One of the most visible realisations of the University of Wollongong’s commitment to integrating art into everyday campus experience is Bert Flugelman’s sculpture *Gateway to Mount Keira*. The stainless steel archway is positioned to mark the escarpment at a significant place of learning for the Dharawal people, the traditional owners of the land.

Close by on the main campus stands May Barrie’s totemic stone sculpture *Viva Solaris* which, as long-time staff recall, was met with some surprise when it was placed there in 1977. For although Barrie was a local resident with a unique reputation in Australian art as a stone carver and an exhibition record dating back to 1947, the importance of art to the life of the University was still a nascent concept.

The University of Wollongong Art Collection began in the late 1970s. Like other institutional collections, its genesis was a combination of realising acquisition opportunities and random, but welcomed, donations. The visual arts’ presence on campus gained focus in 1983, when Edward Cowie arrived to take up leadership of the newly formed School of Creative Arts with a ‘vision splendid’ for an interdisciplinary arts centre. An ordered collecting of staff and student work was developed and by the late 1980s the UOW Art Collection was formalised. It grew in scale and significance, initially with John Eveleigh as director, followed by Guy Warren from 1992 to 2005, assisted during that time by Didier Balez and Glenn Barkley. Barkley was later curator of the Art Collection until 2008.

Successive vice-chancellors have recognised the value of the Art Collection and supported its development; today it encompasses close to 4000 artworks. Many of these are on display throughout the main campus in Wollongong as well as at the nearby Innovation Campus and the regional campus network which covers sites in Nowra, Batemans Bay, Bega, Moss Vale, Loftus and the Sydney Business School. This dispersed, open access to the Art Collection offers students, staff and visitors the opportunity to interact with, enjoy and appreciate artwork in their social, learning and
working environments. The current Collection management team, under the directorship of Amanda Lawson, with Phillippa Webb as curator and Robert Howe as co-ordinator, often works in partnership with the capital works program of the University, tailoring commissions, acquisitions and placement of works to site-specific requirements.

The UOW Art Collection has three major acquisition areas: works of regional significance by artists who live and/or work in the Illawarra, or who have connections to the region and the University; representative works of excellence by contemporary Australian and New Zealand artists; and the development of particular specialisations. One such area is contemporary works on paper: the Art Collection has major holdings of the influential local arts collective Redback Graphix through the Michael Callaghan Donation; there is also a concentration on Australian Indigenous artworks on paper; and a collection of international prints which flowed from the important Douglas Kagi Gift.

An art collection is an accumulation of cultural material across many fields of experience and times and thereby provides an archive of changing tastes, knowledge and values from particular vantage points. The UOW Art Collection is a unique repository of works with particular significance to the Illawarra, a striking part of Australia’s eastern seaboard that begins south of Sydney at Stanwell Tops and stretches down to the Shoalhaven River. It not only reflects the distinctive landscape and communities of the area, but also provides a vital record of the many changes that have occurred since colonial times.

Before the building of viable road and railway connections, trade and transport by sea were essential features of life in the Illawarra and coastal regions around Australia. William James Forster’s S.S. Currajong is a finely painted profile of a steamship, one of many vessels that serviced the area, heroically battling the elements. It was part of a gift to the University that captured the imagination of the local public as well as publicising the existence of the Art Collection in its early days. Today the sea-lanes near Wollongong are still full of cargo ships, as the chunky vessels in Julian Twigg’s Waiting, Port Kembla show.

From the 1860s images of the coastline around Wollongong and nearby villages, as well as agricultural and industrial developments, appeared occasionally in journals such as the Illustrated Sydney News, Town and Country Journal and the Sydney Mail. However the entire continent became focussed on the Illawarra in March 1887 when 81 miners perished in the Bulli mine disaster. Arthur de Tourcey Collingridge, staff artist for the Illustrated Sydney News, created a complex tableau of the key figures and events of the disaster for
the April 15 issue. In this coloured lithograph Collingridge captures the urgency of the moment, the destruction and community distress that ensued.

