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Altered states: an investigation of the relationship between nature and humans in the west country of Tasmania expressed through the ceramic vessel form

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ALTERED STATES

An investigation of the relationship between nature and humans in the West
Country of Tasmania expressed through the ceramic vessel form

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF CREATIVE ARTS

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

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SCHOOL OF CREATIVE ARTS
1992

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this dissertation is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

Vincent McGrath

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Abstract

My three one-person ceramic exhibitions and written dissertation are concerned with the relationship between humankind and nature. Nature is a phenomenon validated by our senses - it is a concrete symbol. Paradoxically, nature is an unseen energy, a primordial life force generating existence through a shaping and refining process. Although harmony can exist inside this paradox, overt human intrusion through ideologies of culture, economic ardour and political power has produced an environment of chaos and disunity.

The field of interest in my research has been the West Country of Tasmania, one of the most heavily covered temperate rainforest regions in the southern hemisphere. Today, this part of Tasmania is a spectacular example of the devastation wrought by mining through Europeans' search for financial gain.

I believe the evolutionary process is an unfolding activity that manifests itself as a synergism through the passing of linear time - past, present and future. I have used the ceramic vessel form as a vehicle to explore and interpret the changing relationships between humankind and nature, function and non-function. An iconography is developed from mine works and settlement towns. The work emerges from two perspectives: firstly, it deals with the way these functional territories with their industrial technology appeared and the presence they commanded within the newly occupied and settled country; and secondly, it explores the idea of non-function, how discarded relics of the past are continually subjected to the complex natural forces of modelling and reorganisation. Developing an historical perspective on West Country mining and settlement has been germane to the way I have interpreted the territories as they are now, worked over by nature and time - testament to a past occupation.

Acknowledgements

The body of work produced during the last four years could not have been undertaken without the friendship, support and critical appraisal of several individuals and public galleries. A very special acknowledgment is given to Serena Krista, Dian Hamann and Trish Armstrong for their encouragement and patience throughout the writing of the project and the creation of the artwork. I also wish to acknowledge the professional exhibition assistance given to me by: Mr Don Gregg, Director of the Tasmania Museum and Art Gallery, Ms Julia Clark, Curator, Tasmania Museum and Art Gallery, Mr Frank Ellis, Director, Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Ms Fiona Christie, Director, Devonport Regional Art Gallery, and Mrs Yvonne Adkins, Manager, University Gallery, University of Tasmania.

