic structures. Protagonists are scientific methodology and an enmeshed capitalist imperative on the one side and humanism on the other.

The thesis will explore the historical roots of two types of Australian visual art institutions, the state/national galleries and the fine art schools which have attempted to occupy a space in the contemporary University system.

It is important to understand these institutions' designs to maintain a position in the university system and to do so, it is necessary to examine the philosophical roots of the European university. From this focus, the changing roles and ideological impetus of these institutions will be examined. Following this there will be an outline of an ideological conflict between the humanities, and the utilitarian aims of 21st century pedagogical structures. This conflict is present throughout the history of the university but is coming to fruition in the contemporary academic world.

Art galleries are a unique form of social institution, falling outside government's need for functional symbolic buildings (such as law courts, treasury or administration). They also fall largely outside of the normal capitalist imperative of profit or perish. They are a rare form of institution, which rely upon the imparting and stimulation of ego, prestige and stature.

Art schools are a social oddity in an economic system that looks primarily to short-term financial gain and measurable results. Artists have become enmeshed in a system where the function of the institution is subsumed by the economic desires of the individual. Arguably, the institution has become a means of supporting peripheral needs in preference to the primary goal of art education. *'As art schools offer no guarantee of employment, wealth, worth or fame and society outside of the institution's walls offers artists even less'* (Brook, 1997, pg.20). It is not surprising that artists have sought work within a closed system that they have been instrumental in constructing. Because of this closed system, artists have evolved into new forms such as the artist

philosopher and the artist academic (*Lee, 1996, pg.4*).

To understand this evolution it is necessary to demonstrate that the impetus for the formation of fine art schools is almost inimical to that of art galleries. It will be argued that both types of institution have been used as a form of social control and that artists are now the least important element in the culture industry. Artists have been subsumed into a wider ideological conflict between the medieval (subjective) and the modern (objective) conceptual frameworks and methodologies. It is this conflict which has created the conditions for the rise of the new type of artist academic and miscellaneous forms of cultural apparatchik.

In the final analysis art has a social value which transcends fiscal worth and this value cannot be readily quantified within the dominant empirical view. Acknowledging that art has maintained a potentiality for radical inspiration, which is dangerous to the exercise of power, art has simultaneously been neutered, and made subservient to the economic status quo. My outcome will be a formulation of the transformative potentialities, which lie ahead, for art in the current period.

An Examination of the Social Function of Art Institutions and their Role as a Benevolent Societal Force in Australia

The origin of the art galleries in Australia

“The fine arts may seem a misnomer for foul arts when applied to this colony. Nevertheless it gives us great pleasure to undeceive the patrons of so preposterous a sentiment. Forty years is a period in which Britons can work wonders. The Muses and Graces are not inimical to our southern climes; and we have no doubt that they will take up residence amongst us.” John McGarvie 1829 (Lee, 1996, , Strecker, 2002, pg.101)

Australia’s institutions of fine art although young, are many and varied, particularly given our relative size and dispersed population. It may be a cultural anomaly that there are so many art institutions in Australia as a result of the historical period that inception occurred. Art institutions in Australia were conceived at a time of intense artistic institutional significance in Europe.

The subject of this study is not private galleries or private art schools, as they are inherently a part of commerce and the wider ideological discourse is less relevant to them as institutions. Art schools and institutions in Australia have typically had a large governmental support base. Therefore this study will focus on the state, federal galleries and the art schools which governments have conceived or maintained.

Older nations such as Britain and France built up their art institutions over centuries. They rose or fell according to social upheaval and or historical accident. In Australia we cannot claim such a legacy simply because we failed to recognize, absorb or embrace any of the cultural traditions which stemmed from the indigenous population. Unless we accept that the reasoning for Art institutions and schools in Australia were imported entirely from our founding countries, there can be no basis for them. The culture that existed in Australia was unrecognized to Europeans.

Few definitive sources are readily at hand and little clarity exist as to the mandates of institutions of art in Australia. If we are to analyse from a modern mindset the continued existence of Art Galleries in this period of

'globalization', user pays and the eternal fiscal crisis of western capitalism, the *raison d'être* becomes increasingly disconnected with their beginnings. Reasoning for their existence seems largely conjectural. To understand where the art institutions sit in contemporary Australian culture we have to understand the *raison d'être* for their existence in the early days of colony.

Art historians such as Robert Hughes (*Hughes, 1970*) Christopher Allen (*Allen, 1997*) and institutional historians in Australia have largely disregarded the formative aspects of art institutions in their writing and concentrated on individual artists. Research indicates that the formation of art galleries in Australia followed a European trend (fig.1).

Art galleries in Australia appeared very quickly after colonization began. The first gallery arose in 1842 in Tasmania and was founded by Lady Franklin (*Lloyd and Sekules, 1980, pg.206*). This collection came to be known as the Ancanth museum and although prominent was later merged with the Royal Society of Tasmania collection and became a Government Authority in 1865. The colony of Victoria followed in 1861 with the National Gallery of Victoria and in 1879 and 1881 the Art galleries of New South Wales and South Australia respectively, were formed. Art Galleries in Western Australia and Queensland came into being in 1895 (*Lloyd and Sekules, 1980*). In contrast, the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory was built in 1969. All these institutions (excluding the Northern Territories Museum and Art Gallery) were created within 107 years of colonization. Relatively speaking the rapid pace of the institutions in Australia roughly follows the trend that occurred throughout the colonies, such as New Zealand² , Canada³ and South Africa⁴.

Art galleries in Australia simply followed a trend, that occurs throughout the colonies and which was begun in Europe by the prototypical Louvre. Its origins are in the French Revolutionary Government of 1793 who seized the Kings collection and in an inspired act, threw open its doors to the public. In an era of social upheaval art became something more than just accoutrements of the rich and powerful. Art was now apparently for the people⁵. As a result of the French Revolution and a fear that the violent social unrest may spread, every western capital in Europe created their own National Art Gallery (or Galleries), all of which were open to the public by 1825 (*Duncan, 1995, pg.30*).

European Art Galleries originated and largely grew from '*...sixteenth, seventeenth-, and eighteenth century princely collections (Duncan, 1995, pg.23)*'. Those collections were set in galleries which most typically acted as

function rooms or receptions halls for European nobility. Art was hung in lavish rooms, intended to impress, dazzle and overwhelm as well as serve to illustrate the wealth, majesty and might of the owner. With the seizure of the Louvre and the subsequent opening of its doors to the masses art maintained its previous relationship of subjugating the viewer, but for new masters and a new audience⁶.

Unsurprisingly most major art galleries in Australia came into being roughly around the time of the gold rush (1850-1860), when there was “a surplus of wealth”. That surplus of wealth accounts to some extent in the improvements in social infrastructure, and goes a long way to providing an explanation for an increase in pubs, saloons, brothels, prisons and so forth. These establishments are utilitarian in nature and readily fit into the economic paradigm of capitalism, fulfilling the law of supply and demand. Art galleries in contrast are fundamentally not utilitarian. Art galleries are empowered by, and derive their existence from, other societal needs and desires (*Duncan, 1995, pg.1-6*).

An examination of the literature regarding the foundation of the various state galleries in Australia, reveals a pattern in which the galleries in the colonies of NSW, Victoria and Van Diemens Land (Tasmania) consistently upholds:

‘a belief that the torch of civilization may be left in the hands of the antipodeans, that Europe may fall, to rebellion and anarchy but that the mother colony would continue on, guardian of the accolades of culture, flag bearer and protector of a history that goes back to antiquity’ (Art Gallery of NSW, 2006)

Clearly, the elites of the new colony considered themselves to be the last bastion of civilization and guardians of the traditions of classical antiquity in the face of a Europe, which they thought may fall to revolution, chaos and war. This was a position they held in total disregard and ignorance of the civilization that they encountered in Australia.

Art galleries have always tended to shy away from socially controversial views, which may upset funding or attendances (unless they promote publicity and increase viewer numbers⁷). As a means of distancing themselves from the controversial, they have preferred a less detailed and more pedestrian self description. This is consistent with the description given by the National Gallery website which is:

'to take art away from the elites so that art 'can be enjoyed by the widest public possible, and not become the exclusive preserve of the privileged' (National Gallery of London).

Some theorists elaborate those views and argue that within Western society the purpose of art galleries is manifest as a form of control or regulation; Art Galleries are *'not the centre of cultural power; (but are seen as) ... a regulating element thereof' (Pécoil, 2004)*. It could also be argued convincingly that television is also a regulating element of social and cultural power. So the question then becomes what are the specifics that differentiate the art galleries from other social regulators of cultural power?

Art galleries *'constitute one of those sites in which politically organized and socially institutionalized power most avidly seeks to realize its desire to appear as beautiful, natural and legitimate' (Duncan, 1995, pg.6)*. Art galleries are a means of extolling the virtues of a government, the benevolence of the rich (patrons) and the wealth (cultural and fiscal) of a nation. The Art Galleries in Australia presented not only a connection to the past but also a culture of superiority and achievement. They enabled the new inhabitants to feel that they belonged in Australia and that they had a form of cultural ownership which had the duplicitous role of excluding and humbling the existing culture (*Bourdieu, 1991*).

