1991

The poetic vision

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University of Wollongong

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I. D.CA. "Kimberley Stranger Gazing" Light installation, video sculpture,
Roslyn Oxley Gallery 1988
Photograph Jill Crossley
THE POETIC VISION

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree DOCTORATE OF CREATIVE ARTS from THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by
RITA JOAN BRASSIL A.T.D., D.P.A.S.
School of Creative Arts
1991
Four installations submitted for DCA
Wollongong University
1988 – 1990

"KIMBERLEY STRANGER GAZING"

"TIME WARP REFLECTIONS"

"RANDOMLY — NOW AND THEN"

"TETHER OF TIME"

Installations as instruments of light and reflection
in kinetic video sculpture
KIMBERLEY STRANGER GAZING
TIME WARP REFLECTION

Installations as instruments of resonance and
randomness in stabile sculpture
RANDOMLY — NOW AND THEN
TETHER OF TIME
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The Poetic Vision documentation

The purpose of this documentation is to record intentions and methods of practice for four works made during 1988–90 at Wollongong University and exhibited in a retrospective at the Fourth Australian Sculpture Triennial Melbourne 1990. However, these works need to be seen in the context of installations made over the past two decades. The chronology begins with works commenced during studies at the Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1969–71, and culminating in works made during three years as a post-graduate at the University of Wollongong, 1988–90. I have adopted a structure based on Trilogies.

The method of documentation is presented in four forms.
1. Written document "Survey of twenty years of installation"
2. Photographic record of D.C.A. works.
3. Poetry and poetic texts as radio scripts
4. Broadcast sound tape from A.B.C. National "Listening Room" "Landscape in four dimensions".

In addition I have incorporated excerpts from articles, reviews and catalogue essays written over the years which explicate the work.

I have done this because they serve both interpretative frameworks and contemplations on the completed works.

Though they may offer other views of the work, they are frequently the result also of interviews or discussion, between author and artist, and as such they record my intentions and attitudes towards the processes and works.

These are affixed as part of the appendix.
I was approached by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, together with the Director of the 4th Australian Triennial to mount a Retrospective Exhibition of my work for 1990.

To assemble this Retrospective, I had to select a representation of my work from the Trilogies of the past two decades. The selection was guided by the need to support the developments of the work of current installations.

The Trilogies addressed aspects of the sensibilities towards phenomena, then the varying cultural attitudes in the perception of what is there.

The guideline in selection of works in the Retrospective was established: a work from each Trilogy should be included and a new set of relationships set up in the holistic spirit of an overview survey of submitted installations. Inherent in the condition of an installation is the dependence on spatial relationships between image-object-process-context and the viewer.

In the Retrospective, all relationships had to faithfully adhere to the object-image-process of the original work, and yet still maintain the integrity of intention within the changed context. However, this may have involved a reorientation with the changed spaces, as well as the relationship between installation and installation. As the works collectively support one another there may be a call for reduction of elements in specific works to allow clarity of concept within the poetic resonances of the whole context, and for the ambulatory viewer.

The Retrospective, therefore, has been treated as collective installations remaining faithful to the signs, processes and intentions of works in the original contexts, but developing nuances relating to the changed contexts as they are assembled to form this collective installation.

For this documentation, each work has been described and placed in the trilogy of its concept.
INTRODUCTION

During this century scientific and technological explorations and discoveries have overturned concepts and values of past ages. The cultural reorientation with respect to time presents undreamt of possibilities so rapidly.....

..... I wish to pause and wonder on
The magnitude of Nature.
Processes of symbiotic adjustments
Energy transfers
the ‘chaos’ of change
to absorb into the culture, the scientific
implications of subtlety discovered
in Nature
to take inspiration from the survival
processes of millions of years, with
the insights and revelations made
possible by technology.

In my work as a sculpture the use of technological processes has allowed deeper probing into the nature of existence. The penetrating view through the electron microscope has revealed hitherto unknown processes of living nature or Earth’s inanimate crust. The vast expansive view by the telescope and the transmission of information by radio waves, or satellite, have demanded new considerations of Space itself.

In sculpture a form of installation evolved where space was the pervading element in which the interaction of process, object and viewer became the work of art. This spatial and experiential dimension of installation, together with the use of time-based electronics, revolutionised the attitude to sculpture.

Jack Burnham writes in 1968:

We are now in transition from an object-oriented to a systems-oriented culture. Here change emanates, not from things but the way things are done.
The priorities of the present age revolve around the problem of organisation.¹

Donald Brook describes the response of sculptors to this “systems-oriented culture” as “the flight from the object.” This flight from the object led to the consideration of sculpture as
process. Sculptural concepts were further revolutionised by the use of light.

The controlled use of light is the most flexible visible art form yet devised and its enormous variety of uses is far from exhausted. At its present stage, emitted light best demonstrates one of the primary qualities of systems: the tendency to fuse the art object and environment into a perceptual whole. In fact, the trend of Light Art is to eliminate the specific art object...²

Over the past two decades, the direction of my sculptural practice has been a development from object to process. Whilst not denying the three dimensional object, electronic energy within the sculpture and installation provides a dimension of time which radically extends the process possibilities, where sculpture may become an instrument of art with the dissolution of the object into light, the work assumes an ephemeral condition as in music or spoken poetry.

Poetic process for me was a way of addressing revolutions in sensibility and forms of sculptural practice. T.S. Eliot maintains that “Poetry may effect revolutions in sensibility such as are periodically needed.”

Poetry ... may help break up the conventional modes of perception and valuation which are perpetually forming, and make people see the world afresh or some new part of it. It may make us from time to time a little more aware of the deeper, unnamed feelings which form the substratum of our being, to which we rarely penetrate; for our lives are mostly a constant evasion of ourselves, and an evasion of the visible sensible world.³

The need to see the world anew is of prime importance in creative thought. This avoidance of ourselves and the visible sensible world leads to the consideration of phenomenology. Phenomenology is a study of what is already there in existence, and is also a study of essences:

... the essence of perception or essence of consciousness, e.g. but “phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any other starting point other than that of Facticity.”⁴

Commencing with “Facticity” as through the twentieth century visions of space, time and energy, I have approached the phenomenology of landscape by the unseen energies and codes effecting the nature of consciousness and perception, then to wonder on “Facticity” by the interaction of processes.
Resonance and reflection have been used as important interactive agents, in the video works, the image itself is apprehended through its reflection. The image of the viewer may be reflected from glass or perspex surface yet the viewer's choice of position changes the reflected image. The position of the listener determines how the random, ever-changing resonances within the installations may be perceived.

Whilst most works are of processes, the object has not been denied, and appears in the installations as found object, as sculpture, as mirror of nature object, or as symbol.

The works are conceptually open-ended and contemplative. In the extended space of the installation, the viewer may participate in the establishment of relationships with the concepts and elements of the work. Viewers position themselves within the kinetic and random elements of time-based works to experience the great enigma of existence.

In 1989, I participated in Ars Electronica in Linz, Austria with “Time Warp Reflection”. The statement in the preliminary brief said:

According to diagnoses, hypotheses and forecasts of scientists and the media-theoreticians, modern mass media and technologies of communication will lead to a profound transformation of our culture, to a new codification of how we experience the world and ourselves, new codes which will determine our perception and our action.5

In the revolutionised codes, communications and perceptions, the documentation of my work during 1988 to 1990 demanded a form consistent with the processes.
TRILOGIES OF INSTALLATIONS

Trilogy 1: PERCEPTION OF THE UNSEEN
1970: “Sound Beyond Hearing” *
1971: “Light Beyond Seeing” *
1974: “Memory Beyond Recall” *

Trilogy 2: THREE ENVIRONMENTS OF 20TH CENTURY DREAMING
1976: “How far between the Potatoes and the Planets?” *
1977: “Have you Metamorphosed Lately?”
1978: “Can it be that Everlasting is Everchanging?” *

Trilogy 3: ENERGY AS A DELICATE CONTRACT
1981-2: “The Energy of the Life Game is all in the Membrane, Y’know?” *
1985: “Through a Magnetic Field Lightly”
1986: “Consider the Fungi at the Interface”

Trilogy 4: MEMORY AND PERCEPTION IN THE AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE
1983: “Stranger in the Landscape” *
1984: “Stranger Charting”
1985: “Stranger Companion”

Trilogy 5: LANDSCAPE IN FOUR DIMENSIONS
1986: “Time Mirages”
1988: “Time Warp Reflections” *
1988: “Kimberley Stranger Gazing” *

Trilogy 6: MUSICA SPECULATIVA
1990: “Randomly - Now and Then” *
1990: “Tether of Time” *

* Included in Retrospective 1990.
TRILOGY 1

PERCEPTION OF THE UNSEEN

1970 'Sound Beyond Hearing'

1971 'Light Beyond Seeing'

1974 'Memory Beyond Recall'

*Retrospective.

Photograph Martin Saunders
TRILOGY 1

The first trilogy of works introduced the phenomenological context with the approach to the intangibles of Space, Time and Energy.

Kasimir Malevich expressed the notion of energy when referring to his use of the "suprematist" elements in his painting:

"expressing sensations of flight ... the sensation of metallic sounds ... the feeling of wireless telegraphy"; "white on white, expressing the feeling of fading away ... magnetic attraction"; "conveying the feeling of movement and resistance, the feeling of a mystic 'wave' from 'outer space'."

From these "non-objective" icons, I wished, as a sculptor, to make three dimensional icons of energy beyond the surface and proceed from the static object to the kinetic process.

The triptych was made up of:

"Sound Beyond Hearing"
"Light Beyond Seeing"
"Memory Beyond Recall".

This triptych consists of three large, wall mounted black boxes, each with a frontal viewing of dark translucent glass. The reflective quality of glass, with a dark background means that the viewer is presented with a view "of self" before the focus penetrates beyond the surface.

In each work a quality of minimal light is explored.

In "Sound Beyond Hearing", the minimal light falls on the polished semi-circular rim, of dark copper "contacts", as a series of found objects in a square system of 16 units. Because part of each of the "contact" rim is worn away, the curves of the polished rims are placed to form waves. The square arrangement of these contacts is placed on a black square board, raised from the background, and slightly off centre to allow for smaller contacts to appear to recede. All this appears as a slight disturbance beneath the dark mirror surface.

The same black-box format is used in "Light Beyond Seeing", but the light is from miniature fluorescent tubes, placed in upright parallel formation within a small square opening 15 mm $\times$ 15 mm. The light source is then amplified by the use of reflection from a concave mirror placed behind the light, in front of the lights is a surface of striated fluted glass to create the effect of a dimensional layering of the light image. The whole apparatus is then blocked out by dense black glass, which allows only a faint glow to penetrate the surface. The grey

glass surface of the front of the work presents the viewer image, with the light work as a small, dim violet glow at the centre. When the daylight fades in the surrounding space, the lights emerge to a greater definition.

The final work of the triptych is related to the human condition of the ephemeral "Memory Beyond Recall". In the central position of the black box, another black box is designed with a grid of 25 holes which have been burnt through layers of acetate and Japanese rice papers, making irregular, layered black margins around the light sources.

The lights are miniature incandescent bulbs, within the mechanical apparatus, which by the use of magnets have the capacity to slowly illuminate, and slowly fade. The current is from an unsequenced bunch of wires, and no light ever reaches full luminescence. This was the first attempt to emulate randomness. Thus, in a large, dark contained space one small glow slowly emerges at a time to slowly fade and leave the large dark space of "illumination lost", anxiously waiting a recovery. The viewer sees his/her image reflected in the dark glass with yet another chance glow of memory to revive before fading again.

This work represents my first attempt at the kinetic process bringing in the dimension of time. Time-based works throughout the exhibition, take advantage of the greater options open to artists through the use of electronics.

Thus the three works represent, firstly, a static dimension indicating the perspective of fading away: secondly, a light work with the illusion of greater depth of layered light: thirdly, kinetic considerations which continue as a prime concern in the development of process and randomness in subsequent works.
TRILOGY 2

THREE ENVIRONMENTS OF TWENTIETH CENTURY DREAMING

SPACE — the measurement from Earth to Planets.

TIME — an encapsuled sequence in an Insect Egg.

ENERGY — the randomness of Cosmic energy registering as bombardments on the Earth.

1. How far between the Potatoes and the Planets? 1976 *

2. Have you Metamorphosed Lately? 1977

3. Can it be that Everlasting is Everchanging? 1978 *

*Retrospective
III. "How Far Between the Potatoes and the Planets"
Sculpture Centre 1976
Photograph Joan Brassil
HOW FAR BETWEEN THE POTATOES AND THE PLANETS?

In 1975, I travelled to Narrabri in the north west New South Wales to visit the Interferometer. This installation was housed in a hangar, and at night would be wheeled out into a paddock on a pair of steel tracks. The apparatus of two giant mirror dishes, like insect eyes, of specially ground Italian mirrors scanned the skies while the physicist made calculations at the console at the base of a dish. These calculations were eventually sent to the KDF9 computer at the School of Physics, Sydney University.

Around the Interferometer sheep grazed beside paddocks of wheat and paddocks of sunflowers, and it seemed that the symbols of habitation were synthesised: “We survive, we investigate, we dream.” With this in mind, I began the Trilogy of “Three Environments of 20th Century Dreaming.”

To make work of this experience of measuring the stars in the midst of survival crops, I wished to work within space itself, rather than look at space from an “outside” position. I wanted to feel tensions within space for a cognition of great distance. For this tension, I wanted to take a survival crop and poetically relate it to the sky. The most appropriate survival crop for the purpose was the potato. The potato was completely earthbound, and came into a kitchen as a “sculpture”, yet the experience of the feeling of a potato in the ritual of preparation, the constantly repeated handling of this sculptural form, made it instantly accessible as a natural multiple with form and meaning.

The poetic tension of irreconciliable opposites was the subject of “How Far Between the Potatoes and the Planets?”. The work sent these earth-bound objects on a levitating journey where they reflected each planet by some change in material form. The work was made up of:

- Pomme de Terre of iron brushed stone-ware,
- to Pomme de Lune of cast aluminium,
- to Pomme de Mars of large smoke fired coarse stone-ware,
- to Pomme de Venus of carved soap-stone,
- to Pomme de Soleil of crystalline wax, which like the wings of Icarus melt like candle drippings back to Earth.

