IllawarraVisions
Collections of the University of Wollongong
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University of Wollongong

16th June - 3rd September 2000
VICE-CHANCELLOR’S FOREWORD

The University of Wollongong, renowned as a centre of excellence in research and education, as exemplified by our recent recognition as University of the Year, holds various collections of the material culture of the Illawarra region which document the historical and cultural memories of its people. "Illawarra Visions: Collections of the University of Wollongong" showcases selections of this material and exposes a range of unforgettable stories of the Illawarra. The University Collections cover a wide range and include those that are used everyday for the purpose of teaching, as well as archival collections that hold the material memory of the Illawarra community. Perhaps most significant is the art collection that must rank as one of the most substantial in the country. The exhibition also highlights the continuing partnership between the University and the Wollongong City Gallery.

The University of Wollongong is pleased to present "Illawarra Visions: Collections of the University of Wollongong" to the public and may it not only increase the region’s awareness of the diverse roles of a contemporary university, but also reinforce the University’s position as a key stakeholder in the continuing social, cultural and economical development of our region.

Professor Gerard Sutton
Vice Chancellor

WOLLONGONG CITY GALLERY
DIRECTOR’S FORWARD

By selecting examples from its comprehensive collections, and displaying them in a single venue, the University of Wollongong is inviting the people of the Illawarra to engage in a series of conversations, both between the individual and the community and between the community and its own pre-eminent seat of learning. Some conversations will arise through the viewer’s private engagement with the objects on display, objects that tell stories about people, places and creative endeavour. Other conversations will focus on the nature of assembling a storehouse of cultural material, the meaning that we invest in objects and the way we harvest a return on these investments.

The University and the Gallery provide separate yet complementary core services to the community and both institutions value the social development roles that come with their respective territories. The social enterprise aspects of education and culture are becoming increasingly important in a world where material based systems dominate and where local values are fast becoming subsumed by global imperatives.

"Illawarra Visions: Collections of the University of Wollongong" is one of many projects that the Gallery has developed in partnership with the University over a quarter of a century, projects that require the energies and enthusiasm of employees and supporters of both institutions. The Gallery is grateful for the contribution the University of Wollongong has made to its public programs and, most particularly, to the Curator of the University Collection, Glenn Barkley, for his efforts in bringing this exhibition into the public arena.

Peter O’Neill
Director, Wollongong City Gallery
INTRODUCTION

This exhibition was originally conceived as a means of demonstrating to the community some of the breadth and depth of the University of Wollongong Art Collection, to show it's importance regionally and nationally, and to make visible the fact that so many significant artists had produced work in the region. The fact that the exhibition has been broadened to encompass many other University Collections, scientific, historical, social and archival, is the brainchild of the curator Glenn Barkley. This collaborative approach gives an opportunity for all of us to see a much wider view of the Illawarra generally and allows all these collections to be seen, together with the Art Collection, as reflecting and servicing the University and the wider community.

University collections have traditionally, in Australia at least, been seen as adjuncts to research and teaching activities. They have often been compiled in an ad-hoc manner. We can be quite proud of the fact that at the University of Wollongong past and present archivists, curators and academics have assembled collections that are truly important on a national scale and in some cases holding material that is of international value. Often individual passions and collective need have shaped cohesive and dynamic groupings that are the envy of much larger collection based institutions. Parallel with this the University of Wollongong Art Collection has continued its policy of supporting young and emerging artists and other artists of the Illawarra region.

Since its inception in 1985, under the directorship of Dr John Eveleigh, the Art Collection of the University of Wollongong has been strongly supported by all levels of University administration and faculties, particularly the Vice-Chancellors Unit and Professor Sharon Bell and the staff of the Faculty of Creative Arts.

I congratulate Glenn Barkley for his vision and passion in mounting this exhibition and would like publicly to express my gratitude to both Professor Gerard Sutton, Vice- Chancellor of the University of Wollongong, and to Peter O'Neill, Director of the Wollongong City Gallery, for their support. I would hope that this exhibition stands as testimony to the past, present and continuing relationships between the University and the Illawarra community.

Dr Guy Warren O.A.M.
Director, University of Wollongong
Art Collection
History & Heritage: Change & Adaptation
Nestled at the base of the Illawarra Escarpment, in the shadow of Mount Keira and Bert Flugelman’s winged monument to flight, the University of Wollongong central campus is constantly reminded of the power of nature and the unique sense of place which exists in this most picturesque part of Australia. Located at a geographical point of convergence between the mountains and the sea, nature is everywhere and obvious, despite the ever encroaching evidence of man and machine. As a seat of learning and focus for research and the implementation of new technologies in the 21st century, the University of Wollongong is ever mindful of the history and heritage of the region in which it operates and continues to flourish.

Aboriginal Heritage
The precise date at which human-kind first set foot upon Illawarra’s golden sandy beaches or wandered amidst its lush sub-tropical rainforests is unknown. What is known, however, is the fact that Aboriginal people have inhabited the southern coastal region of New South Wales for at least 20,000 years. This knowledge arises from the oral testimony of descendents, and the abundant archeological and scientific evidence available in the form of extant middens, burial sites, and related artefacts. The period of 20,000 years may in fact extend out to beyond 60,000 years as more research is carried out.