When we debate the social function of our Art Galleries we must ask not only about the effect that they have had on the European settlers of Australia but also what effect did our museums have on the indigenous cultures of Australia. More relevantly it begs the question as to what effect did the art museum have on the thinking of European and non indigenous peoples regarding the indigenous art and culture? In light of the unarguable brutishness of the colonization process, it is likely that the art galleries defined themselves and Australia by reinforcing a feeling of European superiority and native inferiority. In the face of an alien landscape it was not until the Heidelberg school that there was any acknowledgement of Australia as an entity within the canon of Australian art (*Hughes, 1970, pg.51*).

This argument can be extended further and suggest that as the colonials aged, bred and died they too fell victim to a feeling of inferiority in the face of European superiority and that the curatorial policies of all of the major Australian galleries exacerbated the situation. Not even the generous Fulton bequest was used until the 1960's to purchase Australian art. This implied

that Australian art was not of a calibre worthy of consideration by the major galleries. In this sense, Galleries are a means of subjugation, of both the indigenous inhabitants of Australia and the children of European settlement. Symptoms of this still affect Australia today and are identifiable in the culturally cliched 'tall poppy syndrome' (*Davison, 2000, pg.25*). Art galleries deliberately and or accidentally have acted as a means of imposing cultural domination over the indigenous population and over the children of colony.

The origin of the art schools in Australia

Compared to the divergent forces, which brought forth art galleries in Australia and Europe, the reasons for the formation of art schools in Australia are relatively straightforward. The same caveat exists for art schools as art galleries, in that the impetus of their origins, as opposed to their current ideological basis are divorced from each other. Arguably, art schools have generally retained their original ideological underpinnings more successfully than the art galleries. Art schools in Australia begin with the art club, the first documented art club in Australia is J S Prout's Hobart school formed in 1846.

Although drawing clubs and art schools in Australia predate the mechanics institutes of the arts and the arts and crafts movements, the modern Australian inception of the art school owes much to its origins in the arts and crafts movement, led by William Morris. Arguably a greater influence stems from the Mechanics Institutes of the Arts formed by George Birkbeck, J. C. Robertson and T. Hodgskin around 1821 (*Candy and Laurent, 1994, pg.2*). Art schools as we know them in contemporary Australia derive primarily from the philanthropic Mechanics Institutes of the Arts and the subsequent technical colleges that they spawned (*Allen, 2005, pg.175*).

The social consequences of the industrial revolution, and the catastrophic effect that it had on the working classes, resulted in a desire for the alleviation of their oppression. This attempt at the edification of working men and woman was led by elements of the middle classes (comprised mainly of protestants and some of the upper classes). The tools used were religion, employment, education and the accompanying increase in literacy⁸. An appreciation of the fine arts was thought to be an enlightening and civilizing influence and was utilized as a means for refinement of the working classes⁹.

Art schools in contemporary Australia stem from the mechanics institutes of the arts, which in turn can be traced back to the inception of the Glasgow or London Institutes' of the arts in 1823 or the Edinburgh School of Arts in

1821. Their origins are variously attributed to the literary and philosophical societies of the 1780–90s, the adult Sunday schools of the Methodist and Quaker societies of the 1790s and or the radical Socialism that swept through Britain in the 1820's – 1830's.

Given the diverse nature of the institutes, no single movement or occurrence dominated. It is more likely that the influence of each movement in turn revitalized and invigorated the direction and impetus of individual institutes. The one element that each of those movements shared was a desire to elevate the worker through the refinement of intellect, spirituality and mechanical skill¹⁰.

The Mechanics Institutes of the Arts movement swept throughout Britain and her colonies – Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, India, the West Indies and further afield to the United States. At the peak of the movement, it had over 2000 institutes dispersed around the country (*Candy and Laurent, 1994, pg.2*).

The first (Australian) Mechanics Institutes of the Arts was established in Van Diemens land in 1827, followed by Sydney in 1833 and Melbourne in 1839. The Mechanics institutes primarily offered instruction in the liberal arts but extended their programs slowly and somewhat uncertainly to include the fine arts.

The institutes were concerned with the mental and moral improvement of the working classes, which they pursued by operating lending libraries and conducting lectures on broad topics of interest to the working person. They sought to provide the tools for everyone to acquire an education by providing the means to educate oneself. They also sought to provide healthy pursuits for leisure time. Those few institutes, which are still in existence, maintain their lending libraries and continue to offer lectures of topical interest in the same tradition that they always have. Of significant ideological and historical interest is the fact that the constitution of the Mechanics Institutes of the Arts always specified that there was to be one member of the clergy on the board of directors, for reasons of moral guidance. Within a short time, the institutes were largely taken over by the middle classes and professionals 'who were eager for knowledge and culture as a means of furthering their own interests'. (*Strecker, 2002, pg.101*).

There appeared to be a genuine desire to impregnate high culture into the Australian environs, as much for the 'civilizing nature of art' on a 'colony of convicts' as to brandish the power of the British Empire and laud the virtues

of its cultural supremacy, power and grandeur. An early speech on the fine arts delivered by Benjamin Duterrau (the English painter) at the Sydney Mechanics Institute of the arts talks about 'the importance of cultivating the fine arts in the development of colonial society' '*...as only through education and culture could the colony overcome its depraved convict origins*' (Strecker, 2002, pg.102).

Artists and Academia

The university and economics

*Art will cease to exist by becoming indistinguishable
from other forms of cultural production.
(Jusdanis, 2005, pg.25)*

This section will demonstrate how and why the university system becomes enmeshed with a form of economic rationalism, which transforms the university from its original basis as an institution of broad enquiry, into a system reliant entirely on empirical scientific methodologies. It will be asserted that the desire to embrace knowledge, while pursuing and preserving it, was the primary motive of the older university¹¹ and that this has become superseded by the drive toward economic reward. The methodology employed will examine the work of the sociologist Zilsel, working in the 1940's, who ties the sciences to economics and whose work consequently has bearing on the fine arts and where they are now located in the western university tradition.

Fine art, history and literature departments within the university system of the western world currently exist in a state of crisis (*Jusdanis, 2005*). It is clear that this crisis extends throughout the humanities. An examination of funding and scholarships in Australian universities indicates that the fine arts are poor second cousins to the sciences. The Meyer report and various papers put forward by the National Association of Visual Artists (NAVA) and the Australia Council supports the commonly held and clichéd view that those who choose fine art as a vocation are from a statistical point of view embracing a life of poverty (*Meyer, 2002*).

Artists are often unable to support themselves from their artwork alone, this unsurprisingly leads artists toward other means of support such as teaching art and or working within academia as a significant source of income. Artists historically have had many more opportunities for employment such as patronage, portraiture, scientific reportage and popular illustration. However as art has become more elitist, intellectual and esoteric in its outlook, artists have as a class, largely distanced themselves or been distanced from their employment opportunities.

Teaching offers a related satisfaction to many art academics and artists. Most academic and teaching positions in Australian Universities and art schools

are financially attractive and until fairly recently they were also considered a reasonably secure form of employment. Art schools often guide their prospective star pupils towards teaching, encouraging them by allocation of tuition work and guest lectures.

Artists find themselves driven and drawn to the University, specifically the humanities which is the field of disciplines within which the fine arts traditionally seats itself. The humanities have their roots in classical antiquity and working methodologies which are contrary to modern scientific enquiry. The humanities as a broad framework of learning have been periodically reinvigorated and refined since their inception in the platonic academy as the liberal arts and the Medieval University (Pederson, 1997). The humanities shared their status with the sciences and in many respects they both have the same roots (Pederson, 1997). Particularly during periods of social upheaval such as the 1920-30's and the 60's they have been substantially reinvigorated. However, they sit firmly outside of the dominant empirical scientific methodologies employed by the contemporary university. In some instances, scientific methodology is applicable and relevant to the individual discipline. Disciplines such as journalism and anthropology are protected by their connection to empirical methodology but in other interests such as fiction or design, commercial viability maintains and protects them within the university tradition.

Edgar Zilsel writing in the 1940's puts forward a theory of the sociological roots of science, which has profound implications for the fine arts and the humanities in general. Within its framework is an acceptance that science and the arts have roots which are symbiotic¹². It is put forward in his writing that scientific enquiry and artistic enquiry were at one time, one and the same thing or at least, both utilised the same methodology of inquiry (Zilsel, 1942, pg.942). The outstanding example of that interconnectedness is Albrecht Durers 'Melancholia II', constructed in its entirety using the mathematics of the golden mean. It is the living embodiment of applied mathematics, in the medieval artistic quest for the perfect harmonised form.

Zilsel argues that the beginnings of scientific enquiry can be divided into three strata of intellectual activity (over a period from 1300 to 1600): the university, humanism and labor. He further argues that the university was dominated (and hampered) by theology and scholasticism, which when confronted by secularism, avoided causes and physical laws.