Industrialisation and its effects are an inescapable and vital part of the history of the Illawarra and a key subject area for many artists in the Art Collection. Roy Dalgarno had his vision forged in the matrix of the Great Depression. *Foundry Men* depicts the artist’s favourite subject matter – men at work (whether they be factory workers, drovers, miners, sailors or wharfies) struggling together. In this work extraneous detail is omitted and attention is focussed on the dangerous working conditions as well as the shared humanity and heroism of labour.

John Eveleigh’s pen and ink drawing depicts the *Wollongong Steel Works BHP*, once the central economic force of the Illawarra. The deep spaces, shadows and diagonals of the composition create an intense atmosphere that gives a sense of the energy of the steel industry that once dominated the region. Significantly there are no people working the
machines in Eveleigh’s drawing. In the late 1970s BHP dramatically cut employment, creating major social dislocation. Laurence Aberhart’s photograph draws on the European art tradition of still life, *nature morte*, to reflect on the impact of this decision. *Port Kembla, NSW, 23rd August 1997* shows it all: references to profligate wealth and consumption – the furnaces of industry, advertising, as well as simply drawn fruits, traditional emblems of sensory delight. Bright sunlight floods this post-pop image of industrial ugliness, highlighting every detail, but the graffiti text invests the photograph with an arresting, humorous, biblical significance.

In contrast, Samuel Elyard’s idyllic *Lake Illawarra* is an example of the romantic vision that colonial artists brought to their interpretations of the Illawarra’s raw majesty. Elyard, a member of an early settler family in the region, learnt drawing as an essential social skill, as did most gentlemen of his class. Certainly not amateurish, there is a strange, visionary quality to this work, emphasised by the grisaille technique and coloured ground of the paper.
Before the suburban development of the mid to later twentieth century swallowed up most available coastal land, the beaches of the Illawarra were favourite holiday destinations. Gerringong and its surrounds were regular subjects for Herbert Gallop. Early commentary on his work made much of his famous relative, James MacNeill Whistler. Gallop quipped that he “might have a bit of paint madness from his great uncle” (Register, Adelaide, 13 October 1926). His bright watercolour of late 1930s beach holiday life is a nostalgic image, typical of the safe, modernist style that made Gallop’s career a success.
Also nostalgic, but operating in an entirely different aesthetic, is *Homes, Mt Keira* by Noel McKenna. A deceptively simple watercolour of outer suburbia, this image makes clear the ambivalent relationship that Australia has with what was once “wilderness”, the bush. McKenna depicts a group of humble family houses like fragile fortresses teetering on the edge, aliens in an alienating landscape. The comforting profile of Mt Keira and the escarpment dominates the scene. In a subtle way the artist is referring to the urban history of the Illawarra where, over time, small villages expanded organically, without too much official oversight or care, joining together to form the expanse of present day Wollongong. The clarity of line and colour emphasises a sense of emptiness and isolation and suggests that perhaps McKenna enjoys this wasteland.

Works such as these form part of the substantial amount of historical and archival material which is increasingly important to the Art Collection, particularly in its emerging role as a study resource with great potential for integration into coursework and research at UOW. Generationally closer, and perhaps more relevant to current Creative Arts students, is the extraordinary donation of twentieth century international prints by Melbourne scientist and collector, Douglas Kagi. Comprising works by well known artists such as Victor Vasarely, Peter Blake, Patrick Caulfield and Paula Rego, the Kagi Gift is a perfect introduction to the tenets of Pop and Post Modernism, art styles with reprography at their heart. Blake, for example, said he wanted to make art that was the visual equivalent to pop music. Skilful collage techniques as well as the irony and humour of Marcel Duchamp inform *Ostrich Beach*, a wry reflection on the habits of his nineteenth century British forebears. More ominous in tone and content is Rego’s *Baa Baa Black Sheep*. An inveterate storyteller, she has become highly regarded for her uncanny, if possibly realistic, representations of domestic dramas and childhood dreams. Equally subversive is the depiction of seemingly banal domestic objects and settings by Patrick Caulfield. The cryptic detachment of the Caulfield style has its roots in the work of synthetic cubists such as Juan Gris rather than the heady fun of London’s Carnaby Street and 1960s “New Generation” Pop. What is striking about works like *Large Jug* is that graphic simplicity elevates the form to cultural emblem.