Ancient rocks, stone tools, and artefacts collected from local coastal middens during the early 1940s feature in the current exhibition and are testament to the extended presence in the region of Aboriginal society. This society forms part of the oldest known surviving human culture – a culture which, we can assume, made substantial use of the region throughout the millennia. Illawarra offered a safe and sustainable environment in which Aboriginal society could grow and develop.

The area is geographically distinct - thin and snake-like, it is bordered to the west by bounteous forests and a lush, steep Escarpment which has physically isolated the region from the hinterland. Adjacent to this primeval forest is a once heavily-wooded coastal plain cut by fast flowing creeks and dotted with wetlands teeming with life. The oft placid waters of the Pacific Ocean lie along its eastern flank, providing a rich source of seafood and staple diet for the local people. A temperate climate caps off what must have been a veritable Garden of Eden - an environment which easily accommodated the development of a rich indigenous culture during the many thousands of years in which local Aboriginal people were the sole occupants.

In talking of the settlement of the Illawarra region we need to recognise the extensive period of time during which Aboriginal language, custom and lifestyle has been able to develop and adapt to the local environment. This unique and isolating geographical enclave was a deciding factor in the growth of that society. Its influence remains with us to this day, cutting coastal Illawarra off both physically and spiritually from the metropolis to the north and the ‘bush’ to the west.

Garden of Eden to Garden of New South Wales
The Garden of Eden analogy continued on following the so-called ‘discovery’ of Australian by Captain Cook in 1770, and the arrival of European settlers in large numbers after 1788. Over little more than a decade between 1815-25 the Illawarra region - or the Five Islands District as it was early known - became the ‘Garden of New South Wales’, and was proclaimed as such by the governor of the colony, Richard Bourke, in 1835. This label was freely given as a result of rich harvests from its soils, and the quality of a developing livestock industry.

With the arrival in large numbers of farmers, convicts, soldiers and free settlers during 1830s, the Illawarra Aborigines were quickly displaced from their lands and forced to dwell on the fringes of a new society – largely European, or more specifically British – which alone saw itself as ‘civilised’. By the time of the 1850s goldrushes the remnants of the original tribes were already cast to the bottom rung of the social scale, below even those bearing the dreaded ‘convict stain’. As fringedwellers they were now no longer masters of all they surveyed. Individuals and families were cast out, forced to make their way unsupported by this new community. Where they formerly walked unimpeded, sheep and cattle now grazed and fences were erected. The horse and plough further radically transformed the landscape.

In Wollongong during the 1830s and 1840s Aborigines stood by and watched as errant convicts were flogged at the police compound adjacent to the harbour, or were placed in the stocks at Market Square for a period of public ridicule and humiliation. Records of this barbaric treatment are contained in the Bench of Magistrates books, revealing the gory details of life under the lash.

The local tribes were also powerless to stop the wholesale destruction of the wildlife which had sustained them over the centuries, and which were now falling victim to hunting parties armed with guns and traps. The once proud forests and bush likewise suffered destruction from the iron-bladed axe which accompanied such unsustainable practices as ring-barking and clear-felling.
Previous page:
SAMUEL COCKS, 'Bombo Quarry - Kiama' c. 1890's, plate glass negative. Cocks Collection, Archives, University of Wollongong Library.

Right:
SAMUEL ELYARD, 'Lake Illawara', c. 1890's, Ink and wash on paper. University of Wollongong Art Collection.
The arrival of Europeans during the first half of the nineteenth century brought disease, death and dislocation to local Aboriginal society. This period also saw the first scientific recordings by those precious few interested visitors and settlers who cared to place some value upon indigenous society and culture.

A picturesque region such as the Illawarra naturally attracted travelling artists. Augustus Earle (1827), Conrad Martens (1835), John Skinner Prout (1843-4) and Eugene von Guerard (1859) all took sketches of the area during flying visits, and later worked them up in studios as watercolours or oils for sale. With the arrival of photography from the 1850s a new means of visual recording and expression was available to those who saw fit to visit the region or make it their home. In these early works nature was pre-eminent, whilst human figures were inserted as mere picturesque detail or to give scale to a work. With time the built environment began to feature more prominently.

John Skinner Prout's picturesque views of the Illawarra Escarpment - Gully and Wollongong and Mount Keira - are based upon rough pencil sketches taken during a visit to the district with his young family in the summer of 1843-4. These 'holiday snaps' by a professional watercolourist show nature in all her splendour, as also do the watercolours by Samuel Elyard - Illawarra Lake and Woodbrook Farm.