Humanism, according to Zilsel, stems from an educated class who were essentially intermediaries, and who gazed enviously at the political and

cultural triumphs of the classical past. Realising that their triumphs reflected well on their employers and also accorded a level of fame to themselves, which in turn would generate a better condition of employment, they *'strove after perfection of style and (an) accumulation of classical knowledge'* (Zilsel, 1942, pg.939). Humanism he claims progressed rationally, developing *'the methods of scientific philology but neglected the causal research... ignorant of physical laws and quantitative investigation'*(Zilsel, 1942, pg.940). They were more interested in words than things, more interested in form than content.

Both classes, university scholars and the later humanist intellectuals disdained the uneducated and both classes adopted the ancient distinction between the liberal and mechanical arts. Only professions that do not require manual work were considered worthy of well bred men. Manual work was disdained as the work of slaves and the indentured. That stigma continues often unacknowledged to this day in Western societies (Zilsel, 1942, pg.940).

Beneath the humanists and the university scholars were the labourers, consisting of the artisans, mariners, carpenters, foundry-men, engineers and miners. Stimulated to invention by economic competition they are the real pioneers of the empirical method, observation, experimentation and causal research.

Zilsel concludes his argument:

'the rise of the methods of the manual workers to the ranks of the academically trained scholars at the end of the sixteenth century is the decisive event in the genesis of science'.

This is as important as his belief that the first scientifically verifiable and quantifiable relationship was the invention and application of *'double entry book keeping'* as espoused in Luca Pacioli's "Summeria de Arithmetica (Venice 1494)" (Zilsel, 1942, pg.937). This event is of vital importance to the fine arts and the humanities because it distinguishes and separates the old university structure, and the new university system that is dominated solely by empirical scientific enquiry and commerce.

This occurrence ties commerce and empirical scientific enquiry together in a Gordian knot which either transforms, excludes and or negates access of all

the other perceptual frameworks and methodologies of inquiry from the university system.

The modern medieval embrace

The university academic system has moved away from its original inspiration (medieval scholarly and humanist aspirations) and has become dominated by forces which are antithetical to those original intentions. The forces which now dominate the university are those which Zilsel describes as economic (and empirical scientific methodologies are inherently connected to this occurrence). Emerging from the resulting conditions of change, it can be asserted that art is tied into the older methodology of intellectual inquiry which predates the dominant modern empirical and economic rationale. Further, fine art cannot sit comfortably within the empirical economic rationale which is the basis of modern capitalism. This is because fine art is embraced and absorbed into it, but its radical potential is also neutered by it.

The early university (1200-1400) was concerned with the seven liberal arts¹³ the primary emphasis was logic and the most prestigious course theology (*Pederson, 1997, pg.29-66*). The later university (1500-present) has become increasingly dominated by science, economics, commerce and arithmetic. The beginning of the modern university is the beginning of science as a construct, which is implicit in the relationship of commerce and knowledge¹⁴.

The change in the university structure round the 1500's, results in the beginnings of a major closure of systems of learning and enquiry. Empirical scientific examination, begins its domination of methodologies previously dominated by theological and spiritual enquiry. The university becomes subject to the impetus of a single universal scientific truth moving away from the theology of the church (which although the church laid claim to infallibility, universality and divine authority) was fundamentally subjective. The doctrine of empirical scientific enquiry, which by definition is objective and impartial, begins its path to intellectual dominance. (*Ferruolo, 1985*).

Artists may not have recognised the historical precedents, but they have certainly tried to capitalise on the situation as it stands in the present. The issue for fine arts and artists is that the reduction of working methodologies potentially limits the scope of possibility. This is a position which is antithetical to the current spirit of the fine arts, which are fundamentally eclectic and diverse. Arts institutions are most often in the unfortunate position of attempting to cater to both positions. Theodor Adorno, writing in the schema of mass culture and referring to art holistically as an entity states:

'with the liquidation of its opposition to empirical reality art assumes a parasitic character. In as much as it now appears itself as reality, which is supposed to stand in for the reality out there' it tends to relate back to culture on its own'(Adorno, 1991, pg.17).

It becomes obvious that the fine arts in the contemporary world have diverged as much from the renaissance intent of inquiry, as from the rigidly defined pictorial presentation of form that dominated western art until modernity. The modernist experiment took art from the walls of the rich and attempted to make it both a mass commodity and contradictorily, an elitist product.

Artists in the 20th century attempted frequently (if not unsuccessfully) to escape commodification, through radical and occasionally shocking gestures¹⁵. In attempting to escape the strictures of society and economics, they undoubtedly changed the way that art was perceived and also changed arts primary audiences. As art became a form of mass media transgressing the boundaries of high and low culture, it loses its oppositions. In so doing it not only becomes a commodity but also loses any high moral position and relevance.

Art as an industry becomes the ruin of art as a cultural entity. Both are self referencing, self serving and have become not reflective of, or reflexive to, society as a whole. Both appear to be identical but culture on the one hand arguably shapes society organically (from the bottom up) and art as an industry is arguably a control mechanism, which shapes society artificially (from the top down). That they share so many common traits allows each to hide behind the other (*Debord, 1983*)¹⁶.

The masses, i.e. the non ruling classes have no reason to feel concerned with any aspects of a culture or an organisation of social life that have been developed not only without their participation or their control, but even deliberately against such participation or control.

*(Situationist International -
Martin, 1981)*

In the face of cultural arguments that strike at the heart of relevance, artists and art schools have floundered. While artists and the art industry have attempted to maintain relevance to society as a whole, they have most often sought a position, which distances them from the utilitarian ambitions of the

technical college or has driven them toward the vocational protection afforded them by the design industry.

The fine arts are in a particularly obtuse position. Their defenders are unwilling or unable to extend their defences beyond the vocational utilitarian or the humanist sanctity of the spirituality of fine arts. They rely singularly on arguments, which tie artistic pursuits to industry or artistic product to the elevation of the psyche. Both of those defences tie the fine arts to commerce. Art defenders in putting forward those arguments are demonstrating the dominance of capitalism over the intellect and the fine arts.

Christopher Allen in a contemporary expression of the spiritual argument while defending the fine arts generally, condemns the 1990 Biennale of Sydney:

“art can create spaces of imaginative freedom in which many things can be suggested and played with, dreamt of and lived hypothetically, without the tyranny of explication. It can enlarge the frontiers of our contact with the world and with others, and help us to grow more sensitive, more morally intelligent”(Allen, 1996, pg.6).

Spiritual accolades of the fine arts are incomprehensible to the cultural apparatchiks¹⁷ and bureaucrat's concerned only with profit and loss, because these concepts fall outside of the intellectual framework that they have been educated within. Arguments in support of the fine arts frequently rely on a spiritual foundation. It is hardly inappropriate or an understatement to suggest that the arts at their best are concerned with ennobling the human spirit, inspiring the individual and of expanding the psyche. Unfortunately, for art, artists are often speaking a language, which many can no longer understand, nor desire to do so.

There is another argument that art schools provide a feeder system into many industries. Whilst this is arguably true, it does not imply that art schools are deserving of the resources, which they actually consume. The interrelationship of art schools to industry has historically protected many institutions over the years and has framed the contemporary discussion on the value of schools in Australia. By providing a rationale for art schools as a source of valuable human resources, defenders of the art schools also

play to the greatest instrument in the arsenal of arguments, which seek to remove art schools from our society. That is that art schools ought to be economically viable and accordingly that they have a place within the vocational system (*TAFE NSW, 2006*).

Another striking contention is that art schools no longer have any real connection to industry (*Brook, 1997, pg.20*). A case in point is the National Art School's¹⁸ fight to remove itself from what many perceived as a cloying death inflicted upon it by TAFE NSW. The argument can be described as being between the frightening disconnection of artistic realities in Australia to the vocational training packages proposed by the TAFE Bureaucracy. The National Art School successfully managed to argue a position of autonomy from Industry. Unfortunately, in doing so, its primary argument relies upon elitist aspirations and historical importance, setting itself as a bastion of studio traditions in Australian art education. In putting forward those arguments, the defenders of the art school put the school into a position that has made it irrelevant to both Federal and State governments except as a status symbol.

It is a more accurate point to make that the National Art School is the only art school in Australia that teaches a pure discipline of fine arts, at a time where the majority of art schools in Australia have succumbed to design and craft (utilitarianism). The disconnection of art schools to industry can be defended convincingly given the radical impulse of 20th century art toward equipping individuals and artists with manual skills and a discerning intellectual prowess. If financial success is the singular criteria of what defines good art, then why are Ken Done's paintings not hung, in a predominant position in the State and National Galleries of Australia?

An examination of the constant shuffling of the National Art School, in and out of various incarnations & amalgamations (Alexander Mackie, TAFE, NSW Institute of the Arts) and more currently attempts to merge it with Macquarie University and the University of New South Wales provide striking examples of the utilitarian arguments for and against art schools and their relevance to industry.

The ambiguity and lacklustre response to the spiritual argument for the value of art begs the question of what the social function of the contemporary art school in Australia really is. It is an issue that university administrators, chancellors, the Federal Government, or artists themselves are unable to provide an explanation for. We ought to be asking why the fine arts are significant? If they really are significant, then why are they being taught in

academic circles that are increasingly obsessed with fiscal realities rather than humanist investigation?