From the international to the local, the UOW Art Collection contains important mid to late twentieth century works. The cultural history of regional centres in Australia is often overlooked and the Collection goes some way to redress this. There have been significant acquisitions of pieces by modernist artists at times based in the Illawarra such as Ivan
Englund, William Peascod, Gino Sanguineti, Ron Lambert, Joan Brassil, Pat Harry and Col Jordan. Charismatic figures, who played important roles introducing regional audiences and students to the new languages of abstract art in sculpture, painting and ceramics, some of these artists came to Australia as post-WWII immigrants. Many also studied and taught at the Wollongong Technical School, now TAFE Illawarra and still a key learning hub in the area. The work of more canonical Australian twentieth century artists such as Elwyn Lynn, Ann Thomson and Salvatore Zofrea also feature in the Art Collection.

The University is a site where an individual can develop keen critical thinking skills and where debate and discourse can create knowledge, so it is significant that many of the works in the Art Collection engage with lively social commentary and cultural critique. Contemporary Australian and New Zealand art has gained an international reputation for this kind of approach. Gender constructions of masculinity and femininity are touched on in the work of Pat Harry, Cherine Fahd, Ronnie Van Hout and Peter Cooley. Harry’s pagan *mise en scene* is brimming with anthropomorphic nightmare, while Fahd’s *Mary*
beautifully deflates the enormous weight of history with a few strategically placed balloons. In the series of staged photographs of which this is part, Fahd was interested in how the balloon can have both comic (thought-bubbles, breasts) and cosmic (perfection, science) references. Van Hout’s *The Disappearance* is a not-so-simple shed. For this artist, it is a structure of “clear space”. Built for and inhabited by men, usually separated from the domestic environment and away from what is perceived as the controlling gaze of women, the shed can be a place of male refuge, meditation and creativity – a place not often celebrated in art. In contrast, Cooley hyperbolises the traditionally feminine sentiment of nostalgia with *Three Sisters*, tourist art writ large.

One of the most important aspects of contemporary Australian culture (post-1970) is the broad critical and public recognition of Indigenous artistic practices. Once relegated to the back corridors and storerooms of ethnographic museums, Indigenous art and culture has reactivated the art world and, in the process, drawn attention to the contested nature of culture and history. The experiences and effects of colonisation have become a major, sometimes contentious, subject for contemporary artists in Australia. While some Indigenous artists have deliberately retained a “naïve” approach to content and finish, others choose to expand the languages of abstraction or have adopted a more urgent and direct political manner of address.

Since the late 1990s the Art Collection has developed a rich and varied representation of Indigenous art, from the “traditional” to the “urban” and to the “local”. These are debatable but useful definitions that help frame the remarkable diversity of contemporary Australian Indigenous art. Marrnyula Mununggurr is a senior artist at Yirrkala, Northern Territory. Her bark painting, *Dhangi Fishing at Wulwulwuy*, one of the first Indigenous works to be collected for UOW, adapts sacred clan designs that refer to hunting activities, specific landscape characteristics and the different kinds of fresh water found in her environment.

Far from the remote communities of Northern and Western Australia, where many Indigenous artists reflect strong traditional elements in their work, artists such as Destiny Deacon, Judy Watson and Tracey Moffatt explore the often problematic constructions of identity. Their work reveals some of the long-term effects of colonisation for Indigenous Australians. Deacon and Moffatt use (black) humour as a key strategy in their art while Watson looks back to nature to create a new spiritual lexicon based on the notion of the body as landscape.
Gordon Hookey, Joan Ross, Frank Nowlan and Rod Moss present a spectrum of views in their work which, interestingly, is also informed by humour. Hookey’s *First Stolen Then Stolen Land*, donated by Indigenous curator Tess Allas, is a luridly comic painting that details the artist’s experience of the conundrums of the Native Title Acts and conservative politics. Nowlan’s *Thirroul Sub Division* explores issues concerned with Indigenous land rights but with a decidedly Illawarra edge. The painting depicts the Sandon Point Aboriginal Tent Embassy that was established in 2000 in response to a local government decision to sell public land between Thirroul and Bulli for a private housing development. After a long community battle against this decision, Sandon Point was declared a place of significance for Aboriginal people and a third of the land was retained.