Apart from recording aspects of the local landscape - the most popular of all motifs during the first half of the nineteenth century - these artists and journeymen photographers also served as chroniclers of the effects of dislocation and assimilation on the Aboriginal population. We know very little of the day-to-day lifestyle and ceremony of these people throughout their long period of residence in the district. Our only direct source is oral tradition and scant physical remnants. Despite this, we can also glean a great deal of information from the records of the early settlers and travellers to the district. Their diaries, letters, newspaper reports, and pictorial representations are both ethnologically and culturally significant.

The present exhibition contains a smattering of such records. They include the highly detailed, black and white photographs of Samuel Cocks dating from the 1890s. Those on display feature the Aboriginal people of the Kiama region engaging in a corroboree spectacle, perhaps for the amusement of Europeans and visitors to the region. This so-called novelty event was, up until the arrival of Europeans earlier in the century, an integral part of Aboriginal ceremony and tradition.

The American Alfred T. Agate's engraved view of a Corroboree observed at Wollongong during 1839-40 gives us a glimpse of the mystery and intense ritual evident in this ancient ceremony. The deep scarring and ephemeral body markings of the dancers signifies not only their unique part in Australian Aboriginal society - every clan had its own distinct design - but also adds to the narrative then being presented. This print is an important record of one of the last such corroborees to be held in this part of the Illawarra. From another source we are told that the story being presented on the night through song and dance was nothing less than a re-enactment of the European invasion of 1788. A visiting parson recorded the following in his diary with regards to its significance:

"On inquiry I find the burden of the song to be: "that the white man came to Sydney in ships and landed
the horses in the saltwater.” It is of such ridiculous subjects that the Blacks of New Holland make their songs - and any trifling event is celebrated by a song.” (Rev. W.B. Clarke, 5 January 1840)

This comment from a learned gentleman makes obvious the wide gulf then existing between black and white (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) societies.

Garden Green to Steely Grey - the Plumes of Progress

The transformation of central Illawarra and Wollongong from idyllic Garden of Eden and pastoral Garden of New South Wales to the highly polluting industrial centre of the twentieth century occurred rapidly, and inevitably, as the nineteenth century drew to a close. Early attempts at industrialisation were hesitant and largely unsuccessful. A good example is the Jamberoo steam mill erected during the late 1830s and featured in Captain R.M. Westmacott’s 1848 print Valley of Jamberoo. In such an idyllic setting as Jamberoo Valley, nature fought back against such intrusions and eventually won out, starving the machines of their lifeblood of water and wood. By the time Westmacott’s print was issued the mill was no longer operational. However, in the northern part of Illawarra, nature struggled and lost, beaten by the abundant presence of one of her own riches - Coal.

Referred to locally as ‘Black Diamonds’, coal was present in large amounts within the sandy sedimentary rocks of the Illawarra Escarpment. Outcrops extended ribbon-like from Helensburgh in the north to Macquarie Pass in the south. The quality and ease of access of this precious mineral was responsible for the great change which occurred in the district after the first coal was shipped to Wollongong harbour in 1849. Slow to develop as an industry, the local coal mines burrowed away in the flanks of the mountain and eventually supported a new population of labourers and mechanics. The farmers suffered the fate of the Aborigines before them, and were quickly displaced to the fringes of a new industrial and urban society. With industry came the development of cliff-side mining villages and the township of Wollongong, growing around its small harbour. That great indicator of progress - curbing and guttering - was introduced during the 1850s, and this once small village was transformed into a regional centre of commerce and industry.

To the west smoking heaps of coal rose amidst tranquil rural scenes of cows and rich green pastures studded with tall, thin cabbage palms. This cozy arrangement lasted only until 1897, when a lead smelting complex was constructed on the shores of Lake Illawarra and other heavy industries began looking to the region. The coal mining disasters of 1881 (Bulli) and 1902 (Mount Kembla) added a bittersweet taste to the bounteous fruits of industrialisation, and brought home the darker side of this transformation from pastoral to urban. The opening up of the Port Kembla steel works in 1928 continued this process of relegating nature to a role subservient to man and machine.

The industrialisation of the ‘Garden’ continued unabated through to the 1980s. At this point a steel industry downturn had severe repercussions on local employment, and the University of Wollongong began to play a greater role within the local economy. Local coal mines closed and Sydney’s urban sprawl continued it tenacious extension south, aided by rail electrification. The once impenetrable parapets of the Escarpment no longer protected Illawarra from the milling hordes of progress.

During these 20,000 + 200 years of occupation, the image of Illawarra has changed, just as the physical landscape has been transformed. What we now see on the surface, between the mountains and the sea, are brown tile roofs and black tarmac, amidst a sprinkling of green. This surface is largely jagged and unnatural, hard and foreign. The towering, emerald green Escarpment and a golden, sandy beach zone remain on the flanks, however the prominence of nature has diminished. Closer observation of both these edifices reveals sickness and disease - pollution of the oceans and encroachment of residential development within the Escarpment. This process of change and evolving history is sometimes reflected in art, science, literature and letters. The current exhibition presents a mere scattering of these artifacts of record. Hopefully an impression will form from their viewing and reveal, in part, those unique qualities which characterise and distinguish this part of Australia known as the Illawarra.