The art schools debate is fundamentally economic in nature. The sides can be divided between the artist academics (and cultural apparatchiks) that rely upon the art schools and consequent industries for their livelihoods and the Academic and Governmental bureaucracy intent on financially profitable disciplines, which will maintain and or improve their livelihood and status.

There are not to my knowledge any statistics demonstrating support for the argument that art school training facilitates a transformation of the individual that would not have occurred if they were trained elsewhere in the educational system. Statistics of this type do not generally exist because the transformation that is being referred to is not one that is necessarily quantifiable through empirical scientific methodologies.

As a result of the economic enmeshing between the scientific method, commerce and the modern university, the only surprise to academics, artists and art workers is that the humanities and the fine arts have survived as long as they have. The current period of intense economic domination coupled with photography's push of the fine arts in the 20th century, away from the recording of representative information has contributed to the diminishing fortunes of the fine arts. Fine art is no longer able to tie itself convincingly or loosely to the scientific world.

Artists and defenders of the arts, rather than build a convincing defence of the fine arts along the established lines of utilitarianism or the spiritual benefits of art have begun to rely on other arguments, specifically historicity. That is the arts deserve funding because they are a proud tradition in Australia.

A recent letter to the Honorable John Howard MP in the Sydney Morning Herald resorts to the historicity of the NAS as a 'national treasure' and the education of 'more artists of national and international acclaim than any other art schools in Australia' as a legitimate reason to defend and preserve the art schools (FONAS, 2006).

Those standing behind this plea to the Prime Minister argue that, for its present and past cultural contribution, the National Art School (NAS) deserves to be placed alongside the National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA) and the National Institute of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS). What they really mean is that they want to be funded alongside those other institutions and remain autonomous from debilitating

external bureaucracy. This is perhaps a worthwhile argument to support the NAS, but what of the other three major art schools in Sydney or the many art schools and courses Australia wide which are coming under increased funding pressures. How do they stay viable and or defend their positions as well? How many art schools are actually necessary in a society that statistically speaking, does not embrace the fine arts! Are art schools to be funded based on numbers wishing to study or on numbers of jobs that can be projected to exist for graduates?

If we cannot explain, why the arts belong within the contemporary academic tradition, and if we are unable to demonstrate credibly why they deserve such privilege, ambitions on academia can justifiably be perceived as desperate opportunism. Accusations of opportunism and inappropriate elitism may be levelled at the fine arts and result (particularly for the mechanical aspect) eventually, in their removal from the university academic landscape.

It may be that institutional autonomy is the only way that the fine arts (in Australia) will legitimately survive. In the UK the art schools that have pursued the autonomous route have relied heavily on the vocational aspects of art and design for funding and in the US they have largely positioned the art school toward the wealthy or upper middle classes. This again raises questions which defenders of the arts fail to answer, about the role of the art school within Western society.

If arguments that defend the fine arts are not coherent, eloquent and consistent, then art schools and art students (and the artists who teach in them) will be seen as squatters taking up space in expensive real estate. Artists can no longer rely on or assume that precedent will protect their place within society. Clearly, artists who wish to remain or enter the institutional framework need to re-establish the place of the fine arts within contemporary society.

Reference to the argument that art schools provide diversity of intellect and trained artists are able to adapt to vocations in which the educational system has not equipped other people, may hold some truth. It has not been demonstrated in anything that I have read that the accreditation of a degree is necessary to be an art supplies sales person or burger flipper at McDonalds. In contrast many arguments have been presented that very few famous artists have attended art schools. It has been argued repeatedly that a fine art education can provide serious benefit to the individual, the employer and society but this is never demonstrated. In Australia there has not been a published end study of where arts graduates end up over a

period of time after graduation. Perhaps this is the reason that art schools are resistant to doing graduate surveys.

Many art critics, theorists and interested parties have attempted to comprehend, explain and remedy this situation. Donald Brook writing in the April 1997 edition of *Art Monthly Australia* puts forward an argument which partially explain this plight. He states: *'no agreed body of knowledge or measurable standard of skill is generally required of artists'* and he calls into question the actual need for artists to have qualifications. He also states: *'most human cultures have produced art without the need for art schools'*. He concludes his critique on art schools by declaring his support for them:

'We need a story about what the art school is for that is explicit, coherent, credible, persuasive beyond the confines of the industry, and sincerely believed by the tellers. We do not have such a story and should be working on it'. (Brook, 1997, pg.23)

Donald Brooks statement is surprisingly similar to Geoffrey Galt Harpham's call:

'humanist scholars, fragmented and confused about their mission, suffer from an inability to convey to those on the outside and even to some on the inside the specific value they offer to public culture' (Harpham, 2005).

To borrow again from Harpham, it is what the critic and scholar Louis Menand describes as *'a crisis of rationale'*.

An example of the effect of this crisis of rationale can be found in the recent retreat of Macquarie University, led by its new vice chancellor American Steven Schwartz, 'away from supporting cultural activities' which was demonstrated in its withdrawal of patronage to the Macquarie Trio (one of Australia's top chamber music ensembles) (*SMH, 28/08/2006*). This is following on from a recent withdrawal from a merger with the National Art School. Both are overt examples of how the status of the arts within the university has been diminished in the face of fiscally viable or profitable activities.

The erosion of faculties which are tied to cultural production (i.e. the humanities, fine arts) in Macquarie University has been foreshadowed for some time by a creeping assault on the humanities throughout the university system in Australia. In spite of these attacks on 'culture' it is clear that artists have a vested interest in staying within the university academic system. The university system, for reasons of financial viability, would generally be happier to concentrate only on faculties which give concrete results and financial rewards.

Artists seeking employment in the contemporary academic world of the university or art school, are increasingly having to legitimise their teaching, and the relevance of the arts within the university and society, to gain funding. As part of a more general malaise in the humanities, the fine arts are said to be in a position of producing too many graduates for too few positions.

For many artists struggling economically and critically within their practise, the university may be the only financially rewarding position available. There is a perception in the fine arts community that they are under threat and that they are dependent upon the universities, art schools and government funding bodies for survival. This implies that society, as a whole, does not support the fine arts.

Assaults on traditional academic imperatives such as the appropriateness and viability of the fine arts within the university render the arguments of academics such as Peter Hill and James Elkins somewhat irrelevant. Peter Hill has argued, strongly for the elevation of art accreditation within the contemporary university system (*Hill, 1995*). Elkins on the other hand states that as the arts are a part of the academic world, and that is not going to change, the art school ought to and will embrace the hierarchy of academic qualifications. Elkins puts forward an argument for independent art schools and the university as a champion of the fine arts, which in view of the economic imperative of the contemporary university, is probably wise. Both Hill and Elkins afford the art schools an historical privilege within academia that is: they both accept that art schools are here to stay simply because they are already here. Neither explains why art is of any social, fiscal or historic importance that merits the special privileges' of contemporary academia. To a greater or lesser degree, they both seem content to look back on tradition, to justify the position of prestige and influence which art seemingly exerts over the status quo.

Art schools and artists have frequently sought to maintain relevance by

embracing new technologies. They have sought to demonstrate the dynamic nature of the fine arts and art schools by utilizing new technologies such as computers, holograms, laser cutters and so on. While these technologies may have relevance to artists, they essentially remain toys in the face of an inability to harness those technologies successfully within a traditional arts curriculum. To use the technologies, it is almost a requirement that you are secondarily an artist and primarily a mechanic of that technology. Likewise art schools who have attempted to harness the technologies have often been transformed by the requirements of the technology into becoming utilitarian institutions of design, rather than broad institutions of fine art. Many great artists used the most modern technologies available to them in their time, the embrace of new technology by artists and art schools is not new. However embracing technology can be perceived as a desperate attempt on a public perception of socio-technical relevance.

To be fair to Elkins he makes some concessions to the economic desirability of institutionalising the fine arts, with a frank admission that the inclusion of art into the academic realm may be due to economics rather than appropriateness (*Elkins, 2004, pg.22*). He also questions the relevance and possibly damaging effect that academia may have on certain types of art but at no point does he put forward any reason as to why art is worthy of the accolades of academia. Elkins unlike Hill also makes another concession when he states: *'the academization of art is a fact, whether or not it is a good idea' (ibid' p31)*¹⁹.

While Elkins and Hill might have missed the small detail of appropriateness, Donald Brook asserts that it is time to re-establish the legitimacy of the fine arts within education rather than rely on precedent; that we need to be able to argue as to why art deserves to be included in the contemporary academic milieu.

Art and Government

The non fiscal value of art

High art is deprived of its seriousness because its effect is programmed; low art is put in chains and deprived of the unruly resistance inherent in it when social control was not yet total.

(Adorno, 1991, pg.20)

While artists may not be able to explain the values of the fine arts coherently, governments have not been hampered in their recognition of the value of the arts. They have sought equally to control and define the arts. Governments have sought control because there is an historical precedent that demonstrates that the fine arts and artists when aroused can be powerful tools in bringing Governments to their knees.