Marnyula Mununggurr
*Dhangi Fishing at Wulwulway*
1993
ochres on stringy bark
102 x 61 cm
Purchased 1994
for public use. Another distinctive Illawarra artist, Nowlan makes paintings about things he knows – the daily news, the usually quiet domestic and community activities of the Northern Illawarra.

In contrast to the immediate and direct styles of Hookey and Nowlan, Moss employs meticulous technique to create an almost documentary reportage of aspects of Aboriginal life in and around Alice Springs. *T.V at Reenie’s Camp, Todd River 1995* is a large graphite drawing that depicts contemporary life in what locals call the Whitegate town camp. A group of Arrente people watch TV in a landscape setting. The collision of traditional Indigenous culture and twentieth century European culture is inescapable in this image, countering the more usual exoticism that clouds white reception and understanding of contemporary Aboriginal art and culture.

In the video animation *BBQ This Sunday, BYO* Ross re-presents the colonial history of New South Wales and Van Diemen’s land with an ironic reversal or twist. Ross refers to Joseph Lycett’s 1824 *Views in Australia or New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land Delineated*, designed to advertise the new colony to possible free settler immigrants.
Using the original as one might a pattern book, Ross compounds its elegant fictions, populating the scene with 21st century symbols of the law, ownership and control. Men and women in fluorescent vests, a bevy of “witches hats” (motor traffic control devices) and mysterious floating geometric shapes are deliberately dissonant features. Later in the animation a more obvious reference to the invasion of Australia provides the climactic key to the work – the word “invasion” having a completely different energy to the somewhat benign “colonisation” or “settlement”. This work is “cultural critique” in action.

A much more direct approach is evident in the rare poster Trespassers keep out! by Indigenous artist Avril Quaill. Made at the Tin Sheds at Sydney University in 1982, it uses simple but powerful iconography to convey its message about racism. Artists and screenprinters working at the Tin Sheds – a central force in Sydney’s protest movement during the 1970s and 80s – drew on traditions of political poster-making and social activism with strong colours, vernacular slogans and striking imagery. There are threads of connection back to the Illawarra here: Wollongong-born Michael Callaghan was an
influential member of the Earthworks Poster Collective based at the Tin Sheds; he also founded Redback Graphix, one of the most interesting and dynamic artists’ initiatives to have emerged from the region.

The UOW specialisation in works on paper, enhanced through the Callaghan and Kagi donations, has also been expanded via a stream of acquisitions of Indigenous printmaking, commencing in the late 1990s. When Guy Warren visited Darwin in 1998 to work with master printer Basil Hall at Northern Editions print workshop, he purchased several Indigenous prints, triggering a vibrant engagement with this rapidly growing area of Australian art production.

During his time as curator, Glenn Barkley forged links with master printers and Indigenous artists, both locally and far afield, and garnered the enthusiasm of University staff who donated funds to support acquisitions. Significant suites of prints include the Melville Island artists’ project with Melbourne Museum, produced at the Australian Print Workshop; a full set of printers’ proofs donated by Franck Gohier of Redhand Print in Darwin; the Utopia Suite, a 1991 collaboration between various artist/printers and the
Central Australian community at Utopia; and prints from Tom Goulder’s Duck Print, which moved to Port Kembla around 2005. Recently several valuable prints by New South Wales artist Kevin Gilbert, who began his printmaking career while in prison in the 1960s, have been acquired. Barkley brought into public view the Art Collection’s strength in works on paper with a well-received touring exhibition, *Multiplicity: Prints and Multiples*, curated in 2007 in partnership with the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney.

Textiles have long been a teaching and research strength in Creative Arts at UOW. Academic staff Diana Wood Conroy and Sue Blanchfield both worked with remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, and their connections led to a number of acquisitions, such as the silkscreen *Crocodile* by Nancy Gaymala Yunupingu, in the distinctive, striking style of Yirrkala textile printing. A recent, valuable addition has been the purchase of several works by women artists at Utopia, Central Australia, created during the 2007 Utopia Batik Revival Workshop conducted by Julia Murray, the original co-ordinator of the batik art workshop there in the 1970s. Lena Skinner Ngala’s fluid silk

Lorraine Brown  
*The Seasonal Workers (Eurobodalla)*  
2005  
screenprint  
47 x 65 cm  
Purchased 2006
batik, with its symbols of key foods and bush medicines, is a beautiful example of this work. The Utopia women’s adoption of the traditional Indonesian method of painting – or drawing – with hot wax is remarkable, not only for their mastery of a difficult technique but also for their distinctive ‘Utopia style’ that is at once loose and free-flowing yet strong graphically.