References
M.K. Organ, Illawarra and South Coast Aborigines 1770-1850, University of Wollongong, 1990, 682p.
Michael Organ, BSc. University Archivist, University of Wollongong
Social and Working Life
Work and social life in the Illawarra has long reflected the region's curious geography, as much as its economic and social traits. The region is narrow and almost sixty kilometres long, bounded by the sea to the east, and the escarpment to the west. Here the raw, dangerous and difficult work of coal mining has taken place deep beneath the rainforest, while the hard and tedious work in metal processing took place beside the sea. The centrality of large scale industry and the inherently dangerous nature of much work emphasised the importance of collective community support, aided by a strong union consciousness which further reinforced the community activities and identification. From these developments flowed strong identifications with the first with the village communities, and later with ethnic, social and sporting groups.

For the Illawarra has always been a paradoxical society - a region of many communities, and yet, also a discrete community of people from many places, newcomers and pioneers. To be sure, these have not been traditional pioneering individualists. Rather, since the first farmers and timber-getters of 200 years ago, the people of Wollongong have congregated in small communities, such as mining villages with their intense group ethos, and then later, language or religious communities, occupational communities, trade unions, or community clusters around schools, sporting and social clubs. Since the nineteenth century, workers and their families in the Illawarra have sought to confront the paradox of confinement between beach and escarpment, to deal with the contrasts between demanding paid or unpaid working lives, and great geographical beauty, by meshing into small groups, which in turn have enhanced the villages and town which grew eventually into a urban region.
Those many small communities themselves have reflected the economic development of Wollongong. Thus a history of work and social life in Wollongong has particularly local characteristics, different from those of other regional cities, the metropolitan cities or rural areas. As the early places of employment, the farms and coal mines of the nineteenth century, gave way to the heavy industry of the twentieth century, so the first small mining communities joined in the ribbon of development. Villages coalesced into the towns, and eventually into two cities, Wollongong and Shellharbour. By the 1960s the Illawarra was the fastest growing region in Australia, as hundreds of thousands of migrants arrived to begin new lives in the metal processing firms which flourished during the postwar boom.

Until the 1980s, much paid work was in heavy industry, especially the steelworks, or in the subcontracting engineering firms which serviced these industries. Work also changed in the postwar as new technology changed tasks and skills of the fitter, the mechanic, the secretary and the electrician. In the steel industry, open hearth steel making, for example, was augmented and then superseded, by Basic Oxygen Steelmaking (BOS), leading to fewer jobs, particularly for the unskilled.

Technological change gained pace in the later 1960s and 1970s when the capacity of the computer allowed electronic automation to become an efficient alternative to the traditional skilled judgement of experienced workers. In manufacturing, and metals processing, electronic processing of data and decisions obliterated the need for old rule of thumb skills, while creating some new jobs for those with training in the new technology. Despite Wollongong’s dependence on metal processing, there were increasing opportunities for jobs in other industries by the 1970s. Although there were proportionally fewer jobs available for women in Wollongong than in most other cities, more jobs became available in the government offices, schools, and hospitals as the city infrastructure developed. As well, until the 1980s, several large clothing factories employed women workers. By 1996 despite the closure of many of the clothing factories, the female workforce participation rate in Wollongong was similar to that of the rest of NSW, as the changing structure of the local economy provided more jobs for women and fewer for men.

Social life
Whereas leisure activities in nineteenth and first part of twentieth century had reflected the closely knit village structure of Wollongong, the picture becomes more diffuse in the latter half of the twentieth century. Three major factors can be identified - the increase in leisure time and an allied change in the use of leisure, the rapid growth and change in structure of the population as a result of high levels of immigration, and the growth of the city as it swallowed up the string of villages of earlier decades.

Standard weekly working hours decreased from 44 to 40 hours in the immediate postwar period, and then to 38 hours in the 1980s. Not only was there more leisure time, but leisure itself also changed. Local sports competitions gave way to national and state based competition, so that more people spent more time watching sports or TV shows than taking part in them. Leisure thus became much more a consumer item, something people would buy, rather than do. Increased leisure, increasing ease of communication, and the shift from a community focus to the consumerist nature of leisure meant the loss of much of Wollongong’s local character. Nevertheless, this process occurred more slowly than in many other towns, largely because the town was still only part-grown and community involvement had been so strong.

Left:
MAX DUPAIN, 'Bass Point Jetty', 1946. B+W photograph, University of Wollongong Art Collection.
What reinforced the community-based activities in the postwar years were the rapid growth of Wollongong and the increasing diversity of the population. Each new group of migrants sought to provide cultural, religious or social activities and support. The numerous churches and community centres in Wollongong attest not only to the long-term multiculturalism of the city, but also to the working bees and fund-raising drives held from the 1950s by the locals in their leisure time. The ethos of close-knit sub-communities remained strong even in the 1990s when the economic structure of the region had changed. Thus while the mining villages merged into the wider community, they were partly replaced by the new small communities formed through the exigencies of culture or occupation, or language, and by the very need to build the social and material infrastructure on which epistemic communities are built. St Patrick’s Day marches declined in the 1970s, but May Day marches, the feast of John the Baptist and community events, such as the Bulli Show remained important.