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Preface

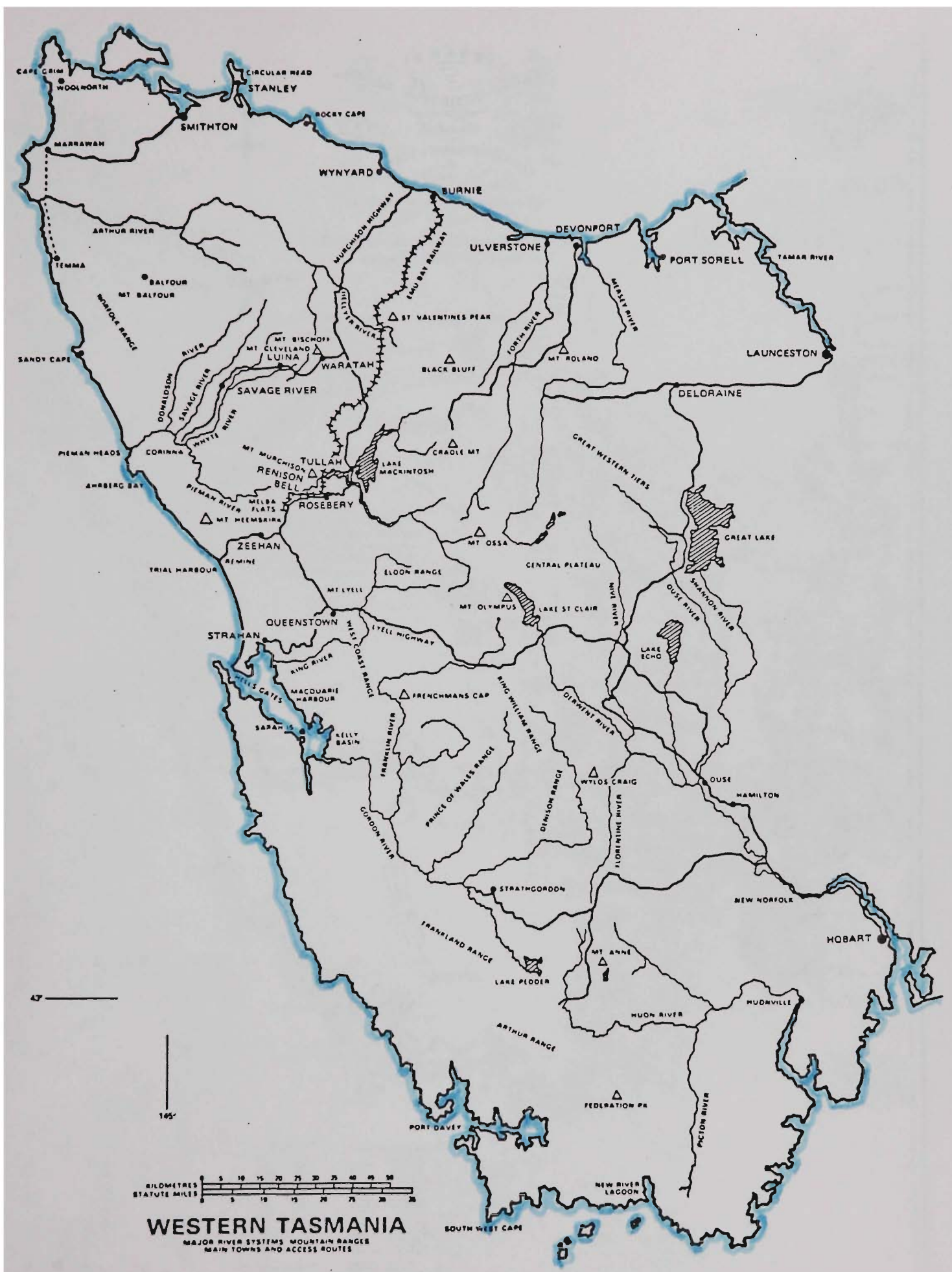
This dissertation is part of the requirements for the award Doctor of Creative Arts at the University of Wollongong, and represents the second part of the project. The first part took the form of three one-person exhibitions of new work across a period of three years. The venues were:

- 1990 Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania
- 1991 Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Burnie, Tasmania
- 1992 University Gallery, University of Tasmania, Tasmania