In addition, there were those that were subject to mirror states where they went “Through a Space Hole Darkly”. Solid bronze or solid aluminium potatoes travel as shadows and reflections together with the elegant circuit boards of the obsolete KDF9 computer. The KDF9, which no longer measured the stars, but was itself also passing through layers of black reflective translucence as reflections.
The centrepiece of the main installation was a large area of earth, forming a “virtual” reflection of Space, where freshly sprung pasture grass described circles on black topsoil to “mirror” the planets. In the centre of each small circular area were three potatoes, one cast, one real, and one made by hand, representing quarks (only three had been discovered in 1976). The potatoes, in effect, moved from “Through a Space Hole Darkly” to “A Terra Constellation Quarkly.”

Thus, the work creates a perception of moving in and out of sense and non-sense, reality and reflection, mirror states and existence. The fanciful myth of life to space and space to life was sculpturally addressed in the poetic tensions of space within installation.

The research for this work was undertaken by visiting potato growers. It was their insistence (that “If you have potatoes, you must have pastures”), that generated concepts for this work. They sent me seeds for pastures of clover, rye and grasses that were germinated in this work.

The Department of Agriculture, Sydney, gave information, whilst the Flemington Markets supplied the varieties of potatoes produced for market: pontiacs, sebagoes, delawares and kennebeks.

The varieties of potatoes were hand modelled from varieties of stoneware clay; over 500 were made. The metal potatoes were cast from actual specimens.

In treating the concept of Time, I decided on biological Time, as encoded in an insect egg, for the instars’ essential for survival. Thus I made two large “hourglass” structures from delicate saplings from casurinas, which grew around my studio. Each structure, mounted on small sections of cherry wood trunks, reached 8 feet high, and described spaces of hourglasses.

For the four “instars” of a moth, white ceramic representations were made of two pupa, two chrysalids, two moths, two eggs. Each instar was placed in the space of an hourglass bowl, and the eggs were placed at the base of a metal DNA spiral. The installation was the treatment of Time as encoded in an infinitesimal capsule of an insect egg.

This work of Biological Time was titled -

“Tune into the Dimension
we are free,
to serve Time.”

The work was within an installation boundary of five upright trunks of ironbark, with metal ‘sensors’ directed towards the “hourglasses”. A floor cover contour of stringy bark defined the area of the ground in the wider cover of bush litter covering the gallery floor.
IV. Aerial from Sydney Uni. Giant Air Shower Recorder in the Pilliga Forest
Photograph School of Physics
"CAN IT BE THAT EVERLASTING IS EVERCHANGING?"

From the poetic tension of concepts of Time and Energy, coded in an insect egg, I then addressed the randomness of Energy showering the Earth, from pulsars and quasars in outer space. These cosmic showers were being recorded at S.U.G.A.R. (Sydney University Giant Air Shower Recorder), which was an installation of a grid of aerials throughout the Pilliga Forest, with a central building where spark chambers monitored Cosmic rays as they hit the Earth.

To make an installation of art from energy, an apparatus containing geiger tubes was made by Dr. Stewart Whittlestone, and used as the prime source of process within the work. Random energy came directly from radiation sources of cosmic rays and Earth.

At the Sculpture Centre, Sydney, the art installation was placed on two levels of earth. In an area 360 x 360 mm were 12 spark chambers, originally made for S.U.G.A.R. but now, minus their ozone, merely a system of ‘found object’ reflectors, under which were placed specially designed circuit boards containing light emitting diodes, operated from the cosmic energy showering the geiger tubes. Each circuit in each board operated 16 diodes, arranged in continuous pattern over the 12 boards, to be activated by six geiger tubes - which circuit would operate, and when, was entirely according to the random energy bombarding geiger tubes from Outer Space.

It would be highly unlikely that the arranged pattern would ever be seen in its entirety. This activation was a progression from the mechanical process of randomness, used in "Memory Beyond Recall", but here process was phenomenology within the meaning.

Amongst the panels of diodes were placed saplings of casurinas and eucalypts, on the tops of which were placed chromium aerials. To further accentuate the contrast, another signifier was introduced, by placing ochre bands around the saplings. From the top of the aerials came “spark tendrils” of tapa cloth painted with “optical” markings to signify a ‘spark’ in both 20th Century visual culture or in aboriginal art.

“Can it be that Everlasting is Everchanging”, the title of the work, indicates many kinds of changes, including the unpredictability of the cosmic energy, and the change of attitudes to discoveries. In a future century, it may be said that we all were Dreaming, in this twentieth century culture. The trilogy was titled “Three Environments of Twentieth Century Dreaming.”

For the Retrospective at A.C.C.A., the space for this installation was considered and the work made to respond. On the top of the original spark chambers, square sheets of dark perspex were placed, tying the tonal quality to the darkness of the earth.

The area of the space was considerably larger than the original setting, and gave far more
V. "Can it be that Everlasting is Everchanging" Upper Sculpture Centre 1978

Lower A.C.C.A. 1990

Photograph Martin Saunders
scope for the expression of space itself. In the original, 360 x 360 mm space, the two levels of earth served to extend the spaces upwards in a small gallery, but the wide twenty by twenty space in the Retrospective was accentuated by making the earth completely flat, and the number of spark chambers was reduced from twelve to ten. The "less is more" principle worked well here; and it became clear that the installation could sustain an even larger floor format.

The whole work was more austere than the original, in which the borders were of iron bark. But the richness of texture together with mounded earth would have appeared as an object and detracted from the feeling of planar space and air in this spacious gallery. The reduction of elements was made effective by the presence of "The Energy of the Life Game."

"Can it be that Everlasting is Everchanging?", is about randomly changing Energy, which may be harnessed and converted. Here I felt that the introduction of plants was necessary for relationships of space-energy and life-energy. Taking as a symbol the high energy storage capacity of sugar-cane as "solar storage units", varied stands of sugar-cane were made in ceramic as 'mirror of nature' forms, and encased in dark translucent perspex to suggest solar storage collectors. The radiating leaf crowns were made from the organic tapa cloth and perspex 'fluid' translucence.

In the darkness of the original installation, the stands of cane were separately ranged around the gallery, and the solar collector slightly separated. However, as installation adapts to the space and circumstance, in the Retrospective at the A.C.C.A. Gallery, three separate concepts of Energy were able to coexist, and support each other.

The stands of cane in the expanded space with natural light would have appeared as an ineffectual scatter of objects, and undermined the strength and cohesion needed for a composite concept. Thus, the separated "tapa" stands of cane and perspex collectors were telescoped into one consolidated stabile grouping, existing between two differing electronic concepts, yet faithfully related to the spirit of the original works.
TRILOGY 3

ENERGY
AS A DELICATE CONTRACT

PROCESSES OF SYMBIOSIS AND PHOTOSYNTHESIS.

Primal chemical energy of life available by symbiosis of Mitochondria organelles in every living cell.

Through the protection of Earth's magnetic field, light available for the process of Photosynthesis.

Land form secured by the symbiosis of the mycorrhiza fungi transferring phosphorus to the host plant roots on the dunes.

1982-3 The Energy of the Life Game is all in the Membrane

1984 Through a Magnetic Field Lightly

1985 Consider the Fungi at the Interface

*retrospective.
The Energy of the Life Game is all in the Membrane Y’Know

What were the forces before
the Dreaming,
The shimmering waves
in an aqua light?
a membrane, a membrane,
a unique mode,
Bacteria, Bacteria,
the chemical code;
chemical turbing of an organelle,
in an exotic, symbiotic,
Primal Cell.

In the Labs of the 80s,
Life energy researched,
Testing, testing.
Testing the Mitochondria
in scintillation counters;
Measure and count, measure and count,
Count the scintillated responses
on Firefly tails,
Life Energy measured on microscales.

The micro charge.
of chemical action,
A cosmic contraction,
of a pulsar
On a firefly tail.

The membrane, the membrane,
The Energy Game,
the chemical turbing
(in a Time trough resurging)
of mess, of lichen, of toad,
Energy recurring
in the same Primal mode;
in fin or in tendon of tensile prehensile,
a membrane, a membrane, a unique mode,
Mitochondria, mitochondria, the Energy code.
VI. “The Energy of the Life Game”

Upper 1st Aust. Sculpture Triennial 1981
Photograph Judith Blackall
Lower Roslyn Oxley 1982
Video details Joan Brassil
THE ENERGY OF THE LIFE GAME, IS ALL IN THE MEMBRANE, Y’KNOW?

After investigating the energy from the vastness of outer space, I chose to investigate the chemical energy in the microspace of a living cell. The research for this work was carried out with the help of Dr. John Pollak, of the Histology Department of Sydney University.

Biologically the micro-energy is dependent upon the conversion of light from space to the energy of the chemical ATP for the Energy of Life within a living cell. This seemed to be a process worthy of celebration. The conversion takes place within an organelle, with two peripheral convoluted membranes through which the process of energy conversion takes place.

To present an installation based on a microscopic organelle as a sculptural process was indeed a challenge. It seemed to me that the most appropriate medium for presenting a micro-organism, which can only be seen through an electron microscope, would be to present it through electronic imagery.

For this, video as a process, was a ready-made solution. Then, taking a course in video-making at the Tin Sheds of Sydney University, I set about making minimal video imagery, by drawing images of mitochondria, and pixillating the spaces between the two membranes. I made the sequences into pulses, in which the cosmic rays were recorded on the screen as the flashing of the random diodes which was operated by energy from outer space. This flashing alternated with the varied imagery of mitochondria.

The confines of a video screen seemed sculpturally inappropriate; I wished to free the two dimensional screen “organically” to a form in space. This was done by taking 8 foot lengths of clear perspex, and convoluting these “membranes” into four screens spaced behind one another, where the images could be reflected and floated out from the two dimensional screen, and be reproduced at four different distances. With the slight differences of surface planes, caused by the heating process for the initial bending, the reflected images were slightly augmented or diminished in space. Three such banks of convoluted perspex were made, and suspended between steel, square rod frames; at the base of each was placed a perspex tray, two of dark perspex and a central one of light translucent green, each filled with water, an essential of life.

This work was then placed into a base of earth, 12 feet by 14 feet. At the back of the complete installation was placed a “wall” of six panels of cosmic-ray chambers and operating from the original geiger tube apparatus. This then meant that the cosmic ray registrations flashed in real time, whilst the video recorded flashes were of time past, making a time trough, through which the primal chemical processes of the mitochondria pass and disappear.

This work was shown in a darkened situation at the First Australian Sculpture Triennial at
VII. "The Energy of the Life Game"
A.C.C.A. 1990
Photograph Martin Saunders
Latrobe University in 1981. The work did not seem to be complete in my mind, because, although I had freed the two dimensional screen, I still had two dimensional images within the screen, lacking the sensuality that necessarily accompanies the organic. I tried making three dimensional forms in perspex but they were not fluid enough. At the time I was doing Post Graduate work at the City Art Institute in Sydney. Then, on a visit to Sydney College of the Arts, to see the Glass Department, I was invited to join a workshop.

This proved to be a breakthrough in the matter of making translucent forms. After experimentation with many processes, I arrived at making irregular forms of "found" stones. The stones or rocks as shapes were used to make moulds over which etched glass, as two layer "membranes", could be slumped and fused into three dimensional forms, to achieve the organic fluidity desired. The high fire glazing of the kiln glass made for the high reflection needed for video light process. A new video pulse was made to animate and shimmer through the cosmic flashes.

The new image production in the video was exhibited at Roslyn Oxley's Gallery in 1982. For the inclusion of this work in the Retrospective, differing circumstances of installation had to be considered. So, from the mystery and isolation in a darkened space in Roslyn Oxley Gallery Basement, the work had to operate at A.C.C.A. in an enlarged space of natural light, and to conceptually and aesthetically respond to another work: "Can it be that Everlasting is Everchanging".

The two works were unified by their connection to the random cosmic ray device. As one work was set in dark earth, I chose the life energy to relate to the light sand and water, using only one original tray of pale green perspex. Concentrating the cosmic ray operation under this tray of water, I eliminated the dark trays in the lights situation. Then across the enlarged area of sand, "waves" were sand-raked as an extension to the outer edge of the pale green tinted border. This also was a colour extension from the green video images of the mitochondria.

The difference from the original was not in concept but a response to the prevailing formal conditions of a larger space, containing two other installations, in a situation of natural light.
THROUGH A MAGNETIC FIELD LIGHTLY

Solar flares,
Solar winds,
on Earth's Magnetic Field
deflect,
with a sough and a sigh.

Through a Magnetic Field lightly,
Photo-energy,
subtle, subliminal and silent,
the biotic transfer,
to the Primal cell.

'PERSPECTA' 1985.
Art Gallery of N.S.W.
Sydney.
THROUGH A MAGNETIC FIELD LIGHTLY

In the Australian Survey 'Perspecta 1985' at the Art Gallery of N.S.W. "Through a Magnetic Field Lightly" work was exhibited in 'Instruments of Art' curated by Judy Annear.

In the introduction to the catalogue Anthony Bond states certain tendencies:

"The emergence of a new sculptural form ... has a high profile in this exhibition. It does not constitute a focused section such as the other components because of the divergent directions being pursued at this early stage. There is one factor that applies to most of the work however, and that is a tendency to view sculpture as installation."

In my installation, "Through a Magnetic Field Lightly", the work was an ephemeral video, light-sculpture of process. A new set of 14 screens was designed, each perspex screen manipulated to reflect a slightly altered image from the video monitor. The overlapping visions, of the sun, magnetic field contours, sea and rocks, together with blown glass models of unicellular organisms were in constant exchange. The contours of collective images realigned with every movement of the viewer.

This work is of energy and earth-life survival. Survival dependent on the sun yet life existing only by protection from the sun.

Every 11 years, there are fierce Sun spots. These solar flares generate the tremendous solar winds. The Earth is able to survive only by the Earth's protective magnetic field deflecting the solar winds.

During solar flares in the '60s, a scientist, Bartels, made a series of indices of the solar winds playing on Earth's magnetic field.

A musician, Charles Dodge, took Bartels' indices and put them through a computer to compile music, the cosmic "music of the spheres"! Using this music for the sound track, I made a video work on magnetic fields and Dynoflagellate. Dynoflagellate is a single celled organism, found amongst Plankton, which spirals around, tuning in to whatever ray of light is available at the time for its chemical survival.

Light and the Sea, Energy and membranes, constant conversion to life by Photosynthesis in Phytoplankton pastures.
In her catalogue introduction to “Instruments of Art”, Judy Annear maintains: “It is in the nature of humanity to pry at the edges of existence.” For my work this led to the consideration of the Earth’s magnetic field, which is the all pervading protector at ‘the edges of existence’ by the deflection of the solar winds.