The new sub-communities of the Illawarra also continued to build for the larger community. Throughout the city there is a great number of community facilities such as Police Citizens Youth Clubs, sports fields and at every one of the local swimming beaches, surf clubs. Many of the facilities bear local names and serve as a reminder that, perhaps more than most cities in Australia, Wollongong’s community and leisure facilities were built through the efforts of locals who in their leisure time worked to build them.

The changing patterns of work and social life in Wollongong have not only reflected wider economic, social, and technological developments, but also the particular characteristics of the region which...
have shaped work processes, the links between work and community, and the nature of social life and leisure.

But then, just when the region began to develop its own sense of self, the downturns of the 1980s shook the region's assurance. Jobs melted away and what had become the notions of community suddenly seemed precarious. Yet again, in this rare and complex region, the community responded in manifold ways, drawing on individual strengths and community abilities. Unions, ethnic and religious groups campaigned for improvement, local investors sought new industries, new theatres and art galleries were built, and the University and the TAFE expanded.

Yet the pressures of global market pressures and new economic imperatives continued past the end of the 1990s. Sandwiched between the escarpment and the sea, the working communities of Wollongong have continued working to adapt their working and social lives to the economic changes buffeting the region. They have drawn on an inner regional strength borne of those traditional sub-communities which characterise the region. Whether they can withstand broader changing patterns of work and social values is not yet clear. For now, we can see that, clearly in its arts at least, there have been unusually close links between work, leisure, social life, and community in the Illawarra.

Dr Di Kelly
Interim Head of Department,
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The Natural Environment
When I was a much younger person, a family friend bequeathed me the 1920 volume of the Boys Own Paper. Amongst the ripping yarns of English schoolboys battling thugs and savages, there were articles about hobbies and general knowledge. The whole production, in fact, was about collecting — stamps, coins, badges, details about trains, facts about the proper care of pets, longest rivers, scientific discoveries, products of the colonies, the full set of weekly papers to be bound into the annual book. Through the rest of my childhood there were radio quiz shows and encyclopedia salesmen: collecting information was a way of improving oneself, of mastering the world.

University collections are interesting in that they show the inherent contradictions of the collecting idea. They are, because of limited funds and disciplinary differences, fragmented and selective. The art collection we see a sample of here is stored and exhibited in different places from the botanical collection. But, separately and together, they signal the drive to comprehensiveness and the ideal of integrated learning. They embody the practice of amassing details, but also assert an important principle — that details are at best trivial unless they are held together in some conceptual and classified system. This is the case whether we are talking about the understanding of the natural world arising from Linnaeus’ botanical taxonomy or the evaluation of works of art and literature.

The previous amateur collections of private citizens and ‘folk museums’ in which a random assortment of ‘wonders’ or ‘curiosities’ are displayed existed alongside the grander trade fairs and exhibitions that nations and empires staged to demonstrate the extent, wealth and variety of their holdings. Antiquity, commerce and nations, however, cannot be comprehended unless there is some analytic framework in which to ‘read’ them as a collective entity. Universities have been front-runners in devising such frameworks, and in more recent times, in questioning the social functions and underlying assumptions of these structures that we have come to take for granted.

University collections, for instance, retain something of the Renaissance glow of patronage: they show off the power and taste of Vice Chancellors; they declare the importance of the institution as a collector and exhibitor of culture and knowledge. Collections also signify the links of modern universities to a past ideal of assembling a ‘universe’ of knowledge, firstly within a Medieval closed system of God’s creation, then as a humanist attempt to understand all the bits of the Enlightenment’s cosmic machine.

Nowadays collecting is still with us, but it has been in some ways ‘emptied out’ of its use value. Computers have taken over the role of information storage and retrieval that the ‘quiz kid’ once embodied. We no longer collect to improve our knowledge and thereby our prospects of job advancement and social mobility; we collect to show we are good collectors. Collecting stamps could educate you about important people, products and geographical features in different countries; collecting Pokémon cards simply gives you a position within the group of Pokémon card collectors. This kind of social bonding through ‘gift exchange’ and building of pecking orders through trading is, of course, vital to any society. But it gives us a special place and a meaning within consumerist culture. One of the battles in Humanities is over the status of this kind of collecting (expressed usually in arguments about the place of Cultural Studies or ‘popular culture’ as opposed to Literature or Art) and the worth of studying it as a social phenomenon.

On the one hand, the university collection supports a historical movement to turn us all into consumers/ viewers/ receivers of knowledge; on the other, locating the collection in a learning environment says something about the active nature of learning and the ‘work’ that every collection does. The art has been made by teachers and students; objects were actively selected by staff and curators to show off local culture and to exemplify certain kinds of art practice; the botanical specimens and paintings have been produced and assembled as tools to achieve improved recognition and management skills in students of the natural world. We all make collections to do something. The university collection reminds us that learning is more than throwing facts together. It also reminds us that information gathering and retrieval, even in the computer age, is only ever as useful (as meaningful) as the people who collect, order, and actively interpret the data.