It is true that there is some discussion by various individuals in both major Australian political parties and their respective arts ministers with regards to the importance of the fine arts in the rich cultural life of the nation. This will be demonstrated to be hyperbole in the discussion later on the AbaF.

Hitler, Stalin and Mao may be leagues away from the Australian Federal and State Governments in terms of levels of control but they share the same basic motivations in regard to the fine arts. The motive for control is the application of a stamp of approval over debate and discourse including entertainment within their respective societies. Censorship seeks to have works judged and disregarded based on a subjective standard. Mao and Hitler, just like Prime Minister John Howard, have claimed a mandate to protect citizens from offensive (or impure) materials and or influences²⁰.

Governments in their consistent attempt to maintain control over the fine arts institutions and thereby over artists, demonstrate that there is an importance to the fine arts that has been overlooked by many defenders, observers and critics. Even though society does not embrace the fine arts, Government in its actions to maintain control of the fine arts imbues them with an importance, which cannot be dismissed.

Art institutions in Australia are seldom financially self-sufficient. This is largely in keeping with international trends where similar institutions 'overseas' have been 'encouraged' to embrace an existence based on corporate sponsorship

and private philanthropy. These institutions have also used those connections to lobby government for funding and support to varying degrees of success (Wu, 2002, pg.278-9).

An observer of Government policy towards the arts might be forgiven the observation that the Federal Government has perceived the arts as undeserving and needy. Accordingly, the federal government has sought to put as much distance between themselves and the arts as they credibly can without risking public perception that they are anti-intellectual²¹.

To demonstrate their commitment to the fine arts the Federal Government under John Howard has established the Australian Business Arts Foundation (AbaF) in 2000, a body which seeks to promote private sector support for the arts or as they state it '*...connect business, the arts, donors and foundations through three programs – partnering, volunteering and giving*'(Australia Business Arts Foundation, 2006).

An examination of the Board and councillors of the AbaF is a who's who of the banking, mining and insurance world in Australia. Two of the 12 board members and five of the 85 councillors are closely tied to the arts. Given the perceived lack of fiscal success of the arts in Australia it makes sense to use business leaders to lend their support, and with only 1 female board member and 5 female councillors it certainly goes a long way to demonstrating the lack of success that women have had in Australian business as well (sic). (Australia Business Arts Foundation, 2006).

The AbaF received a boost to its funding in the 2006 federal budget of 1.1 million dollars. Over the following four years it will be funded to a total of \$2 million to provide and '*train visual artists to work more closely with the commercial arts market*' (Laurie, 2006). An examination of the AbaF web site, publications and publicity describes an organisation which is strongly supportive of the notion of philanthropy. The Federal Government in establishing this funding body, in preference to other already established organisations, arguably weakens their legitimacy and financial security²². There have been MPs and art critics who have perceived this action by the federal Government as divisive²³ (National Association of the Visual Arts, 2006).

It is implicit in the actions of the Federal Government by its establishment of the AbaF that the arts are still significant to them. Government desires to be seen providing support and funding. They want to have a say, in controlling the purse strings but also in influencing the direction that the arts might take

in their relationship to the wider community²⁴.

It is not an easy task to establish the importance of the arts within society but it is clear that in spite of a general inability of artists and academics to explain concisely why the arts are of value, Governments have not let that impede their own acknowledgement of arts social power. From the imposition of Louis XIV's desires and vanity through the French Academy to Stalin's restriction of art to subservience to the needs of the state, art has been a medium historically, with which the power elites have struggled for control (*Boime, 1971*).

An instrumental methodology may be required to identify the importance of the fine arts. If we carve away at the structure of the arts, locating the sources of funding and interest then we can more readily establish the value of the fine arts to society as a whole. We may also potentially identify the role and reason for the funding of the arts by government. This is central to my examination as it denotes the changing roles of art galleries, art schools and the relationship that they have to society.

It is time that artists asked if the fine arts have become irrelevant why then are governments around the world so wary of artists and the arts and so desirous to control them? In spite of a destabilising process which has occurred around the world, art itself still clearly wields some influence on power.

Governments have been wary of the fine arts and mistrustful of their relationship to it throughout the 20th century. If they have not feared the 'high art' of the gallery, then they have certainly been distressed by the accessible art of the streets. For our reference: the Situationist International role in the Paris May 68 riots; King Mob and the Punk movement in '70's Britain; Anarchist Punk in the 1980's (bonded with the anti nuclear, feminist and socialist protest movements); industrial culture temples such as psychic TV, com transmissions and SPK in the 80's; NSK and Laibach Kunst in the 1990's, have successfully effected change to society in greater or lesser degrees.

There has been many occasions when Government ministers have been nervous of involvement with art and artists and demonstrably the police have been made to look fairly heavy handed and foolish on occasion in their roles as arbitrators of public tastes.

It is difficult to demonstrate what purpose the fine arts have within contemporary society but very easy to demonstrate why society, government

and academia desire to contain the energies which art contains and channel those energies in positive directions which are effectively neutered of their radical potential.

Summation - In Defence of Artistic Antagonism to the Status Quo

The artist has a special task: that of reminding men of their humanity and the promise of their creativity.

(Lewis Mumford)

It is clear that if state or national funding of art schools disappeared tomorrow, people would continue to create art. That people create art is not dependent upon the existence of art schools. I suspect that whether they create great art or mediocre art is ultimately unimportant. What is important is that there is a fundamental need in the human psyche to create objects which are useless, irrelevant, subjective and that they can exist outside the confines of the dominant logic. Although these are not criteria for defining art, they are certainly helpful if used to describe superficially a type of work, which we currently accept as fine art. There is a liberationist aspect attributed to any freedom that allows for the celebration of folly.

The concept of a society without art schools is unthinkable to many people. Even as they quietly accept that art schools will become more vocationally orientated, they deny that art schools will disappear. The problem here is that art schools cannot define what they actually are, or what their social function is. They have as much trouble defining their purpose as they do in comprehending their social function. Art schools will be transformed from an amorphous undefined entity (which arose from from a fine historical lineage), and absorbed in name only into a fiscally defined and valued member of the academic canon, but extinguished in substance.

The emphasis of the art school since inception has been transformed repeatedly by external social forces. Art schools have frequently been forced to move away from their aspiration toward pure art, for reasons of financial expediency, and have instead often become closer in function to design schools. They have embraced utilitarian and vocational activities such as jewellery, ceramics, digital media (computer driven art) and photography.

Photography, ceramics, digital media and jewellery all have a valid location in the art school and it is not the inclusion of those disciplines, which are problematic to the art school per se. The problem for the art school is that the potential for these mediums toward utilitarianism easily allows for the transformation of the art school into a type of institution, which is not concerned with the exploration of the artistic but rather the creation of

product. The mandate of design schools is to utilise creativity in the creation and embellishment of product. In contrast, fine art schools are more concerned with creativity's relationship to the nature of objects.

Art schools, in fighting for so long to remove themselves from the limits of functionality and utilitarianism, are in a sense conducting a brave social experiment. In an age of economic imperative, can we as a society value an institution of ambiguous fiscal values? The art school is the sole institution within our society that has as its function, illumination and examination of the subjective. In this sense it is a direct descendent of the platonic academy. To judge it as an institution in modern terms is flawed and disingenuous.

Art in its relationship to society has frequently sought to confront and illuminate power from a position of independence and or complete subjectivity. In doing so artists have exercised a privilege that is rare within our social structures. Even as art is negated by economics, it is also given a licence to be critical of society, injustice, capital and so on. Art is one of the very few social mediums within our society, which acts as a valve for those opinions. It has a licence derived from historical precedent, which allows it to be subjective, radical, confrontational and absurd.

Scientific rationalism, in both the theoretical and mechanical realms, stamped out the subjective possibilities of the imagination. Disciplines outside of the humanities and the fine arts are dominated in heart and mind by capitalism and scientific methodology. Only in art is the irrational and subjective positively encouraged. The desire by artist academics to marry this privilege with the privilege of the university academic tradition is potentially dangerous to the polemic qualities of art but they also herald the potential for a new type of art²⁵.

To maintain relevance and a connection to the sources of income, artists have attempted to position art as a bauble, a functional inspiration for industry or an esoteric reliquary, which will liberate the truth and which in turn, will liberate humankind. The National and State Galleries have acted as both a conduit and as an obstruction of these positions. Recording and preserving the strengths and weaknesses of artistic pursuit in a given period, they set in concrete and are gatekeepers over that which is valid, valued, invalid, and unvalued.

The role of the art gallery has not changed that greatly since their inception in Australia. They still serve to install pride through a celebration of culture and present a face of cultural appreciation and superiority to the outside world.

Art galleries still serve to dominate and extol the virtues of the society within which they exist. Although they serve an elite of people within their bureaucracy, and the choices they make about display, they primarily serve a power ideology. They are a tool of power and not of capital. Their currency is cultural power, not commerce.