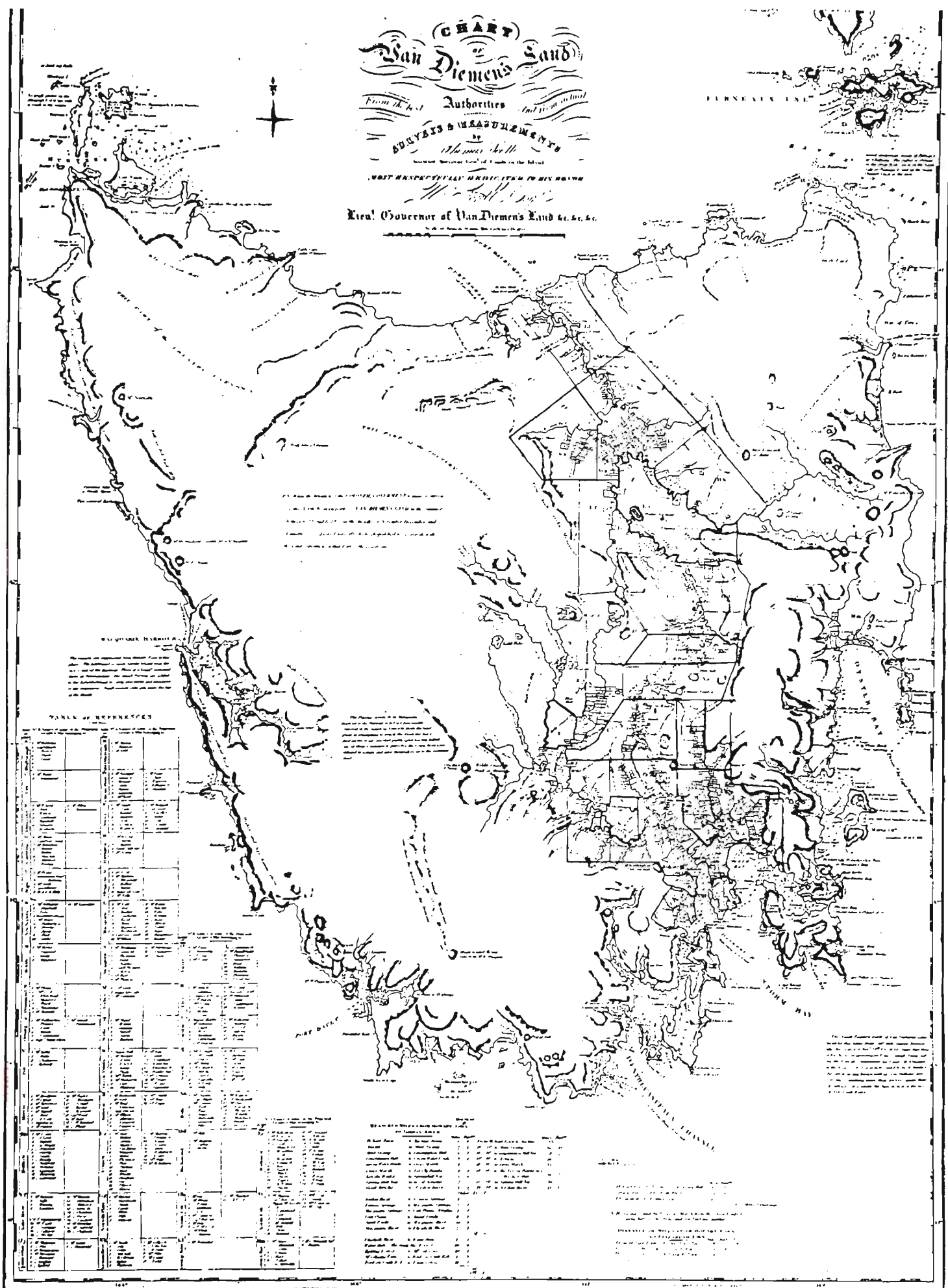
MAPS

Western Tasmania today - courtesy, Department of Parks, Wildlife and Recreation, Government of Tasmania

Thomas Scott's 1824 map of Van Diemen's Land - courtesy, Department of Parks, Wildlife and Recreation, Government of Tasmania



Photograph courtesy of Department of Parks, Wildlife and Recreation
Government of Tasmania



Thomas Scott's 1824 map of Van Diemen's Land indicating the extent of the known and unknown parts of the Colony

Photograph courtesy of Department of Parks, Wildlife and Recreation
 Government of Tasmania

Introduction

A Metaphor of Exploration

The body of ceramic work produced as the major part of this project, and which has prompted this dissertation, represents the culmination of a four-year journey of exploration throughout which, as artist/explorer, I continually search, probe, examine and 'document' an area of Tasmania which, in its present state, begs many questions of the casual interloper. The landscape of the West Country bears the scars of European invasion of the past two hundred years. It is an area of dichotomies: on the one hand a challenging subject for creative visual expression; on the other, a damning indictment of white Australian avarice, and a lasting monument to the near-sightedness of a colonial imperialist regime.

Black Australians roamed the area undisturbed for thousands of years, enjoying a symbiotic relationship with the land of their Dreaming, and living in harmony with the elements; hunting the fauna and gathering the flora to satisfy their immediate needs; neither exploiting the land nor destroying its resources for personal gain or material wealth. They have left behind (for sadly their nomadic existence is no more) minimal evidence of these undisturbed times; little in the way of testimony to these halcyon days.

It is the contention of this thesis that the 'altered state' of the landscape of the West Country of Tasmania is the direct result of the imposition of an imperialist, colonising society with a prime motivating factor of profit, on an area of rugged natural beauty replete with valuable timber and rich mineral resources. The lure of gold, the anticipation of untold riches and the irresistible fascination with the stock market has left its mark perhaps indelibly on Tasmania's West Country.