Thus from the fierce solar winds the poetic tension of photosynthesis exists as a ‘Delicate Contract’ in the transference of energy, between the omnipotent Sun to the living cell.
Consider the Fungi, at the Interface, of Earth and Primal Life.

Consider the Fungi at the Interface, holding the dunes in place, the translucent forms the intricate threads in laboratory light of ultra blue.

Consider the Fungi at the Interface, ranging along roots transferring the phosphorus to the living cell, - a chemical key to the stuff of Life consider the Fungi at the Interface.

1986.
CONSIDER THE FUNGI AT THE INTERFACE

Following the work on the process of photosynthesis in the phyto-plankton pastures, I gained inspiration from the mycorrhiza fungi, which grow on the roots of plants in the dunes. By symbiotically transferring the life-essential phosphorus to the host root, the plant growth is able to stabilise the land-form contour. — "Symbiosis the Delicate Contract"

Under the electron microscope*, the mycorrhiza’s fine translucent threads glowed green in the ultra-violet light. Using this as inspiration for an installation, the mycorrhiza were represented as convoluted perspex tubing. Certain of these convolutions were treated internally with phosphorescent pale green paint, then placed in ultra violet light in the darkened installation. Each unit was seen occasionally to move slightly in random timing.

This kinetic fungi appeared as "objects" in process, in front of "video process" as reflected images of the sea, and, these "objects" were in turn reflected in the screens of video process reflections. Thus two processes, one of reflected electronic imagery and one of actual kinetic object reflections, united the sculptural intent, of object-process in ephemeral installation.

To make a tonal resonance with fungus viewed through a microscope, is a challenging task, but this was my dilemma when deciding to make an installation of video-sculpture for the 6th Biennale in Sydney.

To express the immense result of life-growth, and stabilisation of land form contour, from an invisible fungus - a large installation was made.

The location was an immense old wharf on Sydney Harbour, with the sounds of waters lapping beneath. Overhead was Sydney Harbour Bridge, with trains crossing intermittently, with variations in the envelopes of sound they created, according to whether they came from the northern approach, or the southern approach.

These two sound pieces from the horizontal crossing of the Bridge, and the horizontal sounds of the Harbour waters, needed a very strong vertical “thread”, if the thread-like, Life-giving fungus was to register at all in this soundscape.

Warren Burt was requested to make some chords from the Fibonacci series of numbers for growth: $1 + 1 = 2, 2 + 1 = 3, 3 + 2 = 5, 5 + 3 = 8, 8 + 5 = 13, 13 + 8 = 21$. This was superbly carried out on a synthesiser: at times the harmonics were reversed, or a slight throb introduced. The strong “verticals” from these single chords, over added recordings of the lapping of the Harbour, made an environment of sound in which the trains did not overpower the work, as no one chord depended on any other for audio understanding.

The visual part of the installation was of reflected images, transferred from a previous installation of harbour waters, the emphasis being on transference, so that the images were not descriptive of the harbour, but a composite decayed image of reflections.
In front of the video reflections on perspex, eight narrow perspex tubes were intricately manipulated into "organic threads". These translucent threads were mechanised, and connected to a computer, which was "programmed" for randomness, to move a single perspex thread very slightly. The slight random movement of which tube, when, emphasised the random sounds, the growth factor, the minute movement in the vast ... and consider ... the living micro-fungus eventually sustaining a dune, with a slow gentle resonant pulse of growth.

(See video index)

* Research of Phillip Williams, University of N.S.W.
TRILOGY 4

THREE WORKS OF MEMORY AND PERCEPTION IN THE AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPE

Perception of a strange landscape through a calligraphic memory-grid of a familiar script

Perception of the landfall through the exact charting by the mariner

Perception as an inherited psyche

1. "Stranger in the Landscape" 1983 *

2. "Stranger Charting" 1984

3. "Stranger Companion" 1985

*Retrospective.
Stranger in a Landscape

Harmony and rhythms,
Earth decisions,
Mythologies of survival,
in an arid land.

Nomadic tools,
a stick, a stone,
Reduced forests,
toughened and dry.
Soft-footed animals,
leave plants undisturbed;
Tread softly for survival
in this land.

With voyages of discovery,
come migrations and exiles,
New decisions, with alien
codes.

A landscape migration;
of Druid Oak and Elm;
Horns and hooves,
grasses and grains
A Primal Australia
challenged and changed.

A migration of the written word,
a cursive line,
memory transferred,
A silent migration,
an ancestral web.
The stranger is the memory
that does not apply;
Strange visions,
the new ciphers,
altering perception.

Time makes rhythms
for Earth decisions,
and visions,
visions, visions....

Jean Brassée, 1990
“STRANGER IN THE LANDSCAPE”

Family correspondence dated 1833-55, from London to Hobart Town provided the inspiration for “Stranger in the Landscape”, 1983. The delicate tracery of the penmanship seemed like a web of memories, as the calligraphy traversed the page horizontally, vertically and diagonally. This was a fine mesh of events and memories, from a busy city to the remote isolation of the antipodean colony. It evoked a landscape for which the European names were not yet made. Did the ‘memory grid’ of a garden, telling of a rose, make the ‘Grass tree’ still more incomprehensibly ‘the other’?

In reading “The Voyage of the Beagle”, there is a journal entry by Charles Darwin - Feb. 6. 1836.

The Beagle left Tasmania and on the 6th of the ensuing month, reached King George’s Sound, situated close to the S.W. corner of Australia. We stayed there 8 days, and we did not, during our voyage pass a more dull or uninteresting time.

In the open parts there were many Grass trees, a plant which has some affinity with the palm, but instead of being surmounted by noble fronds, it can boast merely a tuft of coarse grass like leaves. The general bright green colour of the leaves seemed to promise fertility, a single walk however was to dispel such an illusion, and he who thinks with me, will never again wish to walk in so inviting a country.1

Darwin was probably referring to the Kingias which accompanied the Xanthorrhoeas, which are unique to SSW Western Australia.

To approach a work of the European vision of the landscape, I first modelled the now named, ‘Xanthorrhoeas’ or grass trees, which grew around my studio, as a ‘mirror of nature’ image. The naturalistic modelling referred to the idea of art as the ‘mirror of nature’.

I also explored further afield, and, after visiting the South West of Western Australia, made further specimens in the ‘mirror of nature’ mode.

For “Stranger in the Landscape”, as a work of memory and perception, I made grass trees into the symbol of the “strange” land. The “stranger” was identified in the web-like calligraphy of letters sent from London. The strangeness and unfamiliarity of the land was perceived through the memories of home.

VIII. Calligraphy on mesh detail
Photograph Joan Brassil
IX. Calligraphy transparency letter from 1840

Photograph Joan Brad:
“Stranger in the Landscape”, 1983.

Roslyn Oxley Gallery
Photograph Jill Crossley
For this work exhibited at Roslyn Oxley Gallery in 1983, there were three installations, each containing a large 3 foot hour glass, and varied stands of Xanthorrhoeas, as well as Kingias. The hour glasses were blown by Peter Minson, at the technical glass laboratory of National University’s Canberra School of Physics.

In the first grouping, of an east coast stand of “trees”, an hour glass was wrapped in a loose blackened mesh web to evoke a Dreaming time.

In the second grouping of Western Australian species, the hour glass contained transparencies of the letters, whilst translucent perspex surrounding the hour glass implied the perception. The web of the written culture, screen printed on to the perspex, suggested the perception which is to change and evolve over time.

The third group was of burnt-out Xanthorrhoeas and ashes. Regrowth has appeared from the plant protected by the exuded resin inherent in the leaf bases. The hourglass was empty but surrounded by diodes activated by ‘cosmic rays’ reflecting on the surface. Because of the curvature of the glass, the reflection on the outside of the glass was repeated on the opposite inside surface. The effect was of light hanging in a glass, caught but quickly vanishing. The diodes were on three mesh screens of blackened brass surrounding the hourglass.

This work has been installed a number of times in different contexts. I felt that this group of installations was too cramped in one Gallery; much more space was needed for the work to be comprehended.

The three hourglasses indicated three different modes of Time in Landscape:

1. The Dreamtime unaccounted and enmeshed in myth.
2. The cultural colonisation a differing perception of Time, time of the voyage, time for planting, time past, present and passing. The cultural web of time measured and perception conditioned.
3. The fugitive flashes of the unpredictable random rays as processes of nature that cannot be contained by the hourglass set, among trees regenerating after the holocaust.

The hourglass concept was only effective in one installation of the three that made up the work: “Random Rays in an hourglass Reflected”. This was because of the starkness of the space and the cohesion of the burnt trees and ashes, as a foil for the illumination of the diode rays.

The leaf litter on the ground beneath the first two installations was ineffectually ‘Scenic’, and it went unnoticed that one ground cover was of eucalypt leaves and one was of oak leaves, as a symbol of ‘Landscape migration’.

To address this problem, when asked to reassemble a work for the 2nd Australian Sculpture
X. Stranger in the Landscape
A.C.C.A. 1990
Photograph Martin Saunders
Triennial, by stretching brass mesh across the arc of a steel grid frame I made an eye level transparency of letters by applying resin calligraphy across this eye level visor. The work was set on a ground cover of charcoal. This charcoal, in the overpowering bluestone of the National Gallery of Victoria courtyard, became grim and lost vitality. I then tried to retrieve the work by making aboriginal indications in forms made of white pebbles. This was an attempt that did not meet my intentions.

The work was purchased by the Orange Regional Gallery, but adjustments had to be made, whilst not altering the concept. It was to be installed in a foyer space around a stairwell, where the use of the five foot wide visor frame, at eye height, in a space which narrowed to three feet, had to be reconsidered. Small 2 foot high grids were made to lead the small mesh grids of calligraphy, around the narrow passage behind the stairwell wall, on which the enlarged calligraphy from the letters was inscribed in shadow grid writing in graphite, in keeping with the concept.

The ground cover succeeded here as sand was chosen with the colour identical with the path, to be seen outside the glass wall, which brought the general high tone of the surroundings, into an ideal setting for the dramatic effect of the stand of dark trees.

For the reconstitution for the Retrospective in 1990, the original frame was used and the work placed in an outdoor situation, using the Xanthorrhoeas and Kingias for the stand of indigenous plants. In this setting, with the background of European trees from the Botanic Gardens, and standing in a court of brick and paving, they became the “exotics”. This was the final paradox of “The Stranger in the Landscape”, but still conceptually valid as “a landscape migration”.

Thus it is that installation has to be re-thought in formal terms in response to the context, each time it is set up in a new situation, the space orchestrates the central issue of the concept of original work and poem.

In dealing with the perception of the landscape it seemed to me that the method arrived at, turning from object to process, in the reflected video images of ‘the Energy Game’, could operate successfully for the extension of landscape, with the many facets and layers of perception. Thus, landscape and grass trees, from around my studio were first recorded as still transparencies then dissolved into video ready for the superimposition of other images.

Two codes of perception were presented, on the one hand by the overlays of the cursive writing of English correspondence, on the other by overlayed images of aboriginal myths.

I travelled to Cape York and again visually recorded the paintings of the now tribally deserted Quinkin country, near Laura, with its galleries of superimposed cave paintings,
which were previously renewed every wet season, when the tribe used the rock shelters, and renewed knowledge of their myths by painting layers of images. Here I wished to employ translucent glass-light images in a different way, as myth over the recorded, myth of the existing images, as the meanings are now lost in time — a perception through the “spirits” from the lost culture, in a landscape vision of grass trees.
Stranger Charting

A map,
a projection,
a chart,
a grid

Defined spaces,
Defined lines,

Schemes of cognition,
A challenge
To The Dreaming.

Stranger charting a stranger shore

The Dreaming Incognita ... 

While magnetic fields
............. slumber.
While magnetic fields
.................. slumber.
STRANGER CHARTING

From the perception of the stranger in the Landscape through the calligraphy of written memories I turned my attention to the mariner, charting the shores in “Stranger Charting”.

At the time I had the use of a studio on the shore of Middle Harbour and made slide transparencies of the mangroves, oysters and rocks. Then, roaming around the rocks and cliffs of Long Reef, I took another set of transparencies of the ocean, beach and birds. These transparencies were dissolved into a “bed” of images over which I superimposed historic charts, gleaned from the Mitchell Library, our “Dream maps” of the Great South Land. So with the image-wanderings around the shores, mangroves and dunes viewed through maps, charts and grids a very slow progression of images and superimpositions made in continuous journey.

I was fascinated by tidal charts, charts of navigation, charts of magnetic fields. “What really are magnetic fields?”, I asked a geophysicist. “We wish we knew”, he answered. These mysterious existing contours appear frequently in my work, the constant shifting a fascination. The contours on the oyster shells seemed to call for recognition, and so a sequence of “glass oysters” was made to capture light and interact with contours of other oysters and tidal charts around rocks.

For the sound track of this work I chose a didgeridoo, as an indigenous instrument of the ‘Primal Land’ and a viola as an introduced stringed instrument. A sequence of sound was made by showing the musicians the completed video, then straight away taking them to another room. My direction was ‘play for 10 minutes.’ This was done immediately in one take, with the images fresh in the mind. I did not wish for synchronisity, and the track worked superbly with the melancholy drone played by Stewart Whittlestone and improvisations on a viola by Anita Beuthein.

In all video works, post-production technical assistance was given by John Baird.
Stranger Companion

Stranger psyche
  gazing
at an alien shore,
No memory
to fix the elusive visions,
of a Primal Land.

Tread lightly Stranger,
the ground holds change,
the now mobile bones,
in turn will be frames,
for another Time-distant
sighting.

The landscape is in
motion,
everchanging,
slowly, slowly,
everchanging.

J.B.
STRANGER COMPANION

Turning from the charts to the stranger perception of the shore, I wanted to convey that we see through the eyes of those who have gone before us - the inherited gaze, the conditioned gaze. So the grid of perception of calligraphic memory, the scientific charting of the cartographer, the inherited psyche of those who have seen “this” before are aspects of perceptions of the “Stranger in the Landscape”.

For this work I used some of the coastline from the previous work, as I wanted to link the two companion works, but I extended the field to another coastline, using the red contoured cliffs at Maslyn’s Beach, S.A. Over the wonder of this landscape I superimposed “grids” of skeletal bones, not in a macabre sense but the delicate, fugitive images as translucent white of bones of a rib cage, or a foot on the rocks or the shoulder and neck bones which are very delicate in formation.