Inherent in the function of the art school is the potential to relieve the mundanity of everyday life, to reinvigorate our view of the world and the way we interact with it. Sociologists and philosophers such as Adorno, Debord and Zilsel have put forward that there is a conflict between the humanities and the sciences, where the subjective represented by art, philosophy and the humanities are in conflict ideologically with the empirical, represented by capitalism, bureaucracy and the empirical.

Both parties are arguably engaged in a conflict that ought not be won by either side. Unfortunately, in this period of super consumerism and globalisation, we are racing toward a point in human social history where the empirical and the economic are clearly dominating. The modernist pronouncement of *"the end of art"* may have been premature although Danto's argument that the *"master narrative"* is exhausted may be supported by the apparent lack of relevance that art has to society (Danto, 1997, , pg. 10).

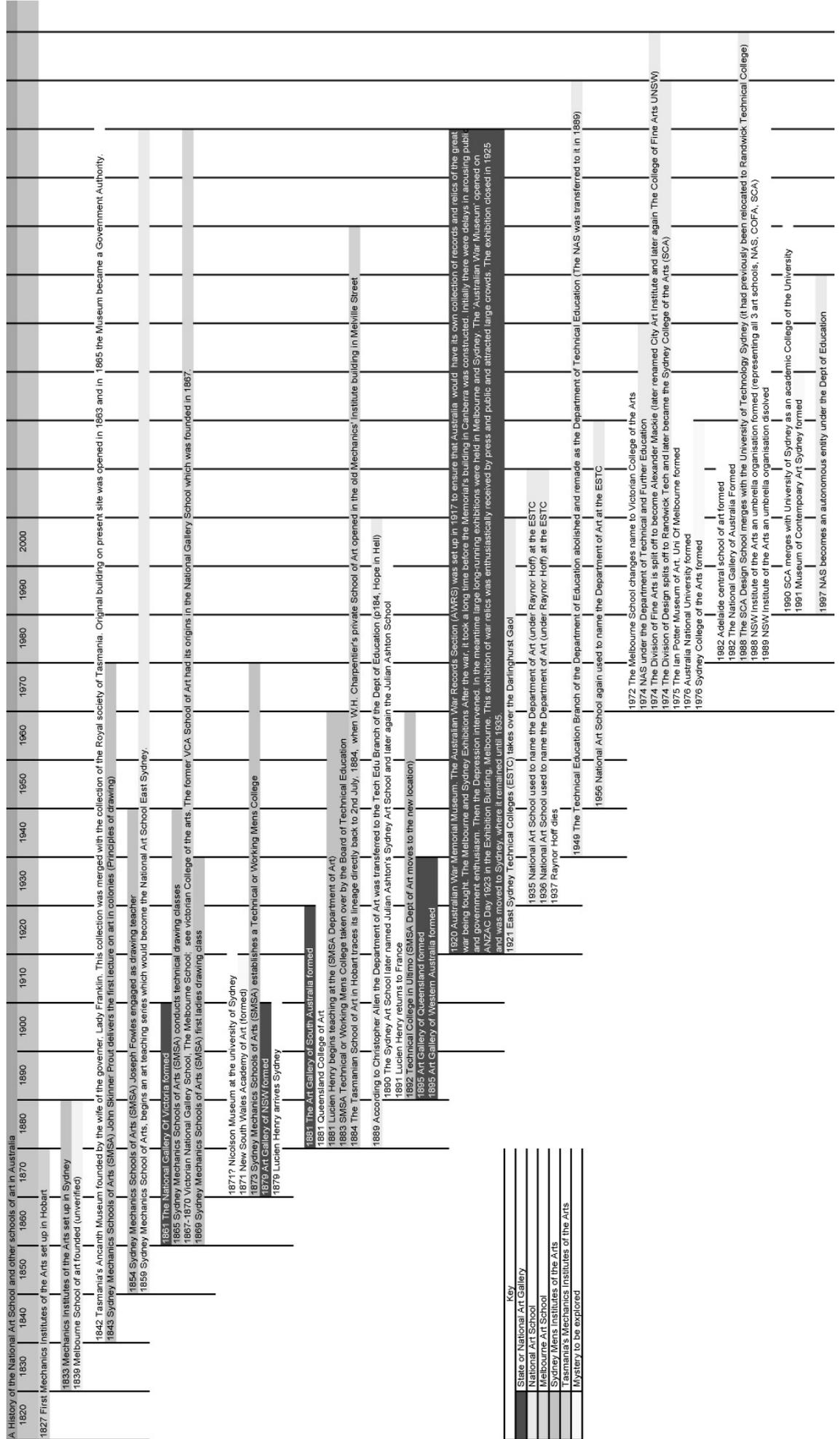
Accordingly, for the art school to remain relevant, it will have to change, and it will be changed regardless. Artist academics can control that change or they can be dominated by it. The art school will have to seek an autonomous model of funding. The art school history departments will need to embrace the disciplines of sociology, ethics and philosophy, all of which inform the broader philosophical discourse of the fine arts now. For practising artists who wish to exist within the economic embrace of society, advertising, publicity and self promotion will be invaluable additions to the curriculum. For mechanical arts the introduction of computers and technology will be advantageous. An art school that is offering digital photography and photo manipulation, laser sculpture, 3d rendering, web construction, digital typography and computer illustration, as skills rather than vocational training will put it self into a position of dominance simply because the emphasis will be on the creative intellectual and mechanical, not on profit or perish.

Art schools aspirations go beyond that of the design school and its functional role as an institution of utilitarianism and vocational training. Art schools desire instead a role that is similar to the role of the art galleries. They wish to be a part of the mechanisms of national pride, imparting a sense of cultural

superiority, and extolling the virtues of the civilisation they inhabit. Unlike the national and state art galleries, artists and art schools often also seek a critical discourse with society.

A nation that cannot afford to have a single institution of art education that flourishes and displays these attributes is a nation that is (in western terms) culturally bankrupt.

Figure 1



Notes

- 1 If art schools wish to be included in the academic university system and reap the rewards of that system, why then do they argue for special privileges with the way that we construct our arguments?
- 2 1865 The Colonial Museum founded under James Hector. In 1913 that the National Art Gallery was founded (now the Dominion Museum)
- 3 THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND, T. P. T., History, .
- 4 Montreal Museum of Fine Arts was founded in 1860 and the National Gallery of Canada in 1880
- 5 NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA, Gallery History, http://national.gallery.ca/english/default_59.htm.
- 6 Although the collection was begun in 1871, the National Gallery of South Africa (Iziko) was only housed in 1930
- 7 SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL GALLERY, I., About S.A National Gallery, <http://www.iziko.org.za/sang/about.html>.
- 8 Through the French revolution art is elevated to the status of a revolutionary symbol of equality, fraternity and liberty.
- 9 My claim is that this relationship nominally continues within the function of art galleries toward the indigenous and colonial peoples of Australia.
- 10 The closest example is the National Gallery of Victoria, Serano, Piss Christ scandal and the arguments abounding around that incident and funding, attendance that this controversy generated.
- 11 Which was the most important aspect of the social revolution and one that William Morris, socialism and the social liberals of the times can take the most credit for as it finally gave the worker the ability to make informed choices and the opportunity to elevate their social stature.
- 12 A modern legacy of this is the placement of art openings during week nights. Employment was to occupy the working mans day, the church was to occupy the working mans weekend and the art opening was placed in the weeknight to inspire the working man to stay out of the pub.
- 13 The same set of skills which are defined by Zisel as defining the scientific revolution ZILSEL, E. (1942) The Sociological Roots of Science. The American Journal of Sociology, 47544-62.
- 14 Deriving their social power and intellectual scope from theological studies.
- 15 It is also clear that the majority of influential writings about the dissolution of that symbiotic relationship is primarily dealt with in the writings of philosophers such as Adorno, Hegel and Nietzsche.

- 16 arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music theory, grammar, logic, and rhetoric
- 17 Interestingly Gerald of Wales in his *Gemma Ecclesiastica* puts a similar criticism and conclusion forward when he derides the decline in learning by those who abuse grammar and rhetoric by rushing as 'quickly as possible to logic, seeking the garrulous loquacity that will make them seem clever and keen. They are not even ashamed to become masters after only three or four years of study and to teach poorly to others the useless learning that they themselves have imperfectly mastered, so that they can boast of the proud title of master and still move on quickly to the lucrative sciences of law and medicine". FERRUOLO, S. (1985) *The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100-1215*, Stanford University Press.
- 18 Duchamp, Marinetti, Nietzsche, Warhol, Koons, have all used shock or the unfamiliar to further their agenda's
- 19 The obvious example of the continuation of this philosophy of art can be found in the writings of Guy Debord (*Society of the Spectacle*) and Raul Vaneigem's (*The Book of Pleasures*). DEBORD, G. (1983) *The Society of the Spectacle*, Detroit, Black and Red, VANEIGEM, R. (1983) *The Book of Pleasures*, London, Pending Press.
- 20 Explanation of the term Professional burocrats in the 1980's working in the arts ended up with the label also
- 21 (formerly the East Sydney Technical College dept of fine arts)
- 22 Elkins expands the notion of the PhD thesis far beyond the limited and solipsistic presentation of the exegesis which Hill proposes.
- 23 One of the first actions of John Howard's newly elected Government was to ban the Pier Paul Passolini's film *Salò*. More information on censorship in Australian media can be found at <http://www.refused-classification.com/> which is an online catalogue of censored materials (ie: refused classification) and <http://libertus.net/> a website dedicated to the debate of censorship and existing and proposed laws in Australia.
- 24 The liberal government has on many occasions defended their position on the arts and extolled their virtues (find references) in that regard. Government ministers however still seek to bask in the philanthropic splendour, social glow and educated façade which is afforded them by seeming involvement in community arts and the more elitist artistic activities such as opera, ballet and theatre.
- 25 The Australia Council, the National Association of Visual Artists and the Arts Law Centre.
- 26 Peter Garrettt shadow minister for the arts, Clover Moore lord mayer of Sydney and the art critc John McDonald.
- 27 This potentially opens up another debate about the broader questions

concerning the social relationship, responsibilities and obligations that governments have to those who they claim the mandate to rule from. What obligation does a Government have to the fine arts and what obligation do the fine arts have to Government?