The Illawarra has a number of Indigenous artists and art workshops, spanning the Boolarng Nangamai Aboriginal Arts and Culture Studio in Gerringong, the Coomaditchie United Aboriginal Corporation’s artist studio near Port Kembla, and long-standing connections between the South Coast and communities at La Perouse in Sydney. Reflecting UOW’s policy of positive wider engagement with the Indigenous communities of the Illawarra, the Art Collection is steadily increasing its acquisitions in this area. La Perouse-based Esme Timbery has gained a national reputation for her reworking of shellwork traditions in her Sydney Harbour Bridge sculptures. Phyllis Stewart’s early shellworked slippers, shoes and thongs looks to this heritage while *Miniature Baskets* combines tradition with innovation to suggest a new language to refer to the experience of the Illawarra environment.

In the screenprint *The Seasonal Workers (Eurobodalla)*, Lorraine Brown, who works at Coomaditchie, re-presents an aspect of Indigenous life that has now long passed but which still lingers in communal memory. In this regard Brown’s work links with the spirit behind other pieces in the Art Collection by Ian Abdulla and Roy Kennedy, although the lurid colours of this print perhaps suggests the tensions that memory can engender rather than a more familiar and comforting rose-coloured nostalgia.

While not a major focus, the Art Collection also accommodates a representation of student work. Two examples from the 1990s are Mark Osland’s sombre marine genre piece, *Where Have All the Sandhills Gone?*, which harks back to Forster’s nineteenth century oceanic imagery, and David (Yin Wei) Chen’s large expressive diptych *Art and Visa*. Chen’s painting speaks to a more recent aspect of Australian life – the experience of international students on campus. It juxtaposes an appropriated historical Chinese motif – the closely rendered wandering monk – with the contemporary form of a shadowy stylised female ghost/demon which is constructed employing a looser, more expressive or painterly mode.

Many of the teaching staff in Visual Arts at UOW have a strong reputation in their field, and the Art Collection has acquired considerable holdings of their work, through
Jacky Redgate
*Light Throw (Mirrors) #5*
2010-2011
c-type photograph,
hand printed from original
negative face mounted to UV
perspex
126 x 158 cm
Purchased 2011
purchases and donations. Wood Conroy and Liz Jeneid have championed a sophisticated interrogation and re-fashioning of traditional crafts practices. Jacky Redgate and Derek Kreckler challenge audiences to consider the nature of representation and the dynamics of reception in contemporary photography. Jelle van den Berg and Richard Hook explore the relationship between process, site and motif. Some artists’ work has been specifically selected to integrate with and enhance the University’s built environment. Ian Gentle’s sculpture, *Whispering Ant*, complements the dramatic architectural spaces of the UOW Library. Gentle was influenced by the climate of pantheistic neo-primitivism that infused much of the late 1960s and 70s and later by Surrealism. In this impressive example of his mature style, Gentle reconfigures found gum twigs to create a work that is part giant amoeba, part map and part totem. Significant works by artists such as these, with long-standing connections to the University, will continue to make distinctive contributions to the Art Collection.

Throughout almost forty years of acquiring art at the University of Wollongong, a rich and unusually accessible resource has evolved. In *A Place for Art* we hope to provide a sense of the breadth and diversity of this important collection. As well as surveying a selection of strengths and highlights, these pages capture the voices of some of the many individuals who have come to know and appreciate particular works. The stories they tell about the connection they make with their ‘favourites’ offer insight into the Collection’s reach and impact. Woven into the fabric of campus life, art infuses the experience of being at UOW. The Art Collection brings spaces alive and inspires the individuals who inhabit them: the University has truly become a place for art.