I photographed fragments of bones from a skeleton, then used X-rays of living bones which registered as a translucent blue when overlaying the landscape. For the “Stranger psyche”, the abstraction of a greek type mask was cast in three inch crystal glass, as a vehicle of light rather than object. The delicacy and translucence of the images made the bones register subliminally as a psyche rather than as a force of a sharp image.

The music for the work was Interiors-Exteriors composed by Richard Meale. The Trilogy of the Stranger was to be addressed again in “Landscape in Four Dimensions” in Trilogy 5.


Resonant Visions by Radio Broadcast.

The electronic transformation of verbal expression has both deepened the commitment of the word to space initiated by writing and intensified by print and has brought consciousness to a new age of orality ...

Walter Ong

Besides the wider audience of the electronic broadcast, there may be a personal intimate relationship also, as the words may be listened to in the privacy of a room, the voice is a presence in sound rather than the internalisation of the printed word.

"'At least in that moment, I have been you', Jean Paulhan rightly says. As my body (which nevertheless is only a bit of matter) is gathered up into gestures which aim beyond it - so the words of language (which considered singly are only inert signs that only a vague or banal idea corresponds to) suddenly swell with meaning which overflows into the other person when the act of speaking binds them into a single whole."

This personalised factor of the spoken word combines with the layers of silence between words. This is especially so in the poetic form, where the layers of meaning, even of one poetic word, may speak a sentence. The silence brings the interaction of form to the spoken word and the space for form in the written poem. The timbre and the self regulating tempo of the human voice brings the written word to the essence of the poem, which is designed as aural writing.

In a similar way, the writing of a script for broadcasting has different emphases from a literary description or proposition. The spaces between words and the personal intonation bring a static written word, dependent on punctuation, into a three dimensional space, existing only in the ephemeral.

"The linguist starts from elementary units to find the highest, ultimate unit in a sentence ... Conversely the speaker's experience teaches him that a relatively small number of signs communicate an infinity of content. These ultimate units in his consciousness of language are the words."

The minimal poem achieves this "infinity of content" through the transference of vision, and the resonances of speech. Thus, with the pause, the silence, and the space, the spoken poem may extend the consciousness.
RESONANT VISIONS

In 1986 I was involved with the A.B.C. in a program for “Surface Tension” as a broadcast feature of “Stranger in a Landscape of Sound”, for which I used the Trilogy of the “Stranger in the Landscape”, “Stranger Charting” and “Stranger Companion”. Produced by Henry Johnson with David Bates as sound recorder. Music improvisations by Michael Askill, Anita Beuthein and Stewart Whittlestone.

Subsequently in 1989, I was invited by the ABC to submit scripts relating to my work for the Australian Sculpture Triennial 1990. The scripts submitted were for the video sculptures, “Kimberly Stranger Gazing” and “Time Warp Reflections” which I regarded as important in the development of sculpture as a process of light, forming a virtual “Landscape in Four Dimensions”. The scripts were written in three voices — poetry, poetic text and prose.

These scripts were then produced for broadcast by Henry Johnston and Donna McLachlan, with Paul McGurcher as sound recorder. The team visited my studio in the bush at Wedderburn. Here with many microphones (one strapped at ankle height), I was directed to walk through the studio, then out on to a flag-stone terrace, then across earth and back again, to repeat the procedure, for the variation in ambience whilst speaking the script.

On the following day, work was done on spacing in the Sydney Studios of the ABC, where baffle-boards were used for whatever sound emphasis was needed, in the poems and the remaining script.

I found the whole approach, and the sense of sculpture as broadcast, to be most sensitively realised by the process of sound, and the vision broadcast into Space itself.

For the sound tracks, I sent the poems to Alan Lamb in Perth, then by phone, correspondence and tapes we arrived at decisions for his wire music tracks.

“Journeys on the Winds of Time” where rhythmic throbbing in keeping with the windmills suited “Kimberley Stranger Gazing” whilst the dissonances of “Spaces in Between” suited “Time Warp Reflections”.

The A.B.C. made this radio feature for the ‘Listening Room’ Programme, which was broadcast in conjunction with The Australian Sculpture Triennial. The works are here produced by kind permission of the ABC. Tape included.
LANDSCAPE IN FOUR DIMENSIONS

"Time Mirages" landscape viewed through the shards of an hourglass finding fossils in time.

"Time Warp Reflections". The desert viewed through dots, living dots of desert flowers, pupunya dots of a desert painting, computer dots of a circuit board.

"Kimberley Stranger Gazing". The Gaze over the landscape to meet the 'gaze' of the earth from the energy points — of the 'eyes' of a Magnetic Field.

1986  "Time Mirages"

1988  "Time Warp Reflections" *

1988  "Kimberley Stranger Gazing" *

* DCA Works
Time Mirages

On a sacred hill,
an ancient chant,
remembered from
a forgotten cadence.

In slanting rocks,
the layered mica, glinting
the semaphore,
of some molten metamorphic,
Primal upheaval.

New shards of glass,
Lining the tyre tracks,
Sharp light reflections
in patterned red dust.

Dust and shards,
overlayed by shadows
from wire-fence grids,
a temporary definition,
on a primordial land.

By the Todd, with
the dry-sand, river bed,
defined by white gums,
the Dolomite boulders,
in time-worn groupings,
hold secrets of an extinct sea.

The dolo-stone reliquies,
with fossils of
perforated sponges,
small Cambrian cones,
encased,
on the vast time,
marine time,
desert plains.

Dust and shards,
overlayed by shadows,
boundary fence grids,
a temporary definition
on a primordial land.
The iron red sands of the Central Australian Desert, stretch over the plains where the eyes are continually drawn to the horizon; that line where the intense red meets the equally intense translucence of the blue sky. The age of the land seems as timeless as the site of an extinct sea, honeycomb rocks are evidence of certain outcrops denoting a sea edge. In Dolomite boulders in the Todd River, primal sea forms are found in fossils from Cambrian Times. One walks in close connection with the Earth and Life Beginnings here.

After walking around a small hill in Alice Springs, a Women’s Sacred Site, lit with almost horizontal morning light, layers of mica glistened in schists highlighting the formation of the striated broken rocks. The sunrise light, besides emphasising the Primal element of the mica, also glistened and flashed, on the broken glass of the broken wine flagons that littered the hill.

The Time difference between these two differing reflections gave indications of a cultural catastrophe.

At the bottom of the hill were the fences and tyre marks in the sand, signs of the displacement of the ancient cultural usage. The visual work was then extended by
being reflected from the video image on to many reflected screens which were distorted to augment or diminish the image, and through the layering and spacing of the banks of reflectors, the image becomes transformed in contour and depth. Thus, in a darkened area, The Time Mirage takes a new ephemeral existence in deepened space, in which translucent images hover and transform.

Random images were taken from Rainbow Valley and varying parts of the Desert, then compiled, after a poetic structure had been composed. The images were layered over each other giving a composite view of the desert, the ranges, the plains and clay pans. These layered images were viewed through shards of a large broken hourglass, the glass itself had been specially blown, and so the clarity and the fire-glazing of the glass itself, gave another dimension to the symbols of light and Time, together with fences and a “wandering” fossil of a primal sponge, as vast time appearing and fading throughout the work.

On a sacred hill,
an ancient chant,
remembered from
a forgotten cadence.
Time Warp Reflections

Tensile Desert Sky
stretched past wide,
— diminishing the vast
Red Dunes.

Sacred rocks,
Sacred Trees,
Legendary tracks,
Possessed by The Dreaming.

Signs of invisible
Connections in Time,
between The Land,
and The Being.

Distant perceptions,
from Technology skies,
Cultural Chasms,
Spiritual Gaps.

Dividing Ridges,
Imposing Bluffs,
Differing perspectives
of Primal resolves.

Ancient Beetle,
of Yipirinya Dreams,
Biting off heads,
of it's caterpillar prey.

Psychic terror,
Time warp fright,
Pause for reflection,
on a Silicon Byte.

Joan Brassil
TIME WARP REFLECTIONS

During a subsequent stay in Alice Springs
- Alice Springs - The land of the Yeperenya Dreaming - another Desert piece was made.
(Yeperenya, meaning ‘Caterpillar’).
Aboriginal Legend has it, that when the caterpillars came down from Haasts Bluff, and Emily Gap, that on their arrival at the Gap at Alice Springs, they were met by the Beetle who bit off their heads. For symbols of Time in this work, circles and dots were taken as they appeared in the desert, or were superimposed by graphics or computer boards on to the video landscape of the desert.

The locations used were, firstly, Haasts Bluff, permission being given to record images of this aboriginal owned territory, the ranges, the desert, the brush and small golden bobble flowers being fiercely blown by the wind. The bobble flowers then became still, and merge into painterly dots, as in a Papunya painting.

The next location was the park at Pine Gap, a joint defence facility, where the grey bobble flowers, lingering from the previous year, cast black shadows on the red desert.
The final location was at Ewininga, ancient crumbling rocks show the honeycomb weathering from the extinct sea; also on the rocks are pecked circles and meander images.
D.C.A. "Time Warp Reflections"
Ars Electronica 1989
Photograph Felix Noubaeuer
A.C.C.A. 1990
- on these rocks - "not our people" say the
traditional aboriginal owners of the Land.
Speculation has it that the ancient artists
came with some previous migration and
walked to Tasmania, before it became an
island, as the only comparable images
are to be found in the north west of the Island.
    Thus some lost tribe, on the side
    of a now lost sea, made marks
    of existence.

A computer circuit board was used as a
symbol of Twentieth Century culture.
A translucent board, with patterns of
information in clustered dots, and scattered
silvered dots, joined by pure gold circuitry,
making for an object which appears as a
bejewelled abstract icon.

In the work, circuitry and terminals are floated over Papunya dots - which may in
their turn be an information giving set of symbols.
These delicate composite sets of patterns
are layered over an aerial view of the desert
landscape, sparsely dotted with trees.

Finally the circuit board fills the screen and
the Beetle appears on the board
    Psychic terror,
    Time-Warp fright,
    Pause for reflection,
on a silicon-byte.
Kimberley Stranger Gazing

Relentless fine-straw plains,
enlarging the sky.
Windmills,
tirelessly turning,
in the Savannah,
as survival Sufis,
hypnotically twirling,
to the sweeping,
contra-whirl,
or parrots,
on invisible arcs of air.

Blazing light, shimmering through filters
of waving grass,
The Gaze transfixed, in a chance trance,
on a quivering, flickering savannah,
waiting for the Wet.

We passing shadows,
fired by the Sun,
as pressured pulses
from alien climes,
Memory programmed
to change the Land.
and,
.....gazing,
The Land
to change the Memory....

With the random precision,
of measured winds.

Jean Bressel
KIMBERLEY STRANGER GAZING

In the far north-west of Western Australia above the Tropic of Capricorn, lie THE KIMBERLEYS, a region of far flung fertile grasslands, on wonderful red earth, the rocky outcrops-and ranges, turn fierce light, the bleaching light, into shadows of purple black.

The winds, as constant currents of air across the plains, accelerate flights, of myriads of birds as they swoop across the sky, like sinuous slivers of lightning - before the Monsoon-Wet. White Cockatoos, yellow crested, screech, and with pink and grey Galahs, sweep across the sky with ear-piercing urgency.

From the ridges of rocky outcrops across the plains, and underneath the rock-shelters are the mysterious galleries of Wandjina paintings. The Wandjinás are the Creation Heroes of Aboriginal Dreaming, of the region. The Wandjina Heroes were responsible for the creation of the landscape - the rivers, mountains and plains some also brought the lightning and the rain.

The head and shoulders of these figures were painted white as the clouds, coming from the Mists beyond Understanding. Their faces contained only large eyes, joined by a slight
D.C.A. "Kimberley Stranger Gazing" Roslyn Oxley Gallery 1988
Photograph Jill Crossley
A.C.C.A. 1990
indication of a nose - no mouth.
Around the head, a halo of light rays
or bands of clouds, and
from their shelters they Gaze
across the landscape.

When the first European explorers
came across the plains, they were
startled by the large eyes of the
Wandjinak staring from the shadows
of the rock overhangs, and it was noted,
in their journals, that they were
the observers observed.

The coming of this different European
Gaze, was to change the Land.
Taking the premise that 'To look at
an object is to inhabit it' -
The Europeans, as their Gaze inhabited
the Land - saw the Pastures - so
animals with hooves were brought to
inhabit the 'land of the Spirit Gazing'
where previously only soft-footed
animals had grazed.

By the energy of the winds - the
whirling and the power pumping of
the windmills, finally effected the
European settlement of the Plains.

The images chosen to follow the
settling of the Savannah, were, with the
wind-swept grasses and overlays of
slithering lines, fragmented in the wind.
The European vision was shown by:-
Shadows over the Land,
- Shadows of stockmen,
- Shadows of horses,
- Shadows of farm-structures,
- Then Kinetic shadows of the survival rhythms of windmills on the grass.

As windmills turn at speeds decided by the wind, one vision of the turning vanes may be overlayed by another image turning at a different timing, until mill, over mill, and mill shadows hypnotically draw the gaze into a concentrated focus.

With this concentration of focus,
The Gaze becomes a series of eyes.
Firstly the image of eyes of the moment, as a computer scan from a photograph.

Then light images made from glass, not graphically representing eyes, but to deflect the light from the skies, as the eyes of the Creative Spirits, with light rays melting into the quivering of a ‘living cell’ over the grasslands.
The graphic eyes from the photograph now merely appear as socket frames filled by the image of the savannah.

The final image of the Gaze is compiled from charts of magnetic fields, where the contours circling the concentration of magnetic energy sources, arrive at the position of the eyes of the
Wandjina Spirits, where the magnetic fields look back at all observers.
So with the mirror-thought of the Gaze

"Memory programmed to change the Land,
... and gazing ...
The Land to change the Memory,
with the random précision
of measured winds."
To begin to make a visual work of art of this landscape, there had to be the wide horizons of the grasslands, the enormity of the sky and the great depth of distance in the fierce tropical light.

I believe we are in a constant state of transference in thought, in sensibility and the gaze, and art itself is a form of this. The many layered memory of the gaze observes the many layered visions of landscape.