- 28 Sot art, and paper architecture in the USSR, outsider art in the USA, industrial culture and punk in Europe and Britain are examples of this type of artistic social occurrence.

Bibliography

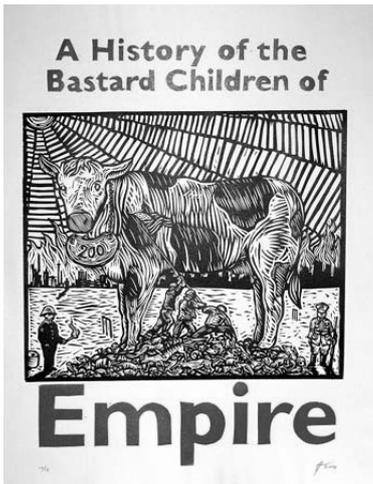
- 1 ADORNO, T. W. (1991) *The Culture Industry - Selected essays on mass culture*, London, Routledge.
- 2 ALLEN, C. (1996) Speaking of defeat and powerlessness. *Art Monthly Australia*, 92, 4-6.
- 3 ALLEN, C. (1997) *Art in Australia*, London, Thames and Hudson.
- 4 ALLEN, C. (2005) A brief history of the National Art School. IN BECK, D. (Ed.) *Hope in Hell*. Crows Nest, Australia, Allen & Unwin.
- 5 ART GALLERY OF NSW (2006) *History of the Art gallery of NSW*, Sydney, Australia, Art gallery of NSW.
- 6 AUSTRALIA BUSINESS ARTS FOUNDATION, About ABAF - introduction, 4 Sept 2006,
- 7 BOIME, A. (1971) *The Academy and French painting in the Nineteenth century*, London, Phaidon.
- 8 BOURDIEU, P. (1991) *The love of art : European art museums and their public*, Cambridge : Polity Press.
- 9 BROOK, D. (1997) What is the art school for? *Art Monthly Australia*, 98, 20-23.
- 10 CANDY, P. C. & LAURENT, J. (1994) *Pioneering culture: mechanics' institutes and schools of arts in Australia*, Blackwood, South Australia, Auslib Press.
- 11 DANTO, A. (1997) *After the End of Art*, Princeton University Press.
- 12 DAVISON, G. (2000) *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, Crows Nest, Australia, Allen & Unwin.
- 13 DEBORD, G. (1983) *The Society of the Spectacle*, Detroit, Black and Red.
- 14 DUNCAN, C. (1995) *Civilizing Rituals - inside public art museums*, London, Routledge.
- 15 ELKINS, J. (2003) *What happened to art criticism?*, Chicago, Prickly Paradigm Press.
- 16 ELKINS, J. (2004) Theoretical remarks on the combined creative and scholarly PhD degrees in the visual arts. *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 38, 4.
- 17 FERRUOLO, S. (1985) *The Origins of the University: The Schools of Paris and Their Critics, 1100-1215*, Stanford University Press.
- 18 FONAS, F. O. T. N. A. S., To the Honourable John Howard, *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 26-27, 2007, pg. 11
- 19 HARPHAM, G. G. (2005) *Beneath and Beyond the Crisis in the humanities*.

- New Literary History, 21-36.
- 20 HILL, P. (1995) Is there a doctor in the art school? *Art Monthly Australia*, 84, 11-14.
- 21 HUGHES, R. (1970) *Art in Australia*, Ringwood, Penguin.
- 22 JUSDANIS, G. (2005) Two Cheers for Aesthetic Autonomy. *Cultural Critique*, 61, 22- 54.
- 23 LAURIE, V., Who's best placed to train artists, *The Australian*, 10/08/06, pg. 40
- 24 LEE, A. (1996) *Art Schools and the Academe*. *Art Monthly Australia*.
- 25 LLOYD, C. & SEKULESS, P. (1980) *Australia's National Collections*, Cassell Australia Limited.
- 26 MEYER, R. (2002) *Report of the Contemporary Visual Arts and Crafts Inquiry*. Commonwealth Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.
- 27 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THE VISUAL ARTS, Press release, 07 August 2006, pg.
- 28 NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA, *Gallery History*, http://national.gallery.ca/english/default_59.htm
- 29 NATIONAL GALLERY OF LONDON, *National Gallery, London*, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk>
- 30 PÉCOIL, V. (2004) The Museum as Prison. *Third Text*, 18, 5, 435 - 447.
- 31 PEDERSON, O. (1997) *The First Universities*, Cambridge, UK, Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.
- 32 SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL - MARTIN, J. S., J. VANEIGEM, R. VIENET. (1981) Response to a questionnaire from the center for socio-experimental art. IN KNABB, K. (Ed.) *Situationsit International Anthology*. Berkley California USA, Bureau of Public Secrets.
- 33 SLADE SCHOOL OF FINE ART (2005-6) *Prospectus*, London, Slade School of Fine Art.
- 34 SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL GALLERY, I., *About S.A National Gallery*, <http://www.iziko.org.za/sang/about.html>
- 35 STRECKER, J. (2002) *Colonizing Culture - The origins of art history in Australia*. IN MANSFIELD, E. (Ed.) *Art History and its Institutions - Foundations of a discipline*. London & New York, Routledge - An imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group.
- 36 TAFE NSW, T. A. F. E., *Course Information*,

<http://www.tafensw.edu.au/howex/servlet/Course?Command=GetCourse&CourseNo=7530>

- 37 THE MUSEUM OF NEW ZEALAND, T. P. T., History,
- 38 VANEIGEM, R. (1983) The Book of Pleasures, London, Pending Press.
- 39 WU, C.-T. (2002) Privatising Culture - Corporate art intervention since the 1990's, London & New York, Verso.
- 40 ZILSEL, E. (1942) The Sociological Roots of Science. The American Journal of Sociology, 47544-62.

A History of the Bastard Children of Empire



200 Years – A History of the
Bastard Children of Empire
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
31 x 42cm



Colonial Period – A conga line
of Suckholes
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
31 x 42cm



WW1 – The Myth of
Nationhood Revealed
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
31 x 42cm



WW2 – Cock Fighting Cousins
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
31 x 42cm

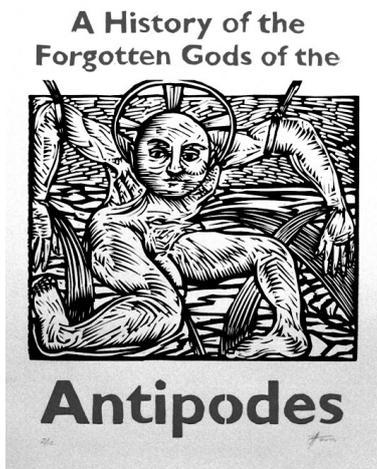


Vietnam War – The Hot Cold
War
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
31 x 42cm



American Iraq War – George
Bush's Poodle Farm
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
31 x 42cm

A History of the Forgotten Gods of the Antipodes



A History of the forgotten gods
of the Antipodes
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
31 x 42cm



Mythis
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
31 x 42cm



Sidhartha
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
31 x 42cm



Jesus
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
31 x 42cm



Muhammad
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
31 x 42cm



Fenris
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
31 x 42cm

Shadows Under a Blood Red Rock – An Empty Land



Pissing in an Empty Land
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



Revisionist Historian
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



The Never Never
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



Hero of the Black War
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



A Snake Longer Than Anyone
Can Remember
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



The Other Great White Meat
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm

Shadows Under a Blood Red Rock – The Lucky Country



Pecking at the Weak Spot
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



The Noble Savage
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



Rabbit Proof Fence
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



A Man and His Dog
in the Never Never
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



Waiting for the Tsunami
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



Fortress Australia
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm

Shadows Under a Blood Red Rock – The Black Heart



Natives on Flinders St
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



Bread and Wine
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



Unclear Historical Parrallel
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



Black Armband, White Blindfold
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