In the Australian historical and local context, one of the first things to be collected was knowledge of the distinctive features of the land. Aboriginal peoples assembled over millennia facts about particular plants and animals: where they were most to be found and when. They arranged these facts into meaningful cycles of harvest and travel, drawing, singing and dancing the (linked patterns of nature and social belonging. Collection of this kind demonstrates the human self-consciousness basic to culture. But, from a position off-shore, and then from positions along the shoreline, people with no links to the land observed its strangeness and sampled its curiosities, seeing its indigenous as part of the landscape and their
Right:

Next Page:
JANET Cosh, Wattle - 'Acacia parramattensis', specimen mounted on watercolour paper, (painting verso.) Janet Cosh Herbarium

JOHN INGLIS Cosh, watercolour, c. 1928 (specimen verso). Janet Cosh Herbarium
rituals and tools as material for Europe's 'natural science' collections. This exhibition illustrates these different collecting viewpoints, and in many cases the drive to reconcile the two.

The abstraction in 'dot paintings' of Western Desert narrative and ritual information expressing personal and communal relationships with the environment can be contrasted with the scientific to-back, conventions of panoramic landscape painting (art) and botanical illustration (science) crossing male-female roles and jostling for attention. Notice too, how in modernity, Koori painter Mona Brown views her native Shoalhaven from the same kind of 'realist' distance as either of these white artists, while still asserting the connection between her people and the natural setting, capturing through 'naive' style the comparisons across an arranged selection of pictures. John Caldwell, by contrast, uses the principle of collection to resist photo-realism: his "Illawarra Escarpment" is a composite of images selected from different locations.

The collected images of the Illawarra show an idea of Australia opposing the sun-drenched plains of the outback more widely celebrated as representing illustration that objectifies the 'outside' world and concentrates on specific, isolated detail. (We might reflect, in passing, on how the art collection 'flattens out' story into design, and converts painting from cultural expression to commodity item.) But also note how the botanical drawing which converts plant into specimen expresses qualities of personal investment and aesthetic interest, and draws both artist and viewer towards the material under observation.

This contrastive connection could not be more graphically illustrated than in Janet Cosh's botanical drawings. Not only can we read a personal story of parent-child rivalry compounded by historical gender prejudice (her father prevented her from taking up a University lectureship in Mathematics), but we can see, back-intensity of emotional engagement and the Van Gogh-like dynamism of the land.

In white Australian painting, there is a similar attempt to get beyond 'photographic' representation. Lloyd Rees's drawing "The Vortex" captures the intense vitality of sunlight transforming a backyard into something both wondrous and disturbing. In "Rainforest Blues" Guy Warren inserts the human figure into a forest setting, at once 'naturalising' the figure and turning nature into a ritualistic calligraphy. In one sense, this painting is anti-collection: it speaks of the need to integrate, to dissolve distinctions of modern and traditional, human and natural. Nonetheless it is itself a collection and ordering of images from the escarpment rainforest and has its meaning as a modern artwork within our the nation. In their own ways, both Arthur Boyd and Colin Lancely perpetuate the particular landscape tradition of this region, Lancely in particular showing a retreat from the earlier panoramic prospect to a more limited and detailed vision. Each treatment nonetheless partakes of the romantic 'vision splendid' of a natural Australia and incorporates elements of the colourful and picturesque that informed earlier art in the region.

Although there are considerable differences in understanding the concept, both indigenous and immigrant peoples saw the Illawarra as a 'garden'. For Western illustrators, the coincidence of framing escarpment, deep forest, lush grasslands, lake and sea entrenched a way of seeing the district. Since Captain Westmacott sent sketches to illustrated books of 'the colonies' and Augustus Earle painted
Left:
Common Ringtail Possum. Biological Science Teaching Collection.
Common Goanna. Biological Sciences Teaching Collection
Barn Owl and Red-Browed Firetail. Biological Sciences Teaching Collection
Diamond Python. Biological Sciences Teaching Collection
Barn Owl. Biological Sciences Teaching Collection.

Right:
GUY WARREN, 'Rainforest Blues', 1989, Oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas, in situ, Foyer McKinnon Building.
his cathedral-like stands of rainforest, art has told a story about this region being both ‘picturesque’ and ‘pastoral’. Recognisable in this language of European culture, the Illawarra continues to attract settlers, tourists and artists. In poetry from the 1850s we can see the same tradition of natural riches, and in the bushwalks and preservation of wetlands we see the ongoing botanical interest in the area sparked originally by such features as the cabbage palm and the flame tree. Penny Harris’s “Frog”, Ian Gentle’s “Bush Rat” and Neil Cuthbert’s “Purple Crowned Pigeon” extend this interest into local fauna. They both replicate the collecting of samples from nature that we see in the items from the Biological Science teaching collection, and work against the idea of collecting and preserving for use by trying to express the unique character of each living thing. Ian Gentle breaks with the artist’s or scientist’s distance from natural objects by working with sticks and branches to produce shapes of starkness and violence that are also elegant, with totemic qualities redolent of indigenous art.