To achieve a three dimensional sculpture in many layers of vision, video images of the landscape were collected. But the confines of a two dimensional video screen are not appropriate for this vast vision of the country. So, the video was merely used to reflect images on to enlarged perspex screens, which augment or diminish the image. The rectangular contour of the video screen no longer exists in the work; each reflected image curves to a different contour until they all join together to make an entirely different visual form in extension, layer on layer.

Besides the side by side extension of overlapping landscape, more reflectors are placed, with spaces between, to overlap in varying depths of field. This spatial dimension brings the video image into a three dimensional sculptural form that could not have been envisaged from the raw video image at all.

A sculptor manipulates the raw material of steel, and distorts and augments the form to make a three dimensional image. Here the raw material is the original video which, by three dimensional reflection, spacing and manipulation of the images, creates a totally new form as an ephemeral light sculpture in extended space, hopefully transferring the gaze to hover in space, the ephemeral sculpture.

The sound work was made by Alan Lamb in Western Australia, on a modified stretch of abandoned telephone wires half a mile long. The music is made by the wind which causes the wires to vibrate, because they are so long the patterns of vibration may shift along an infinite range of possible harmonic combinations.

The ‘shape’ of the music is influenced by landscape and factors of changing temperatures, flies colliding, beetles crawling along the wires or resonances of songs through feet of birds as they perch on the wires. The collected sounds are collaged into a work which could have arisen from such a landscape.

This sound work was called “Journeys on the Winds of Time”.

In the visuals, the effect of the wind in setting the rhythms of the movement, dominates. This is combined with the energy of the wire-music, the vibrating rhythms moving towards a climax, then diminishing, as a finale, back into space.
POETIC VISION
AND
MUSICA SPECULATIVA

Resonant Processes from:

1. Rocks, percussion of rock on rock and synthesiser.

2. Rocks, electrical energy transduced to the rock’s resonant frequency, randomly.

3. Wind, resonances of naturally random sound waves on wires as an aeolian harp.


   An Aeolian Harp. 1988-90*

3. "Randomly - Now and Then."
   Resonances in Rocks. 1990*

*DCA Works*
Energy Mirages

Signs from the Centre, coded, in Mica, in Calcite, in Quartz.

Quartz, myths for healing, Quartz, for a Fertility Rite. A Crystal, for the Spirit arrival, central to a Women's Sacred Site.

Rocks of Desert Ranges, from the folded Mantle, of a cooling Core. Energy Mirages, extracted from dust, of crushed iron-red, or, the Radiant yellow. That Chemical Energy, the Matter of Time.

The Jcarus spear-heads, may be honed, from an Energy charged, Multi-million, – year old stone.

Cry, Cry the Crystal, of the Sacred Site.
ENERGY MIRAGES

For the installation “Energy Mirages”, again a subject dealing with the Primal, the sound found expression in electronics.

The video was inspired by the differing attitudes implicit in the aboriginal sacred connection with the Land and the European usage of land.

In Western Australia, there is an aboriginal women’s sacred site where pieces of basalt are placed in a marsh, in a spiral formation, with a crystal at the centre and a boulder at the side.

For the sound work of this piece, five rocks were chosen for their resonance, and a spectrometer was placed near them (one rock was slightly radioactive). I then approached a leading Sydney percussionist and composer, Michael Askill, who made a piece by recording sounds and composing a work for synthesiser, using the notes of five rocks and a spectrometer; the spoken words in the piece were accompanied by the rubbing of stones.

The five stones were hung on two steel frames and the audience invited to ‘play’ them by striking with a crystal, this of course gave random sounds of the same five notes.

The reflected video visuals for this installation were of primal mineral crystals, and diagrams of crystallographic images.

The work was first shown in the basement of Roslyn Oxley Gallery in Sydney, then later taken to the Central Desert, and the installation was set up in a dry clay pan at Ewininga, a remarkable site with three rocky out-crop hills, on which there are ancient carvings, on crumbling rocks, from a lost tribe - “Not our people” say the present aboriginal owners.

The desert site was the perfect location for the piece, viewed at night, when the stars seem to hang light crystals in the sky, and the sound of the five sounds spread out to either side of the clay-pan.

A sculptural installation of rocks with transducers was planned to follow this work in 1990, “Listen to the sounds of a Million Years Singing”.

Progressing from this idea of resonances in rocks I approached Philip Black, geologist at the Department of Minerals and Energy, who suggested that I should visit the Core Library. Here I was given access to cores from which all data had been collected. After testing hundreds, a selection was made of 8 diorite cores of varying lengths and resonances. Dr. Whittlestone was then consulted for the attachment of a transducer to each rock to produce its resonance.
Randomly – Now and Then

Resonant Energy,
Transduced to the air,
from fine-grained rock.
The Diorite depths intoned,
in mottled-grey fragments
of compacted cores.

Sine waves,
slow, long, deep,
short, sleep, high,
.... Sing
the pitch
of the Cooling Crust,
from the Great Heal.
.... Sing
in the crystals,
The Song
of Time.

Random knowledge
of
The Now and Then,
.... and then ...
Energy Connections,
of Earth and Life,
Time and Flight,
as Carbon Moon-moths,
Listen, to the sounds
of a Million Years singing,
for just
One Nocturne.

Joan Braseed
The Idea of Time,
The measurement of Time,
Cycles of Time,
Aeons of Time,
relative notion
to chart the conscious experience,
the conscious expression of Time.
We humans can find a rhythm,
a spacing,
an action,
for the contemplation of the movement
of events from the Past -
relative to the Now
or the Future event,
movements deflected
by the unpredictable actions,
randomly changing events,
now or yet to be
- the undefined continuum.

In an art-work,
8 rock sample cores
drilled from deep in the Earth,
form elegant elongated cylinders,
like fragments
of slim polished poles of Diorite.
Each rock suspended from
a microphone stand
of muted grey-graphite surface
and highly reflective chromium.
The shafts of grey-mottled rock,
are made to resound
by means of an
electrical current being discharged into the core, to vibrate at the rock's resonant frequency.

The variation within the structure of each Diorite core, making the differentiation of sound between each one "singing".

The timing of the signals is dictated by a small computer, "programmed" for randomness. Each rock core resounds according to any chance number of seconds between one and two hundred seconds, with the silences of each core correspondingly programmed. So arise the random cadences from their unpredictable, non-melodic singing of The Earth. These chance resonances of random intervals from an unpredictable "Metronome".

Again considering Time, Time as one day of Life, in contrasting tension of aeons of Time of the Earth Thinking in the scale of one day, as in the Life of a Moon-moth after metamorphosis.

What is the measure of Time, before a carbon moth evolved to live for just one nocturne?
Above the singing of the Earth Rocks, an experiment was made of tuning forks, resonating in accordance with the sounds of the rocks which were recorded and quadrophonic speakers placed near the ceiling, the recording was made randomly, then placed in a cyclical "loop" timing. Thus within the Gallery space, the delicate resonances of the metal tuning forks in the air above the rocks, engender a space for the poem's imaged "carbon moon moths" to non-objectively exist, in a space of Time tensions, in the "Flight from the Object", in cyclical random sequences of a life span above the random sub-terranean rocks, a day in a million years.

However the two elements of sound detracted from the purity and concentration of the earth sound of the rocks and so were eliminated. Instead, on the walls, charcoal, as carbon, was used to draw shadow images of contours of sound waves from rocks. Then they were fragmented which may suggest flight. The use of carbon, carried on the element of carbon which was used to cover all the counter-balancing rocks, found on the ground at the end of the stainless steel rope wires. The carbon here picked up the carbon surface on the microphone-stands. This element of carbon was used as a dual symbol of Life and the dating of Time. This may seem esoteric, but as I am dealing with materials as subject, I feel that the subliminal nuances linger in the total cognition.

The Random Rock Programme

The computer program switches each of the rocks on or off independently. Each time a rock state (singing or not singing) is changed, the time until the next change is taken from a random number between 1 and a maximum of 200 seconds.

For this work the maximum ON PERIOD IS THE SAME AS THE MAXIMUM OFF PERIOD. When the ON period was longer than the OFF period, the sound was judged by the artist to be too dense. With a shorter ON period, there were conspicuous and disturbing silences.
A Chance – Tether of Time

Borne on Southern winds,
There’s a new
Archaic Song,
Tuned to Antactica.

Chance cadences,
Throbbing through wires, –
as soft sirens murmur
in moments of passage.

Haunting winds,
cross-bowing
on a
Tether of Time.

Slow Drifting
Continent,
the silent counterpoint,
of Austral echoes.

Time Distant descants,
of Gondwana memory,
subsonically linger
still in Grass-trees.
XIII. D.C.A. "Tether of Time" Beginning Sketches

Photograph Joan Brassil
XIV. D.C.A. Developmental Sketch “Tether of Time”

Photograph Joan Brassil
XV. D.C.A. Developmental Sketch "Tether of Time"
Photograph Joan Brassil
"Tether of Time" is a proposal to make an installation of Aeolian Harps in the natural environment of the wilderness, and by a style of sculptural process echo a condition of existence.

"Pietro Cerone's 'El Melopeo y Maestro.. (1613). Mainly a manual for playing and composing for the lute, its final section gives an account of composing with chance and other unusual techniques, a 'guide to musical chaos' which is a poetic overview of the relation between music and existence."

Proposing that the wilderness area should be Heirisson Island, in the estuary of the Swan River in Perth, Western Australia, the 'sculptures of process' were to be made as instruments of interaction between the Viewer, and Nature, and Time.

The two harps are of different types. One has lengthy horizontal strings, between 5 masts 150 metres apart. The other has 5 masts all within a distance of joined by two cross beam waves weaving through two planes, to support 60 vertical strings, which are tensioned in a manner more in keeping with a traditional harp. These strings catch the chance winds from varying directions.

The first harp, because of its lengthy spans, is designed with free standing masts, which makes for flexibility within whatever location. The masts bend towards the wind and the terminals are cleft into 'tuning forks'. At the base of each cleft, the wires are strung with 2 strings. At the base of the mast, there is a jarrah platform $130 \times 130 \times 45$ mm. allowing for a variety of interactions with the mast. The mast has a jarrah post affixed to either side, so that the vibrations may be experienced from the throbbing of the wires by placing the ear on the wood, whether the wires are singing or they seem to be silent.

The second harp has been described in a script prepared for radio broadcast.

After many trial models, the concepts were given to Len Hedges, at Mt. Jamberoo. As a Naval Architect, he realised the concepts in a draft form. These plans were given to Bill Sykes of Wollongong, a technician who collaborated with the final model. Should the proposals of the concepts be realised, Dr. Alan Lamb will be responsible for the physics of the stringing of the Harps.

XVI. D.C.A. String Detail
Photograph Joan Brassil
The vast repertoire of possible sounds means that the wind organ can be regarded as a giant and extremely versatile musical instrument. However, it differs from most others in that complete control of the sounds is not possible. Neither is it possible to be certain, in advance, of the precise sound any given action may cause.

The Tether of Time is a structure of five curved "masts" supporting two curved beams, gently weaving separately in two planes, behind or in front of the masts. Because of this meandering "flow", the vertical strings supported by the beams. Constantly change angles allowing variations in the possible sounds.

Visually from a distance, the work appears as a rather austere instrument, but with the ambulatory interaction of the viewer from the path beneath it becomes more complex. The vista changes as the beams constantly alter direction and the vertical sight lines become interlaced as each beam interacts and counteracts with the other. This combined with the interlaced vertical wiring, presents a shimmering wave of light.

To extend the quality of light an experiment was conducted with Dr. Ron Roberts of the Optics Laboratory of the C.S.I.R.O. about the feasibility of attaching steel mirrors to the tops of masts to deflect light at the Equinox, from thirty feet above the ground. From the top of the building at Lindfield Laboratories we placed a five foot vertical steel mirror at a 30 degree angle and the resultant reflection was an interesting irregular shape, rather like an illuminated flower.

The thought of having five such reflections in a pool beside the harp was visually appealing, and the poetic nuance of the phenomenology, of a time recaptured from the passing day was a contemplative desire. Care was taken that the angle of the point of contact with the earth was aimed ten feet below the surface of the water to avoid any chance of dangerous deflection or undesirable interaction.

The vision of the interaction of the viewer is that the occasional ambient viewers could stroll at sunset, along the path underneath the harp, and in the pool view the luminous epilogue of the day and listen to the aeolian sounds which may or may not be audible in the air, but if the viewer should lean against the 'listening posts', the resonances could be detected. The interaction with this phenomenological instrument for the contemplation of nature seems a peaceful nocturne.
The project was an answer to a request for a Wind Harp concept requested by Dr. Alan Lamb for Perth.

The financial vagaries of the time have not been conducive for realisation procedures to be attempted. However as a poetic concept and model it stands.

Whilst designing the Perth Wind Harp, the suggestion was put to me, ‘Why not Wollongong? There are winds aplenty’. The idea was appealing and a sketch model was designed. It had to be quite different from a harp made for the flow of a river, and so the design was made for a cliff top. The curve of the masts now became accentuated as an incoming wave from the sea. With long resonant wires sweeping to a companion receptive harp. The listening mechanisms to be the same as the Perth harp, that is, of wood. The masts should be of stainless steel. This would need generous patronage from an engineering steel company. A site such as the sweeping headland north of Wollongong or at a site near Kiama would be most suitable.

As the work is a concept, it would be interesting to realise a Harp in Perth on the south west coast, and a Harp at Wollongong on the south east coast. I spoke of this to Eric Gidney, Head of Department of Film Video and Intermedia Studies at University of NSW, who saw the possibilities of a telecommunication linkage by satellite, for planned interaction between harps, during the random vagaries of the Antarctic winds. As these are concepts we are free to dream, and most concepts have first to be dreamed.
Those unknown processes, in the fearful
glory of the Sun, giving life to Earth.
The mystery of solar magnetic fields,
solar flares, and solar winds, sustained
in the might of this matrix The Sun.

These solar winds again deflected by
the Earth's magnetic field survival
for the Earth spun from the Sun.
Mysterious, solidified, and motion guided
by waves of probability.

As the Earth from the Sun,
Here in the southern continental drift,
The Great South Land seceded from
the Southern polar land mass.
Terra Australis.
An island continent still containing
the seeds of Gondwana memory, of unique
resolutions of living forms.
"Borne on Southern Winds
There's a new Archaic song
Tuned to Antarctica".