My exploration is both spatial and temporal. Spatially, my concern is with the West Country of Tasmania - with those areas bearing the scars of the

historical past. Temporally, the exploration concerns time present and time past. As Elliott Jacques says, 'The past is the experience of the flow of memory, the present of perception.'¹ Memory and perception are the tools of the explorer/artist, and indispensable to his/her art. History is activated by memory. It is the result of what is remembered and written down, and history, being as it is a record of what is past, is an essential tool in any temporal exploration.

My exploration is also aesthetic. In the process of creating the ceramic object, I am mentally and physically exploring the paradigm of space: space that relates to function, and space concerned with non-function. Both forms of space are investigated in respect of the landscape, and the ceramic pot and ceramic vessel form. The principal thrust of these formal concerns is to relate nature's deconstruction of man-made functional spaces and territories to the negation of the idea of function from the traditional ceramic pot.

Through my ceramic works I wanted to eliminate the notion of 'completeness', and instead portray the idea that these works are representative of a part of a larger entity that was once there. The remains of the largely abandoned mine sites are mere fragments of a whole, shards of the past. To understand how these fragments came to be here, how these landscapes seen in their 'altered states' are this way, we must go back to time past. I am concerned with the events of the past - with the historical process - in so far as it illuminates the present, and I hope, through an exploration of the past, to arrive at an understanding of these 'altered states'. Margaret Atwood articulates this admirably when she writes:

Part of where you are is where you've been. If you aren't too sure where you are, or if you're sure but don't like it, there's a tendency, both in psychotherapy and in literature, to retrace your history to see how you got there.²

The dissertation is organised in three sections, the first two suggested by the foregoing Margaret Atwood quotation, the third addressing the work itself.

Section I deals with Tasmania's West Country landscape as it is today; i.e., in its 'altered state'. It articulates my physical exploration of the area: of its natural phenomena, of the surviving evidence of a quite sophisticated technology and a period of heavy industry, and of the reminders of human and domestic occupation and activity.

Section II is an historical exploration that examines the impact of European activity on the landscape of the area, taking in various groups from the earliest explorers to the miners of the region.

Section III addresses the product of this exploration - the art object itself, and explores issues such as the deconstruction of utilitarian form, and the elimination of boundaries.

¹ Elliott Jacques, *The Form of Time*, London, Heinemann, 1982, p. xii.

² Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, Toronto, Anansi, 1972, p. 112.

SECTION 1

WHERE WE ARE

Chapter 1

A Physical Exploration

The concern with 'where we are' involves not only place, but also a state or condition, and has arisen from my own physical explorations of specific sections of the West Country of Tasmania. What has evolved as a result of these explorations is a variety of forms of documentation: a personal collection of working drawings, photographic images, written journal entries, and aural recordings that are subsequently incorporated into the interpretive and creative processes of making the ceramic objects. The store of knowledge accumulated from my physical explorations is analogous to the early explorers' journals, where perceptions of the many new sights, sounds and smells were scrupulously recorded, bringing a deeper understanding of the region. The physical exploration of western Tasmania by the early explorers was an unrelenting struggle against an uncompromising, resistant environment. The explorers, geologists, prospectors, track cutters and miners were virtually unaided in their searches; they travelled on foot, carried tents and sufficient food supplies, were in possession of scant information about the physical terrain, plotted their own courses in unknown country, and were outside the bounds of assistance in the event of emergencies. In contrast, my physical exploration, and for that matter, those of other contemporary explorers, is supported by the accumulation of extensive charted topographical information, and has the advantages of twentieth century technological advances. Frank Long, the prospector who discovered argentiferous galena (silver) at Zeehan in 1882, did not have the advantage of the Geiger counter or scintillometer for exploration work. Neither did he have the benefit of magnetometer surveys, helicopter supply support, aerial photographic imaging or satellite meteorological reports.

In my quest for knowledge through the method of physical exploration (field trips), I have used the early explorers' maps and journals to retrace paths

along remaining pack tracks, disused railways, and streams, into towns, mine sites and old leases. My physical exploration has essentially been a visual one on land and from the air, recording objects and places, using much the same visual process as the geological surveyor Charles Gould used in documenting geological formations, flora and fauna, and weather patterns.