Picnic at Hanging Rock
(Deaths in Custody)
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



Flora and Fauna
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm

Shadows Under a Blood Red Rock – The Assimilation Dream



Living off the Land
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



Story of Albert
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



Missionary Position
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



Gin Trap
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



Mother of a Stolen Generation
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm



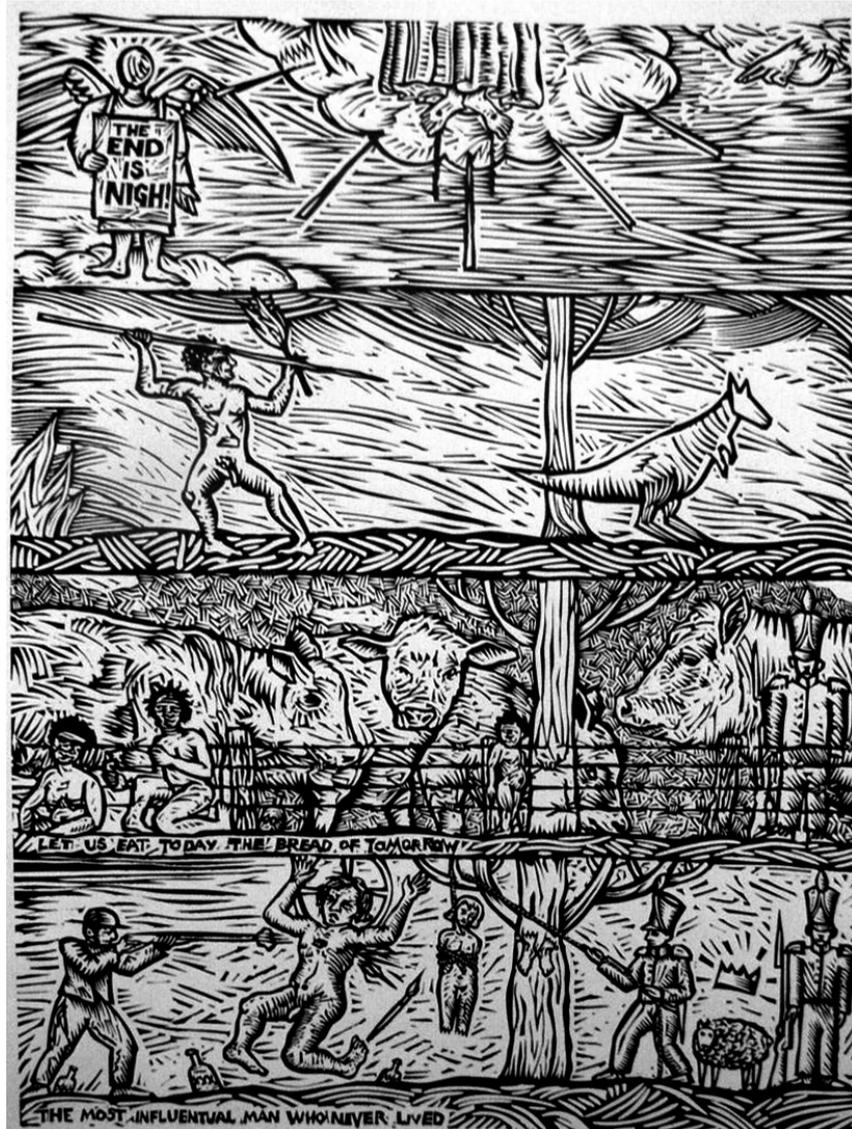
Flaming Cows
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
12 x 12cm

Shadows Under a Blood Red Rock – Hope



Hope
2006
Linocut, edition 12,
11.5 x 17cm

Lieutenant Governor Davey's Proclamation Poster



Lieutenant Governor Davey's Proclamation Poster
2006

Linocut, edition 12,
60 x 42cm

Alex Trompf – MFA Report

The submission consists of 38 prints divided into 3 sets: a History of the Forgotten Gods of the Antipodes; a History of the Bastard Children of Empire; and Shadows Under the Blood Red Rock, the last divided into six sub-sets which together comprise the chapters of an Artist Book. Each set utilises a different stylistic trope, allegorical, symbolic, and an expressive realism (for want of a better description), respectively.

The works are exhibited in Gallery 451, an artist initiated gallery managed by the candidate. The presentation is clear, professional and intelligent, enabling each set to be appreciated individually, highlighting their stylistic diversity while at the same time allowing the sets to compliment each other in a manner which results in a coherent experience of the exhibition as a whole.

As the title of the print “Black Armband, White Blindfold” indicates, the candidate has deliberately set his work in the context of the Culture and History Wars currently being contested. While being informed by post-Colonial theory, the works avoid a dry didactic presentation of theoretical concerns – context and theory are filtered through the imagination by use of allegory and symbolism to re-emerge as nightmarish myth; a ‘Terror Mythica’ which challenges the triumphalism of ‘mainstream’ foundational myths.

The works contain references which span the history of printmaking with echoes of Durer, Renaissance Esoterica (Robert Fludd, etc) and Goya’s Capriches being perhaps the strongest. History, however, is not simply appropriated but imaginatively assimilated and creatively recast into a personal visual idiom supple enough to be in turn apocalyptic, hallucinatory and elegiac; to express both melancholy and an ironic, savage, black humour.

The candidate exhibits a very high degree of technical mastery, with manipulative skills capable of rendering the minute intricate detail of the “Bastard Children of Empire” set on the one hand, and on the other a direct simplicity which imparts to the smaller works comprising the Artist Book a sense of monumentality which enhances their epic sweep.

In lieu of an exegesis, the candidate has presented a paper entitled “Origins of Irrelevance” in which he addresses issues arising from what he sees as the anomalous predicament of art galleries and art schools forced to justify government funding in the context of a capitalist world market whose fiscal and utilitarian values are antithetical to those of the humanities and the fine arts. He argues that this has led to a situation in which these institutions and

indeed artists themselves have in part internalised market values and adopted practices compatible with the interest of those who fund them, resulting in their present condition of irrelevance. While the paper is unabashedly polemical, the argument is clearly presented, cogently expressed and well researched and documented. It displays the candidate's grasp of the historical material and the theoretical discourses surrounding the issues addressed. It also displays committed professionalism and the same seriousness and ability that characterises his submission as a whole.

To conclude, it is my opinion that the candidate has met all the requirements listed in the guidance document and I therefore recommend that he be awarded his MFA.

Graham Marchant– MFA Report

My overall impression of Mr. Finn's presentation of both his studio and theoretical work were favorable, and the thesis although different in terms of the usual subject matter, was one of the most interesting and engaging documents that I have examined at this level.

Although not immediately obvious there was an interesting and rational connection between the studio work and the thesis. Of particular interest was how the candidate discussed the issues and underlying concepts of the gallery system and Art Schools in Australia and then further examined these notions largely through political and historical reference in his own prints. His prints demonstrated an originality that clearly indicated a cognizance of German expressionism and Australian art history yet were without eclectic subservience or imitation.

I felt that as the thesis evolved the candidate showed how the reservoir of research he had amassed equipped him with the confidence to offer original, cogent and contentious argument. The concluding section managed to bring his points together and his use of quotes was pertinent and further substantiated his argument. The extensive bibliography and time line demonstrated admirably the depth of the research. What I thought of particular merit was that the chosen topic required much original research in terms of sourcing material and I am unaware of any previous documents that so comprehensively deal with the issues raised and although I was not always in agreement with the points forwarded I thought the standard of writing and the clarity of argument commendable.

Although it was not apparent at first a conceptual connection between the thesis and the studio work emerged and I found myself reconsidering some of my own previously held notions solely as a consequence of the candidate's argument.

Having examined the works in the gallery I asked to see evidence of preparatory work, e.g drawings, sketchbooks, note books etc. Mr. Finn took me to his studio and I was very impressed with the amount, variety and obvious enthusiasm he had for both his subject matter and the various print processes he was exploring. I would always encourage candidates to show the examiners this work, the MFA is an examination and such items provide valuable insight for the examiner into the candidates thinking and add to the richness of the overall experience.

I would like to commend the candidate on his persistence and of the honest approach displayed through his endeavors; this was evidenced both through the prints and in the thesis. His prints were interesting, intelligent and considered. The studio work demonstrated how worthwhile and how evidently rich the processes of relief printing and wood engraving are and how appropriate they are to the candidates oeuvre. It would have been easy for the candidate to introduce more fashionable pictorial and theoretical issues into the research to give it a more contemporary feel, but I was pleased to see that this superficial temptation was avoided.

The supervision of the candidate appears to have been both diligent and thorough, and the quality and the amount of visual works, would indicate that there had been both knowledgeable and persuasive intervention throughout the program. The supervision appeared to allow the candidate to develop his own vision and interpretation and to take at times what must have been a challenging position.

I have no hesitation in recommending that Mr. Finn be awarded the MFA qualification; it was a delight to witness the intensity, evident concerns, development, enthusiasm and artistic maturity demonstrated by the candidate.

May I offer my congratulations to all concerned.

Graham Marchant