To sing a song of memory matrix,
a sculpture as a wind harp has been
proposed for the south south Western
shore of Heirisson Island, a small
island in the Swan River near Perth.
Where the winds arrive unimpeded
from Antarctica.
A sculpture of five, thirty foot, masts, curving as in a prevailing wind from the south. On the upper portion of the masts are two wave forms, as undulating beams, each curving in two planes, these horizontal waves gently weave through the masts and are connected by 60 vertical finely tensioned wires to make the unpredictable music, in the varying directions between. “Chance cadences, in moments of passage, throbbing through aeolian wires. Haunting winds, crossbowing on a tether of Time.

The harp masts stand on a pathway on the edge of a small lake, where viewers may stroll and linger. Vertical jarrah sections are attached, to the base of each mast, to a distance of 6', so that the throbbing resonances may be experienced by placing the ear against the wood, which acts as a resonator.

The Tether of Time extends, not only to the transient, unpredictable winds but also to the transience of Light, at the equinox; in so far as the harp design has, at the top of the masts, vertical steel reflecting mirrors, so angled that when the sun is below the horizon of the path, the light reflected from the top of the masts is placed within the pool. The fleeting light gathered...
after sunset to linger at the Equinox,
as irregular delicate forms of light
in pools of light reflections.

It is proposed that the masts be made
from laminated wood, and clad with heavy
gauge copper. This would mean that because
of the interaction between the metal
and the atmosphere, the wind harp would
change to green, and blend with the
surrounding wilderness area, and with the
responding stand of she-oaks, near by,
which in diminished polar Winds,
may gently sough and sigh.
EPILOGUE
FROM POLAR GONDWANA

This austral continent
drifts on a journey
of Time,
whilst vestiges of
primal landscape
survive, as unique
networks of systems

Twentieth century practices
within this receding context,
probe the earth and search the skies,
a surveillance of existence
as techno-revelations —
for visionary resolutions
or overwhelming fears.

As a sculptor observing
processes of particles
or subtle symbiosis,
I see
discreet objects dissolve
into altered reflections
of light and sound,
ephemeral and random
to pass, then linger
in the psyche
as wonder and renewal
of the timeless
observed.

We configurations
of energy, interact
with landscape
wondering and wandering
as mortals in Time

EXHIBITIONS

1988
“Kimberley Stranger Gazing”
Roslyn Oxley Gallery June–July

“Experimenta” City Gallery Melb. November.

“Time Warp Reflections” Power House Museum
September Australian Video Festival

1989
“Time Warp Reflections” ‘Ars Electronica’ Linz
Austria September

1990
Retrospective — “The Resonant Image” Aust. Centre
of Contemporary Art Melbourne

4th Australian Sculpture Triennial

POETRY

1988
“Poets Reading” 7th Biennale of Sydney. Art Gallery
of N.S.W June

BROADCASTING

1990-91
A.B.C. Radio “Listening Room” – “Landscape in Four
Dimensions” Sept. 10th, 13th 1990

A.B.C. Telecast Interview of Retrospective to be

PUBLICATIONS AND ARTICLES

1988

“Australian and International Monthly”
Installation: The Dispersed Self – Christopher Allen.
Sept.


“Experimenta” Catalogue Nov.

“Cantrill’s Film Notes” December.


1989
“Ars Electronica” Catalogue Austria. Sept.

“Kunstforum” Austria. Nov.
1990

“Photofile” – “Chaos” Autumn

“Art and Text” Sept.


“Art Monthly” Noel Hutchison “Bunyip or Leviathan”. Nov.


FORUMS

Forum “Future Visions, Women – Technology”

Forum M.I.M.A. Experimenta

“Video Sculpture”. Nov. 1988


“Aspects of Randomness and Resonance in Video Installation”

Forum 4th Aust. Sculpture Triennial
Session 5 23rd September, 1990 “For and Against Nature”

“Time, Space and Energy in Sculptural Installation”

Forum First Australian Electronic Media Conference.
Art Gallery of N.S.W. 3rd November, 1990

“Introducing Video Sculpture”

Lectures Bangkok and Chiangmai


N.M.A.


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APPENDIX

for D.C.A. works.
The Principle of Publicity

"that whatever the artist, as such, makes or does should be in principle a public entity; because only that which is (in principle) available to anyone is capable of supporting a common language, a common understanding, a community of values. We may enjoy private dreams, but it is only our public versions of them - the stories we tell, the pictures we make and the things we do in the world - that ultimately mediate between us, and upon which we found a form of life and a set or sets of values.

- Donald Brook

"Flight from the Object", 1969.
Autumn in November

JULIE EWINGTON

Sydney

Now, some general ruminations. My previous caveat about idiosyncracy notwithstanding, there is a discernible shared thread running through the work of certain Sydney artists that deserves attention. Working with installation, these artists share a set of impulses and sympathies rather than a style or subject, a thread emerging (from the labyrinth) to manifest itself in different ways. The work of Joan Brassil and Joan Grounds is importantly associated in my mind with this intensely poetic sensibility, which works to frame cultural perceptions of natural elements and forces, or to mobilize associations between natural objects and personal histories. Obviously Robyn Backen and Simone Mangos may be seen in this frame, and work by Mikala Dwyer (sometimes pungently, as in her installation earlier this year at First Draft West) and Noelle Janaczewska at Performance Space in late 1989 also come to mind.

To call this work ‘environmental’ is too crude an assessment. Yet the artists I mentioned are particularly sensitive to the fragility of the natural world and to its inexorable power, particularly alive to the diversity of intersections social life offers between ‘the natural’ and its other. None endorses the Modernist urban dream of perfection: on the contrary, if there is a common aspect of their vision, it is a strong sense of the complex energies set into reciprocal (but uneven) play by human societies acting on the raw matter of the universe. Artists have been attempting to recover intimations of the sacred functions of art for decades now. It strikes me that Brassil, Grounds, Mangos, Backen, and other artists working outside installation too, approach their work with a sensibility that is never explicitly religious, but is certainly deeply reverent. A philosophical form of poetry, perhaps, striking a high clear note.
November 1990.

Bunyip or Leviathan?
The Fourth Australian Sculpture Triennial

NOEL HUTCHISON

Joan Brassil's retrospective exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art was a much more significant affair and put forward some of the concerns that Australian artists might well consider before they are engulfed by the current rising tide of the symbiotic (or some might say 'parasitic') multi-national art market culture. She displays by example a compulsion to remain unabashedly concerned with the Australian experience at the same time as showing that that experience is wide, complex, crosses the boundaries established by categorisation and ultimately is enthralling in its subtlety. The nuances both visually and aurally of the installations Randomly - Now and Then (1990) and Time Warp Reflections (1988) establish the richness of exploring the avenues of sense data. Certainly there are elements of biography and symbology, which have always been regarded as the legitimate province of the visual arts, but the quirky scientism and concern with phenomena, and the way these may be identified and established in an artwork, has led Ms Brassil to produce a rather wholistic mode of artwork. Such works went beyond the narrow confines of video-art, sculpture or music, yet incorporated features of all three categories of human creation. Because of their concern with phenomenology they subvert or indicate the pointlessness of some of the more popular aspects of current French-inspired art theory. Experience goes beyond and does not need language, no matter what some theorists or philosophers may propound.
In a long overdue move, installation art is holding centre stage at Melbourne's Sculpture Triennial. JENNY ZIMMER reports

**World of cosmic potatoes**

JOAN BRASSIL'S electronic devices — including TV monitors, Geiger tubes and spark chambers — are installed at ACCA amid several tonnes of topsoil, gravel and sand. She began creating installations in 1976 and describes her art as conceptual, close to poetry. Each piece is later synthesized into a poem, the only way she knows to put perceptions into words.

She talked about her work *How Between the Potatoes and the Planets (Through a Space Hole Darkly)* (1976) "I had been dealing with invisible forces — light, energy, impetus etc. — and getting too abstracted from the people I was living among. Finally, unable to make contact, I chose the potato as an object through which I could draw attention to the earth, and then the planets. The pomme de terre became pompme de lune, then pomme de Mars and Venus. They loved it and said: "This sky's the limit." I said, "Is it?" and extended the work to *Through a Space Hole Darkly.*"

"They understood I was trying to extend the concept of personal space to the enormity of the universe. These were my neighbours, hard-working people, and we were using our imaginations to make a myth."

Curator Sally Coucaud says Brassil has "an ability to roam through the heady fields of phenomenology, new physics, chaos and cinema theory as easily as she moves from potatoes to cosmic rays."

Of her installations collected at ACCA under the title *The Resonant Image,* Brassil says: "This retrospective exhibition traces my desire to present the important processes of nature — including light waves and space itself — as elements of sculpture. My installations employ a variety of media from earth to electronics. Their use is determined by what I need to say. Although I am in no doubt, I leave the works open to interpretation by each viewer."

She evokes concepts of time, space, perception and memory by reference to the Australian landscape — "Australian, because that's where I am. Working with natural materials and electronic technology, she believes in the grand scheme of things and refuses to separate science from ecology."

A key work, *Can it Be that the Ever-lasting Is Ever-changing?* (1978), uses cosmic rays from outer space. Impulses are picked up by six Geiger tubes. They activate light diodes in spark boxes set in black earth. Blinking randomly from the floor, they resemble stars in the night sky. Saplings suggest an ancient forest.

Brassil's inspiration was the Pilliga Forest, a place chosen by astrophysicists for its clear sky and suitability for observations. Here she "found" the spark chambers. "No one knows how they'll spark — that's the chaos theory," she says. "It reveals the inner sources of nature, how far is there between the potato and the planets?"

Her question impinges on the world's problem of ecological survival. The Australian Aboriginals, faced with a similar dilemma, developed the Dreaming as explanation, epic poem and prayer. Brassil creates new myths around new perceptions, saying: "Each place dreams in its own time."

Artists such as Brassil aim to orient us to the wholeness of the universe and lead a reconfiguration of intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual states to establish a new ecological age. Rather than condemning science, Brassil likens it to a new dreaming.

"Electronic media are the material of the age," she says. She likes to work with electronic engineers who are aware of quantum inseparability in physics and share with artists intuitions of wholeness and interrelatedness.

The latest work, *Randomly Now and Then* (1990), is made with microphone stands, computer, diorite cores, gravel, rocks and tuning forks. It is programmed so the rocks sing randomly. Silences are unexpected. Predicated on the expectation that rocks can be seen but not heard, it is charged with resonant energy. Brassil says: "This work is a measure of time, from when the rocks were formed — to one nocturne."
FOURTH
AUSTRALIAN
SCULPTURE
TRIENNIAL

KSV88J.025

2 November, 1988

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Hosted by several independent organisations the Triennial exhibitions will be mounted at:

1. National Gallery of Victoria
2. Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA)
3. Heide Park and Art Gallery
4. 200 Gertrude Street
5. A series of public sites within the City of Melbourne

Each venue will have a separate curator, but the whole Triennial will have a common theme. According to Geoffrey Edwards, Curator of Sculpture, National Gallery of Victoria, the 1990 Triennial will assume a decisive international profile, representing a broad cross section of innovative Australian artists together with selected works by European and Japanese sculptors. This will provide an opportunity for serious assessment, in a truly expansive context, of distinguished Australian achievements in the field of contemporary sculpture.

1. Australian and Overseas Artists: National Gallery of Victoria

At the National Gallery of Victoria, the intention of the exhibition is to give an account of the confluent and conflicting attitudes which distinguish Australian, European and Japanese sculpture. These may be considered within a broadly defined framework of two principal streams:

1.1 The first stream embraces work evolved from formalist/minimalist theory and places a particular emphasis on spatial investigation and sculpture which operates on the basis of refractive or reflective processes involving natural, or artificial light. In addressing the wider implications of spatial theory, this stream will incorporate installations which engage the viewer through the visual experience of a site transfigured by deviation from accepted scale, introduction of unorthodox materials and re-interpretation of existing ethos and purpose.

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3 Buddie Drive, Toorak, Victoria, Australia. 3142.
1.2 The second stream of activity has its roots in the Expressionist/Surrealist movements and places particular emphasis on the object and its metaphysical, metaphorical or narrative associations. Work in this stream may also deploy found objects which are invested with fresh emotive significance through a process of juxtaposition and alteration. The stream embraces a broad diversity of attitudes and incorporates new interpretations of classical and romantic styles.

2. Joan Brassil: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art

In terms of the above concern with spatial compositions, the deployment of natural and artificial light, installations, and the use of unorthodox materials, the work of Joan Brassil at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art will provide a link with the exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria. The retrospective exhibition of this distinguished Sydney artist, will be guest curated by Sally Couacaud.

3. David Smith

Heide Park and Art Gallery will mount a survey of drawings and sculpture by David Smith - a seminal figure in the evolution of modernist practice and philosophy in sculpture. The influence exerted by Smith's work has been such that this survey will underscore vital issues in current Australian sculpture, and most importantly, serve to communicate to a general audience, a lucid and compelling narrative of the formalist tradition. The work of this internationally acclaimed American sculptor would establish an historical perspective to the formalist work shown at the National Gallery of Victoria.

3.1 Large scale installation by an Australian sculptor to be displayed in the park.

While the David Smith exhibition will be displayed within the gallery, with possibly two external pieces in the courtyard, it is intended that a major installation of the current work of an Australian artist, whose work will be most appropriate to the large scale outdoor spaces at Heide, will be installed in the park.
For more than twenty years Joan Brassil has been making installations—
sculptural sites where the realms of art, technology, science, metaphysics and poetry cohabit and converge. The enduring concerns of Brassil's work are time, perception and memory, and they are articulated through a wide-ranging vocabulary of material means: homely potatoes, exotic Xanthorrhoeas, earth and clay, glass and perspex, concrete and cosmic rays, calligraphy and video, telegraph wires and Geiger tubes, computers and diorite mining cores, but most particularly through the deployment of space, light and sound.

Ironically, it is perhaps this unique and very complex mix of art and science and of diverse and unorthodox materials, her ability to roam through the heady fields of phenomenology, new physics, chaos and cinema theory as easily and as eagerly as she moves from potatoes to cosmic rays, and her propensity for the installation format that has prevented Brassil's work from receiving the major acclamation that it deserves. Indeed, in recognition of this situation, the Australia Council in 1988 bestowed upon Brassil the Australian Emeritus Award, which honours the life and work of an eminent senior artist whose work merits greater public recognition.

This retrospective exhibition of Joan Brassil provides then an overdue but important and welcome opportunity to apprise ourselves, and assess the full extent of her practice, starting from 1969 when she first began work on a professional, regular basis.