Ironically, the success of the story of an abundant natural retreat that we read from collected images of the Illawarra has produced its own collapse. Early botanising meant the discovery of resources to be chopped down or dug up. The more people moved to the district to savour its natural delights, the less natural habitat there was. So against stories of continuity there are also stories of loss. Koori art speaks not only of beauty and survival but of death and absence; white art also asks questions such as “Where have all the sandhills gone?” (Mark Osland) and, by implication, ‘where are all the trees going?’ (Sue Blanchfield’s “Forest Industry”). As the ‘story’ of a natural Illawarra changes, so one of a suburban and industrial region emerges, partly as social critique and partly as celebration of national ‘progress’ generally and of Australia’s migrant workers in particular.

No collection is ever complete, because collections change with time, economy and politics. The contending/ complementing strands of nature and settlement will continue to be developed and catalogued, and the University’s involvement in producing, collecting and interpreting the products of this process will remain a critical part of the Illawarra’s distinct and dynamic narrative.

Works Consulted


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Hybritity and the Influx of Ideas
BERT FLUGELMAN, 'Computer generated drawing for 'Lawrence Hargrave Memorial'', 1988, on loan from the Artist.

Apart from substantial cave paintings and engravings done by the indigenous inhabitants of the region the history of art in the Illawarra up until the Second World War was primarily the tracking of movement of artists throughout the region. The Illawarra was known in the growing colony as the ‘Garden of New South Wales’1. It was an ideal site to capture vistas of the topographical picturesque that met the needs of artistic consumption in the colonies and in the mother country. Later, nationhood and a maturity in production that began with the Heidelberg school, meant that artists saw the Illawarra anew as a site for capturing light and its play on the landscape. Next in line were the modernists who, with their more complex questioning of social values, culture and investigation, valued the Illawarra as a venue for the snapshot rather than an intense gaze extended over a period of time.

After 1945 industry flourished in the Illawarra and the regional economy grew rapidly. Cultural production in the region also increased. The establishment of regional University courses in 1951 and the subsequent rise of the University of Wollongong helped to create a more discriminating and learned audience in the region, who were potential consumers of cultural production. All this made work for artists.

This also runs parallel to the establishment of Art courses at West Wollongong TAFE. The Wollongong University College was unlike the established Universities in Australia, in that it was wholly technological. This is because it was a feeder college for the University of Technology set up in 1947 by a Labor government intent on creating a non-traditional and vocationally-oriented university more suitable for working class students. Thus even after the University of Technology became the University of New South Wales and added faculties of Arts and Medicine to become more like a traditional university, at Wollongong the courses were science, engineering and metallurgy and trained the employees of the steelworks (BHP). Arts and commerce subjects were first offered in 1964, but grew fairly rapidly thereafter. Illawarra artists, therefore, worked in a more diverse milieu of peers from disparate disciplines and often worked across disciplines both in employment and artistic activity. This is exemplified by the meeting of scientific ideas and frameworks with modernist art practice.

As a result it seems oddly apt that the first recorded work to enter the collection in 1963 is a painting by Ivan Englund who is known more as a ceramicist than as a painter. Englund and his work signify the multi-disciplinary origins of modernist and contemporary artistic production in the region. In the late fifties Englund was one of the inaugurators of the art courses at West Wollongong Technical College, later West Wollongong TAFE and had an office next door to perhaps the greatest regional exemplar of cross disciplinary practice. This was the mining engineer, and later painter, William Peascod, a key figure in the development of an art community in the Illawarra.

Peascod was born in the English Lakes District and as a youngster became a miner working the three foot coal seam of that region. Later he rose through the ranks of the mining industry and by the time of his arrival in Wollongong in the late 1950s was employed as a lecturer in Mining at the TAFE and then later worked at the University of Wollongong. Peascod only began to paint after his arrival in the Illawarra, but his work from the outset reflects the
dualities of his life - mining and the trends then current in Australian painting of arte povera with its emphasis on the surface qualities of painting. The works in this show, particularly Escarpment and Red Ridge, are typical of Peascod's work. Peascod seems to be referencing those materials he knew intimately and professionally. Escarpment could almost be a reference to the seams of coal he mined in his youth as well as an examination of the surface of geology, the micro blown up to the macro, re-enforcing the push and pull drama of even the smallest of geological material.