My exploration, like that of the early explorers who travelled this part of Tasmania, is about breaking new ground through interpreting the signs of the landscape. Henry Hellyer,¹ 'Philosopher' Smith² and Charles Gould³ read the landscape in an attempt to unlock hidden resources for the purposes of economic expansion and profit. My own physical explorations have prompted questions about the present nature of the landscape, its former nature, and the reasons for its altered state. I also explore the physical remains of European occupation to ascertain the ways in which intervention in the landscape has been perpetuated.

This activity ostensibly concerns itself with the 'now', the *current* state of an evolving or changing landscape. I see these physical journeys of exploration as a means of documenting and recording time present (much as the journeys of the early explorers were a means of documenting and recording *their* time present); and this documentation will ultimately be influenced by time past (in the form of human histories) and by my own imaginative exploration.

For me, the physical exploration of these remaining mining territories is an entry into them, a way of absorbing them as they are now in their state of change. I see these territories as more than a locality, an entity or a mark on the map: they are, instead, part of a continuous environment that runs beyond my scope of physical vision. Before exploration and settlement the mining territories were part of a greater whole, unspoilt by the insensitive acts of profit-seeking industrial enterprise.

These early mining territories of the West Country were Australian frontiers incorporating the inter-connected ideas of exploration, settlement and the acquisition of wealth for both the individual and the Mother Country. To me, these abandoned mining territories represent the wreckage of a past order, an old way of life, tenuously maintained by original papers, photographs and memorabilia kept by museums and public authorities in Tasmania and Britain. The few remaining pioneers of the fields, and their descendants, sustain the images of the old order as a regional folklore. Throughout the occupation of the mine territories, only a small number of miners had their names and achievements officially recorded. For the most part, the thousands of people and syndicates who came in search of profit were transient and have faded from memory, their only legacy either a devastated and annihilated environment, or one which is struggling towards a slow regeneration and re-ordering.

The process of the physical exploration encompasses both macro and micro viewpoints. The macro perception sets the mine sites within the context of the West Country landscape, examining the relationships and tensions between forested, mountain terrain and the disfigured and denuded areas of former open-cut and shaft mining activities. The micro exploration ascertains perceptions from information taken locally, from the site itself. During the past four years I have made many field trips gathering personal visual and written information that describes and analyses the circumstances of the mine territory according to seasons, time of day, weather conditions, and my own state of visual receptiveness and historical reflection.

It took little more than fifty years for Europeans to affirm their will on the West Country landscape through acts of exploitation. The journals and diaries of the early explorers show that they encountered a robust, thriving and unspoilt environment suspended in a dynamic cycle of growth and re-growth. Successive waves of European mining settlements broke the ecological

balance of the region by rendering thousands of hectares of virgin bushland a wasteland that now, after many years, is held in a fragile condition of survival.

When these industrially scarred mine leases are visually separated from the surrounding native forested landscape, an interesting paradox is perceived. The Mount Lyell, Zeehan and Rosebery fields tell of spoiling, desecration and ugliness; however, within this setting of disorder and chaos there is also order, harmony and beauty. Taken separately, slag heaps, dilapidated machinery, toxic ponds and tree-less grounds present a satisfying aesthetic in colour, shape, form and surface, and by their presence illustrate the harmonious process of re-forming through the natural phenomena of ageing, weathering and re-growth. The re-forming and re-shaping processes of nature are the means by which the former functional mine site territories are deconstructed.

¹ Henry Hellyer (1790-1832) was the principal explorer and surveyor for the Van Diemen's Land Company. During the six years' work up until 1832, Hellyer provided the most important contribution to surveying and mapping the West Country of Tasmania.

² James 'Philosopher' Smith (1827-1897). First generation Tasmanian prospector who discovered tin at Mt Bischoff in 1871.

³ Charles Gould (1884-1893) was contracted by the government of Tasmania between 1859 and 1869 to carry out a comprehensive survey of the Colony's mineral resources.