Born in 1919 in the Sydney suburb of Annandale, Brassil has spent her life in and around the environs of Sydney. Although she entered the art world late in life, after raising a family and a career in teaching, the focus and forms of her work can be traced back to an early and consistent interest in art and nature—she still has a book of botanical drawings done at Sydney Girls High School.

In 1969 Brassil returned to school—a three-year, part-time evening course at the Power Institute, where her teachers included Donald Brook and Bernard Smith. Nonetheless she cites Kasimir Malevich as the greatest catalyst for her work—'It was Malevich's statement that he was looking for other ways of getting beyond the surface that really got me going.' In this sense, Malevich's influence can be clearly seen in Brassil's 1969-1974 work, 'Trilogy—Sound Beyond Hearing, Light Beyond Seeing, Memory Beyond Recall', an installation of three black, glass-fronted boxes in a darkened space. The contents are minimal and their visibility is mediated to a certain extent by the reflection of the viewer in the glass. The 'sound' is silent, the 'light' is obscure, 'memory' is kinetic. Attention is focused away from the object onto the process of phenomenological experience. Indeed, 'Trilogy' does not only propose a way of 'getting beyond the surface' but, with its insistence on perception taking place within a space-time continuum, it is an implacable rejection of surface.

'Trilogy' is a seminal work containing many of the key characteristics of Brassil's oeuvre—a propensity to work in trilogies, often over an extended period of time, her use of light, sound and electronics; an almost exclusive use of the installation format; her emphasis on the temporal and experiential aspects of process in nature, sculpture and vision; and her concern with phenomenology, both as subject and mode of enquiry.

Brassil's work can be divided into two strands. The first deals with unseen phenomena and processes of science and the natural world, such as time and energy, and the second with European perception and memory in the primal Australian landscape. These strands can not be neatly divided, either chronologically or stylistically; rather there is a
complex and intricate interweaving of threads with an overriding insistence on the phenomenological process of perception.

**List of Trilogies**

1969/74 Trilogy - Sound beyond Hearing  
Light beyond Seeing  
Memory beyond Recall

1983 Stranger in the Landscape  
1984 Stranger Charting  
1985 Stranger Companion

1976 How Far between the Potatoes and the Planets?  
1977 Have you Metamorphosed Lately?  
1978 Can it be that the Everlasting is Everchanging?

1986 Time Mirages  
1988 Time Warp Reflections  
1988 Kimberley Stranger Gazing

1982 The Energy of the Life Game is all in the Membrane Y'know  
1985 Through a Magnetic Field Lightly  
1986 Consider the Fungi at the Interface

1990 Randomly - Now and Then  
Tether of Time (in progress)

'How Far between the Potatoes and the Planets?' of 1976 was the first work of a trilogy in which each work was a phenomenological investigation of, successively, space, time and energy. According to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology can be explained as a transcendental philosophy which attempts to regain a direct and ‘primitive’ contact with the world. It offers ‘an account of space, time and the world as we live them’, but in which the world is always ‘already there’ before reflection begins:

'...when I look at the lamp on my table, I attribute to it not only the qualities visible from where I am, but also those which the chimney, the walls, the table can "see"...I can therefore see an object in so far as objects form a system or a world'.

In other words, perception is never a neutral objective act; it is always already more complexly constituted than the mere ‘perception’ of an object; it comes accompanied and translated by a baggage of personal and cultural associations and memories. It is then our intrinsically complex and reciprocal position within the world that informs the phenomenological view of perception and which declares the inadequacy of a perception based solely on the material presence of an object.

Rosalind Krauss, in her celebrated essay ‘Sculpture in the Expanded Field’, has explained the rupture between modernist and postmodernist practice as a move from defining a medium on the grounds of its material and the perception of that material to an expanded but finite set of related positions which operate as an opposing duality within a
culturally defined situation, and she gives as examples 'architecture/landscape', and 'uniqueness/reproducibility'.

With Brassil, however, it is clear that this expanded field - while relevant, particularly in her works dealing with landscape and memory - is not really expansive enough; that culturally constructed opposing dualities are too limiting for her desire to create work that will open up the possibility of experiences beyond our own direct experience. Her juxtaposition of potatoes and computer circuits in 'How Far between the Potatoes and the Planets?', for example, or of earth and trees with Geiger tubes and cosmic rays in 'Can it be that the Everlasting is Everchanging?' (1978) might be considered by some as opposing dualities of nature and technology, but for Brassil such oppositions do not exist, everything is systemic, part of the fluid inter-connectedness of the universe. For Brassil all matter takes on a metaphoric mantle to express the dynamic, perpetual flux of the universe and the intimate correspondence between the particular and the whole, the particle and the universe.

This correspondence is considered in 'Can it be that the Everlasting is Everchanging?'. Geiger tubes register the random pattern of cosmic rays hitting earth while light-emitting diodes in transparent sparks boxes are activated by the cosmic rays. Set in a landscape of dark, rich earth and slender saplings, the intermittent blinking of the diodes evokes the organic and dynamic connections between the seen landscape and the unseen landscape of the cosmos. In 'The Energy of the Life Game is all in the Membrane, Y'know' (1982), the intimate relationship between microcosm and macrocosm is also expressed through light, though here the images of mitochondria (organisms responsible for energy within any living cell) and the scintillating pin-prick patterns of light (activated by the randomness of cosmic rays) are projected from a video monitor onto a series of translucent perspex screens, creating within the dark installation space a veritable incandescent floating world.

Brassil's installations are usually inspired by direct experiences or incidents which become the jumping-off point for an extraordinary process of curiosity, learning and making, in the course of which the sense of wonder that the original experience provoked becomes amplified and transformed into a wider philosophical enquiry into, and celebration of, the great questions of life. 'How Far Between the Potatoes and the Planets?' was inspired by a trip to the observatory at Narrabri; 'Can it be that the Everlasting is Everchanging?' by visiting the S.U.G.A.R. installation (Sydney University Giant Air Shower Recorder) in the Pilliga Forest, where the rate of cosmic rays hitting the earth is measured; and 'The Energy of the Life Game is all in the Membrane, Y'know', after seeing mitochondria through an electron microscope.

For Brassil the role of the artist is to express the thoughts and concerns of the time, and clearly the radical transformation of our understanding of space and time has been a major feature of the twentieth century. The part that electronic media such as television, video and computers have played in both constituting and symbolising this new knowledge is acknowledged and affirmed by Brassil who says, 'Electronic media are the material of the age'.

In order to use the appropriateness of these technological materials, Brassil enrolls the assistance of scientists, and computer and electronic experts. Undaunted by her basically intuitive understanding of science, she goes out and seeks the specialised information she requires. Then, through a process of poetic alchemy, Brassil transforms her materials. Unlike the medieval alchemist however, who, seeking to make
gold out of metal, seems like a forerunner of the forex dealer swapping
one currency for another merely to increase material wealth, Brassil
transforms the material to the immaterial, the tangible to the intangible,
the known to further questioning.

The second strand of Brassil's oeuvre - landscape and memory -
is introduced in 'Stranger in the Landscape' (1983/85) then developed
through two sets of trilogies, all of which take the form of video installa­tions. Like most of Brassil's works, this epic quest of landscape and
memory was inspired by an actual experience - in this case her discov­ery of letters her great-aunt wrote to her great-grandmother in Sydney in
the early 1880s. The writing is spread very carefully, firstly across the
page, then vertically and finally diagonally, forming a calligraphic grid
which then becomes a central metaphor for Brassil's exploration of
European perception and culture in Australia. In 'Stranger in the Land­scape' this calligraphic grid is enlarged and superimposed onto a fine
brass mesh which is strung across a metal frame. These successive
layers of geometric grids are then juxtaposed with clumps of
Xanthorrhoeas to evoke the rigid, rational Euclidean-based perception
with which the first European settlers viewed the primal antipodean
landscape.

However it is the video medium (first used in 'The Energy of the
Life Game is all in the Membrane, Y'know' for its ability to suggest the
crystallizing, translucent energy of mitochondria) that was to give Brassil
the perfect means to express the complex layering of culture and memory
inherent in perceptions of being and place. Although the image on a
video screen is by its nature time-based or temporal, it is still a flat, two­
dimensional image. Unhappy with the limitations of this flat surface,
Brassil radically transformed and expanded the image from object to
means by projecting it, within a dark space, onto a series of curved and
warped transparent perspex screens. Liberated from the monitor screen
the image, reflected and refracted through these layers of perspex,
becomes a luminous, multi-dimensional form in space. Gilles Deleuze
has described the screen as a 'cerebral membrane' where the primary
characteristics of the image are time and topology and where confronta­tions of past and future can take place without being tied to a fixed point
of view. With Brassil's multiplicity of translucent membranes, the image
resonates and reverberates in and through a space-time continuum,
effectively dislocating and destabilising the terrains of topography and
temporality and, indeed, our perception of perception. Brassil calls
this 'working with degree-zero' - 'that space just before something
starts'; enabling apprehension at a subconscious level and then
realisation that perception comes already coloured by memory and
cultural conditioning.

In 'Time Warp Reflections' (1988), the sinuous, translucent screens
reflect a video which is itself a layered construction of aerial views of the
central desert landscape sparsely dotted with vegetation, of Papunya
painting dots and the silver dotted grid of a computer circuit board.

The soundtrack is a recording of the sounds and phenomena of the
landscape - wind, insects, changes in temperature, the singing vibra­tions of telegraph wires which have been collected and converted by a
transducer. Within the darkened space of the installation, the materiality
of sound and image is transformed into an immateriality of resonance
and luminosity, enabling a phenomenological perception of relationships
of time and culture which are not reduced solely to the present, nor to
the past, nor to the future, but which are all-encompassing, all-possible,
omnitemporal.
Henri Bergson, in *Matter and Memory,* proposed the concept of a movement-image and a time-image which exist beyond normal perception. He wrote that we conceptualise time in terms of space and, like cubist and futurist artists, he was attempting to come to terms with the profound implications that were being raised by relativity theory.

Previously, classical Euclidean physics had defined space as a three-dimensional, absolute entity quite separate from time. Relativity theory showed that in fact space and time are inseparably connected and form a four-dimensional continuum – space-time. Brassil’s video installations, in a unique fusion of Bachelard’s ‘poetics of space’ and Barthes’ ‘poetics of time’, take sculpture beyond the three dimensional and provide a visual experience of four-dimensional space-time.

Brassil’s most recent work, ‘Randomly – Now and Then’, in progress at the time of writing, continues her fascination with natural phenomena and the way in which they are inseparably constituted in the fluid, dynamic and interconnected order of the universe. We ‘see’ a number of suspended diorite rock mining cores, we ‘hear’ a random pattern of acoustic signals – it is the cadence of rocks singing. Transducers convert the resonant frequency of rocks into a perceptible form while a computer is programmed to randomly switch the resonant frequency from a non-perceptible to a perceptible state.

In focusing our attention on the fact that we might ‘see’ a rock but that we might not ‘hear’ it, Brassil emphasises again the nature of perception; in focusing our attention on the patterns of occurrence and the relationships between everyday matter, such as earth and rocks, and more intangible matter, such as cosmic rays and resonance frequency, she attempts to make us aware of the way they are inherently and intimately connected in the ‘grand scheme of things’ – a concept that is being explored and put forward in one of the newest areas of scientific thought, ‘chaos theory’. Along with relativity and subatomic physics, Chaos has provided a way of looking at the world completely at odds with the classical models of knowledge proposed by Euclid, Descartes and Newton. These classical models described and dissected the world and its phenomena into increasingly rational, mechanistic and absolute entities, whereas chaos theory proposes complexity, and a more fluid, non-linear, ‘wholistic’ model.

In attempting to come to terms with fluctuating patterns of order, in which apparently simple phenomena are capable of great complexity and complex phenomena of simplicity and relationships that cannot be expressed nor explained by abstract language, scientists are turning away from reductive and rigorously divided disciplines to an analysis that is both syncretic and synergetic.

Brassil’s work has always been about this – the relationship between a butterfly and the sound of rocks singing, between trees rustling in a summer breeze and cosmic rays, relationships beyond language but not poetic imagination. Brassil always writes poems that relate directly to the works, yet they are never explanations nor directions, only ‘working notes’, a suggested itinerary, points of departure; it is the poetics of the works that enable our minds to fly through space and time.

Sally Couacaud
*Director, Artspace, Sydney*
1 The early death of her husband meant that she was unable to devote herself to her art until she no longer had to support her children.

2 Joan Brassil, interview with the author, 1990.


7 Joan Brassil, interview with the author, 1990.

8 Cited in Deleuze, *op. cit*.


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*Stranger in the Landscape 1983-85*

Cement, copper, copper slag, ceramic, brass mesh, brass
360 x 480 x 360 centimetres

*The artist*
Catalogue

Trilogy - Sound Beyond Hearing 1969–74
Black box, copper contacts, steel, glass
90 x 90 x 15 centimetres
The artist

Trilogy - Light Beyond Seeing 1969–74
Black box, light tubes, mirror, glass
90 x 60 x 15 centimetres
Technical assistance: Dr Stewart Whittlestone
The artist

Trilogy - Memory Beyond Recall 1969–74
Black box, steel paper, acetate, perspex, lights
105 x 105 x 15 centimetres
Technical assistance: Dr Stewart Whittlestone
The artist

How Far between the Potatoes and the Planets? (Through a Space Hole Darkly) 1976
Perspex, computer circuit board, potatoes – natural, aluminium, ceramic, soapstone, wax bronze
120 x 120 x 15 centimetres
The artist

Can It Be that the Everlasting Is Everchanging? 1978
Earth, spark chambers, light diodes, computer circuit boards, Geiger tubes, ceramic, perspex, steel, wood, tapa cloth
480 x 480 x 270 centimetres
The artist

The Energy of the Life Game is All in the Membrane, Y'know 1982
Sand, spark chamber, perspex, steel, glass, video monitors and deck
270 x 360 x 120 centimetres
Technical assistance: John Baird and Dr Stewart Whittlestone
The artist

Stranger in the Landscape 1983–85
Cement, copper, copper slag, ceramic, brass mesh, brass
360 x 480 x 360 centimetres
The artist

Time Warp Reflections 1988
Perspex, steel, video monitor and deck
270 x 360 x 120 centimetres
Sound: Alan Lamb
Technical assistance: John Baird
The artist

Randomly – Now and Then 1990
Microphone stands, computer, diorite mining cores, gravel rock, speakers, tuning forks
840 x 390 x 300 centimetres
Sound: Warren Burt
Technical assistance: Dr Stewart Whittlestone and Warren Burt
The artist
Landscape in Four Dimensions will be broadcast on ABC FM on Monday, September 10, at 10.00pm; and on Radio National on Thursday, September 13, at 8.00pm. Joan Brassil's Time-Warp Reflections will be installed for the Fourth Australian Sculpture Triennial in Joan Brassil's retrospective exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, in Melbourne. The triennial opens on September 16.