Perhaps more importantly Peascod also interacted both socially and professionally with academics, teachers and students from a large cross section of the University and wider community. When Peascod died, Col Jordan, another artist active in the region during the sixties, wrote that "he was a man of enthusiasms ...with natural charm which attracted a circle of friends and admirers who enjoyed the warmth and hospitality of his studio.... His studio was my art school." 2

It seems that Wollongong's visual cultural life in this nascent stage offered possibilities that are still relevant through the divergence of new technologies and art. A good example of this is the artist John Stockdale who, although living in Southern Sydney, and working at the Lucas Heights Nuclear Facility, was also an active Member of the NSW Arts Society and a colleague of Bill Peascod and Col Jordan. Stockdale's painting exhibited here, Extension, he says is an attempt to 'align my painting with my science' 3 and the mathematical allusions and hard-edged format seems to invoke a clinical beauty that often equated with scientific and mathematical precision. One can imagine that in Peascod, Stockdale found a similar spirit, not so much in terms of aesthetics but an artist who was trying to reconcile his working life with his artistic life. In Peascod's case his artistic life eventually replaced his work teaching mining practice.

The idea of collaboration and cross-disciplinary practice as an aspect of Illawarra cultural production is still evident in the case of Ron Lambert and Paul Higgs. As well as influencing and indeed to some extent collaborating with each other, they have created work which utilises an abstract gestural idiom and is also influenced by computer generated possibilities in creating art. An additional influence is the electronic hardware they were using, the mother boards and microchips. In this case their interest is on a general and aesthetic level, what drew them to the scientific, apart from the possibilities of exploration of form in a different context, was the 'visual quality' of the scientific material then being published in scientific journals. This is the 'look' of the images of light from planets refracted through lenses and later the psychedelic rhythms and patterns of fractal mathematics as captured in the Mandelbrot set. 4 This interest they share with many artists working from the sixties onward.

Perhaps the best known example of cross-collaboration and hybridity is the work of sculptor Bert Flugelman. Flugelman through works like the 'Transition' series and 'Balls on a Stand' is working with basic mathematical building blocks, spheres and triangles, albeit modified with slight variables, especially in the case of the 'Transition' pieces, to create a limitless set of sculptural possibilities. In Flugelman's larger sculptural pieces that are permanently installed on the University Campus, collaboration has played a key role in their creation and is an intrinsic part of the artistic process.
BILL PEASCOD, 'The Escarpment', 1966, Synthetic polymer paint and mixed media on canvas mounted on board. University of Wollongong Art Collection
Left:
IVAN ENGLUND, ‘Port Kembla Landscape’, 1962, Oil on board. University of Wollongong Art Collection

Right:
Installation of Bert Flugelman’s ‘Lawrence Hargrave Memorial’, 1989, Video stills, University of Wollongong Art Collection Archive.
"Wave" or 'Gate-way to Mount Keira' seems to reference both the 'wave' of the ocean, albeit in a simplified and abstracted form, as well as sound waves as seen optically as through an Oscilloscope. 'Wave' was first conceived by Flugelman in the early seventies but was not brought through to completion until the mid-eighties partly due to the fact that pipe-bending technology as utilised in the sculpture was not available in the country until that time. 'Wave' as well as its 'companion piece', 'Homage to Lawrence Hargrave' or 'Flight', used heavy industry manufacturing and engineering techniques to bring about their completion. In particular 'Flight' is a perfect example of working with heavy industry to solve problems creatively and push cutting-edge technical expertise to its creative limits. An example of this is the technical drawings here rendered by computer drafting software. Although it was supposed that this then new technique would be able to plot the geometrical faceted planes of the piece, it proved to be not versatile enough, in effect highlighting and benchmarking the limits of the technology. Eventually the piece was created almost in a traditional sculptural fashion scaled up from a marquette. So the hand and eye, although 'technically' inferior to their mechanised counterparts, were the most important tools in creating this sculpture. Indeed the almost humanlike frailty of the sculpture butted hard up against the sky seems to deny its materiality.

The interaction between the machine and the body is referenced more directly and is the preoccupation of another artist, Leonie Watson, whose work directly recalls the biological world. Her knowledge of the peculiar beauty of the biological is gleaned from her studies of marine biology. Transformed and cropped to create an interior landscape Watson's work has direct relationship to the truncated organic form, reminiscent of Peascod and his transformation of the geological form from the micro to the macro, Watson does the same using the surface and interiors of the body.

The work on exhibition in this section of 'Illawarra Visions' offers to local audiences, and in particular local artistic audiences, a glimpse of the opportunities and outcomes that cross discipline activity can give to arts practice. And although science is not the only discipline that has informed regional cultural production of the last fifty years is has had a greater influence than any other. Science and art both give a view of the world that puts forward a theoretical model that is augmented and diminished to gain new insights and ideas, and as such the two disciplines need not be separated by the schism that is perceived to exist. The University Art Collection stands as a document of this existing historical and ongoing precedent of collaboration that can be achieved through multi-skilling, informing and sharing knowledge across a variety of disciplines.

Glenn Barkley, BCA
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Art Collection

3 Stockdale, J., Correspondence with the Author, 11/3/00
5 Stockdale J., op cit.
PHOTO CREDITS

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structures between the machine and the body, formed from materials similar to the composition of soft body parts, such as tissue and bone, directly evoke the biological world. The knowledge of the medical history of the biological influenced the creation of the biomorphic machine, which was inspired by medical and anatomical descriptions.