LANDSCAPE in Four Dimensions is the product of a remarkable collaboration between one of Australia's most extraordinary sculptors and video artists, one of our most unusual composers and a highly creative team of broadcasters.

The program's genesis lies in a journey which video artist Joan Brassil made from the Kimberleys in the far north-west of Western Australia to Alice Springs. During that journey she collected video images; these images made up the raw material from which Brassil constructed three video installations, entitled respectively Kimberley Stranger Gazing, Time Mirages and Time-Warp Reflections.

The installations have now been translated and transformed into three works for radio which retain the titles of the installations.

Brassil's journey began in the Bungle Bungles. From there she took the road to a cattle station near Fitzroy Crossing, where she paused to gaze upon the grassland plains. The next destination was Alice Springs, which she travelled to by road via Katherine. After months in the Central Desert, Joan Brassil flew to Perth.

A train trip across the Nullarbor, allowing her to experience the vastness of the southern desert plains, was the final leg of her journey. Once home, in her Sydney bush studio, Brassil set to work on the images and impressions which she had collected along the way.

For the first work of her trilogy, Kimberley Stranger Gazing, Joan Brassil gathered together a series of video images of the sky, the grasslands and the fierce tropical light of the Kimberleys. She was fascinated by the interplay of the red earth and its successive waves of human and animal habitation. The huge skies were alive with white cockatoos and the pink and grey of countless galahs.

The Wandjinas, the creation spirits of the Dreaming, descended from translucent skies - when the first European explorers arrived, they were observed by the Wandjinas. By the use of manipulated perspex screens, each placed at a distance from the others, the video images acquired a third dimension. They became a video sculpture.

At one level, Kimberley Stranger Gazing is about perceptions. The work's initial point of departure was what the artist saw as she travelled. She reflects upon the inevitable subjectivity of perception. When the first European explorers surveyed the fertile grasslands and rocky outcrops, they saw pastures.

Those Europeans thought of themselves as observers, but to what extent where they themselves being observed? The Wandjina spirits, she felt, with their wide-open gaze, had certainly inhabited the land for many centuries before them. In the video installation's final image, contours of charts of magnetic fields converge upon the eyes of the Wandjina spirits; the earth's magnetic fields thus gaze back upon the observer.

In its translation from video installation to radio work, Kimberley Stranger Gazing became a sculpture in words and music. The words and voice are those of Joan Brassil; the music is Alan Lamb's Journey on the Winds of Time #1. Lamb's music seems perfectly suited to Brassil's vision of the Kimberleys and in some ways it is just as intimately connected to the earth as are Brassil's images.

In 1976, Perth-based composer Alan Lamb found a half-mile stretch of abandoned telephone wires, all singing softly in the wind, in the Great Southern Region of Western Australia. Lamb was already aware of the unique musical sounds which the wind generated with these wires and he set about the arduous and pioneering task of perfecting techniques for recording the music.

For Lamb the telephone wires were nothing less than a giant aeolian harp. He paid $10 for the wires and they became the focus of his Faraway Wind Organ project. Lamb uses recordings of the singing wires as raw material from which musical works are built up. By a process of memorising and cataloguing, he gains control over a seemingly infinite variety of timbres, textures, pitches, rhythms and structures.

For Lamb, "wire music is an aural embodiment of some of the most fundamental dynamic laws of the universe". As a compositional technique, it shares as much with the world of visual art as it does with the world of conventional musical composition.

Just as Brassil's video installations began with the selection and collection of pre-existing images, so Lamb's musical works began with the collection of naturally occurring sounds.

The second piece in this translated trilogy is entitled Time Mirages. This work was first exhibited at the Roslyn Oxley gallery, in Sydney, in 1986. For its translation to radio, Lamb took a series of phrases from the words of Lamb's Journey on the Winds of Time #1, and set them to music in a way which reflected the music and words of the video installation.
Time Mirages, Joan Brassil collected video images of the iron red sands of the central desert. The appearance of fossils from Cambrian times evokes the incomprehensible age of the continent. The sun glistens on broken wine flagons and tyre tracks abruptly shift our focus from the distant and ancient to the familiar and contemporary. They also shift our focus from sheer awe at the continent's age and immensity to which bit off their heads. Images for this work were collected from three locations, each with its own landscape and each with its own human story: Haasts Bluff, Pine Gap and Ewininga.

This work, *Time-Warp Reflections*, is about landscape and culture. These concerns are articulated through symbols, shapes, textures and sounds. Viewed from the air, trees become dots on the landscape, and they merge with the dots of Pupunya painting. Similarly, the sound of the video camera becomes one with the sound of the beetle. The music, once again by Alan Lamb, is a piece entitled *Spaces Between*.

The creation of this piece is also part of the story. After departing from Alice Springs, Brassil travelled to Perth, where, at the back of Murdoch University, Alan Lamb had attached wires to a number of trees. It was here that *Spaces Between* was born. A collection of dramatic recordings of the sounds made on a blustery day were made. From these sounds, Lamb constructed his *Spaces Between*.

Through juxtaposition and transformation, Landscape in Four Dimensions offers us a uniquely attractive synthesis of seemingly irreconcilable aspects of our world. Enormous spaces are reconciled with images of tiny beetles, ancient landscapes are simultaneously contrasted and documented by high technology and connections are made between seemingly contradictory phenomena.

One of Joan Brassil's most important contributions is the incorporation of sound and music into her video art. It is one of the aspects of her art which sets her apart from her contemporaries. In her visual structures she uses sound and music to resolve spatial connections. Indeed, she employs sound to create and expand a sense of space.

For this function, Alan Lamb's music is more than just appropriate. Lamb's compositional processes are directly analogous to Brassil's. Both Brassil's and Lamb's work begins with the electronic collection and recording of natural phenomena: landscapes and the playing of wind upon telegraph wires. Once collected, the sounds and images are collaged into a continuous composition. The radio programs take this process a step further. The medium, however, is one of time rather than one of space. The programs are at once a translation of the installations into the medium of broadcasting and an expose of the ways in which the installations were constructed.

An integral part of the programs is Joan Brassil's description of the ways in which she built a video installation from her journey. This she articulates in both prose and verse. At another level, she also offers an interpretation of her work after it has been completed. The programs offer us a further journey through the creative process, first in the creation of a video installation and then in its translation to the medium of radio.

The programs were produced for *The Listening Room* by Henry Johnston, who devised the program, and Donna McLachlan. Technical production was the work of Paul McKercher.
FOURTH AUSTRALIAN SCULPTURE TRIENNIAL

2 November, 1988

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1. Australian and Overseas Artists: National Gallery of Victoria

At the National Gallery of Victoria, the intention of the exhibition is to give an account of the confluent and conflicting attitudes which distinguish Australian, European and Japanese sculpture. These may be considered within a broadly defined framework of two principal streams:

1.1 The first stream embraces work evolved from formalist/minimalist theory and places a particular emphasis on spatial investigation and sculpture which operates on the basis of refractive or reflective processes involving natural, or artificial light. In addressing the wider implications of spatial theory, this stream will incorporate installations which engage the viewer through the visual experience of a site transfigured by deviation from accepted scale, introduction of unorthodox materials and re-interpretation of existing ethos and purpose.

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3 Buddle Drive, Toorak, Victoria, Australia. 3142.
The second stream of activity has its roots in the Expressionist/Surrealist movements and places particular emphasis on the object and its metaphysical, metaphorical or narrative associations. Work in this stream may also deploy found objects which are invested with fresh emotive significance through a process of juxtaposition and alteration. The stream embraces a broad diversity of attitudes and incorporates new interpretations of classical and romantic styles.

2. Joan Brassil: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art

In terms of the above concern with spatial compositions, the deployment of natural and artificial light, installations, and the use of unorthodox materials, the work of Joan Brassil at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art will provide a link with the exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria. The retrospective exhibition of this distinguished Sydney artist, will be guest curated by Sally Couacaud.

3. David Smith

Heide Park and Art Gallery will mount a survey of drawings and sculpture by David Smith - a seminal figure in the evolution of modernist practice and philosophy in sculpture. The influence exerted by Smith's work has been such that this survey will underscore vital issues in current Australian sculpture, and most importantly, serve to communicate to a general audience, a lucid and compelling narrative of the formalist tradition. The work of this internationally acclaimed American sculptor would establish an historical perspective to the formalist work shown at the National Gallery of Victoria.

3.1 Large scale installation by an Australian sculptor to be displayed in the park.

While the David Smith exhibition will be displayed within the gallery, with possibly two external pieces in the courtyard, it is intended that a major installation of the current work of an Australian artist, whose work will be most appropriate to the large scale outdoor spaces at Heide, will be installed in the park.
Joan Brassil, a video sculptor of distinction now at the Roslyn Oxley Gallery, is also a poet, but more so when her views of the Kimberleys are reflected on three sets of perspex, each with four screens of varying contours that create a lyrical alchemy of Outback views of windmills, grasses, corrugated iron and something like rock paintings. Almost everything becomes weaving, pulsating, throwing lines that stream with grace or quiver and flinch in anticipation. They are metaphors of the blissful continuity and warm rapture of nature.

Joan Brassil's Kimberley Stranger Gazing is aptly called a "video sculpture", for it is not a video screen we watch, but the reflections of the screen on a series of irregularly curved perspex sheets set one behind the other. The effect of this is to break up the eternal oblong of the video into a multitude of wisps and patches and amoebic agglomerations, overlapping, mutating into different patterns with every change of the viewer's position, and all internally in constant process of change. The landscape which constitutes the basis of the video itself is similarly broken up, distorted and multiplied; but it is precisely by rendering it unrecognizable that Brassil reveals the landscape to us. Her video sculpture recreates the poetry of colour, texture and movement, inhibiting the recognition that closes off perception.
Die gebogenen, durchscheinenden Schirme Joan Brassil’s "Time Warp Reflections" stellen ein geographisches und temporäres Terrain dar, eine mnemonische Metapher für Raum und Zeit in einer spirituellen Dislozierung. Die nomadischen Spuren und Orte zur Traumzeit werden in den Soundtrack überführt und in den verzerrten Bildern widergespiegelt - die Brüche in der Stille und im Bild reflektieren die Abgründe des Unterschieds, die wir durchwandern können oder wo wir zur Reflexion pausieren können.

Joan Brassil an der Arbeit für "Time Mirages" in Alice Springs. Foto: Dorothy Grimm

Hintereinem Heiligen Berg in der Wüste Zentralaustraliens ging die Sonne auf und in dem beinahe horizontalen Morgenlicht glitzerten die Glimmerschichten im Schiefergestein und akzentuierten die Formation der geborstenen Felsen. Doch der Sonnenaufgang hob nicht nur das ursprüngliche Element hervor, sondern spiegelte sich auch in den herumliegenden Scherben von Weinflaschen. Im Video wurde der zeitliche und kulturelle Abstand zwischen diesen zwei Reflexionen durch übereinander gelagerte Landschaftsschichten und vor diese eingebundene Scherben einer Sanduhr gestaltet.


(Auszug aus Joan Brassil: Aspekte der ursprünglichen Landschaft in der Videoskulptur)

Scintillations

A MUSIC THEATRE PRODUCTION
by Peter King and a video installation by Joan Brassil: If I were betting on work that will survive from a year in which we have been bombarded with new, and not so new, Australian art, these would have to be my favorites.

"Scintillating", the reviewer's shorthand for general approbation, has an exact sense in relation to Joan Brassil's video installation, 'Kimberley Stranger Gazing'. In front of the video monitor, some two or three metres back, stand three perspex screens that reflect the video image. Their surfaces are slightly warped and curved; they stand at a slight angle to each other; in fact, each perspex screen consists of four layers of perspex, each layer subtly superimposing its own image on the image. We, the viewers, stand behind the video monitor looking at the nine or more video images dancing on the perspex screens.

This extremely simple arrangement has something of the improvised elegance of Rutherford's original cathode ray tube. And, in her own way, Brassil has made a comparable breakthrough. By reconstituting the smooth, apparently solid surface of the image as a field of scintillations, she has radically altered our perception of perception.

But this is not merely a trick of mirrors. The idea that our perceptions of the world are not naive and direct but come mirrored and refracted through memories, both personal and historical, also determines the subject and treatment of 'Kimberley Stranger Gazing', a short film which meditates on the technology of European settlement in the desert.

One of the most arresting sequences shows the whirling vanes of a water pump, the steady throb of the piston. Broken up, fanned out or narrowed to an edge that resembles the fingerless playing of a pianola, we perceive in these transformations, not only how our technology casts its migrant shadows across the land, but how, also, it carries with it cultural memories.

Something even more astonishing emerges as we stand at the focal centre of these metamorphoses: the fragmented landscape, camera framed and silent, begins to stare back. In symbiotic rapport with the screens (themselves modelled and mounted to resemble segments of gigantic mitochondria) the cell of the centre begins, accompanied by Alan Lamb's wire music, to breathe and dance. There is no question here of appropriating Aboriginal imagery or history, but a genuine convergence by other means on the possibility of the land no longer being a stranger.

'Kimberley Stranger Gazing', one of four installations Brassil has devoted to aspects of the centre, was on view in Sydney at the Roslyn Oxley 9 Gallery in June and at the City Gallery, Melbourne, as part of Experimenta, in November.

Paul Carter
Peter Castelli, during an interview [A.B.C.] broadcast in August '88, said: “I went down to see your video and discovered myself crab-walking around it without realising that I was doing it – now you were originally a sculptor, what I realised when I was walking around your video, I was moving through three dimensions; what this your intention?”

The question was the answer that pleased me. The importance of the spaces “in between” can be seen clearly in the cohesion and form of the eventual configuration, made from the interaction between the two “instruments.”

Hopefully the varied movements, within the video sequences, together with the movementsd imagery in interaction with the movement of the viewer, may subliminally arrive at the structure and form of the originally implanted poetic form.

Over: Storyboards for Kimberley Stranger and Time Warp Reflections.