Chapter 2

The Landscape

Marcus Clarke's 1874 novel *For the Term of His Natural Life* which tells of the overland escape by the man-eating convict Gabbett (from the actual case of Alexander Pearce) is a definitive Romantic statement of the West Country of Tasmania. The novel describes the early colonial administration's 'prison' attitude to the region, and offers an imaginative adversarial construct that easily lodged into the collective consciousness of recently settled European Tasmanians. As Clarke writes in his novel, the West Country is 'bleak and cheerless....the air is chill and moist, the soil prolific and prickly under growth and noxious weeds, while foetid exaltations from swamp and fen cling close to the humid spongy ground. All around breathes desolation; on the face of nature is stamped a perpetual frown.'¹ Clarke's West Country landscape satisfied the biblical concept of wilderness as wasteland, a place of no worth or value, a place that easily contrasted with the traditional European concept of arcadian beauty: one of order, pastoral serenity and cultivated prosperity. The concept of the arcadian ideal was used extensively in the early colonial guides in promoting free settler immigration. The colony of Van Diemen's Land was purported to be a 'Little England' down under, a countryside of rolling hills, meandering streams, headgerows and oak trees.² By bringing the English idea of landscape to the new country, colonial administration's senior servants, wealthy pastoralists and the officer classes ensured that a real appreciation and understanding of the native landscape would take several generations. While the Derwent Valley, the Midlands and north-east of Van Diemen's Land were temperate, fertile and easily cultivated, the West Country contained second grade soils, poor native pastures, and was regarded as gothic - dark, gloomy, sinister and brooding. Subsequent exploration expeditions by surveyors, geologists and fossickers have left varying perceptions of the landscape. Jorgenson and Hellyer³ often referred

to 'picturesque' and 'ancient' in describing their emphatic appreciation of the scenery of this wilderness area. Other explorers, while declaring admirable visual qualities observed within the landscape, were often stricken with a sense of depression brought about by the intense isolation, difficult terrain and the apparent uselessness of the land.

The widely held nineteenth and early twentieth century view that the Tasmanian West Country was an unattractive wilderness served the mining companies well because they saw the land as one large industrial site. Government enthusiasm for reviving the economic fortunes of the Colony, a disregard for the beauty and ecology of the region, irrevocably changed much of the face of the landscape. For over one hundred years this wild landscape was treated as an adversary to be overwhelmed, exploited and then forgotten. The attitudes of the explorers, prospectors and miners to the country was based on a cultural, social and economic association with Britain. This association gave settlers a tenuous psychological security which, for many years, obviated the development of a 'closeness' with the land, the kind of relationship that Tasmanian Aborigines had fostered for over one thousand years.

My own physical exploration of the West Country wilderness has been influenced by the emerging cultural and social mores of a two hundred year old Australian history, by an understanding of the environment's inherent fragility, and by a belief that nature is a significant factor in the long-term survival of humankind.

The discordant relationship that resulted from overlaying an intrusive colonial urge for economic profit on to a delicately balanced ecosystem remains evident today both conceptually and in actuality. Mineral extraction has depleted much of the West Country's wilderness of its flora and fauna to such an extent that full recovery in some areas seems unlikely.

The hundreds of single-person bush tracks that were cut through the landscape by explorers, prospectors, and bushmen employed in the Survey Department and Public Works Department have virtually disappeared by being re-taken and re-shaped by the elements of nature. The tracks, which were the sole means of passage used to probe into unexplored territory, also served to make the vital symbolic connection between the eastern settled pastoral areas of the Colony and the recently pegged mine leases of the West Country. The great exploration tracks of Henry Hellyer to Surrey and Hampshire Hills which were later utilised by countless prospectors and miners are today nothing more than registrations on the Department of Land's maps. The newly constructed Murchison highway to Waratah straddles much of the path that Hellyer took to Surrey Hills. The geologist and bushman T. (Tom) B. Moore cut hundreds of kilometres of bush tracks for the Mount Lyell Company, various English prospecting companies, and the government between 1877 and 1919. Moore's tracks, which penetrated much of the country between Mount Heemskirk and Mount Lyell, have vanished apart from a few kilometres along the Linda Valley floor and up into the West Coast Range. Still discernible in Linda Valley are the features of the track, even though large tree trunks lie rotting across the path and years of rainforest undergrowth of moss, man-ferns, bracken and fungus have slowly built up a dense covering hiding much of the track floor. The endeavours of the early explorers faced with the barriers of the country are still in evidence today. I have seen where thin sections of fallen giant eucalypts have been cross-cut sawn and pulled away, providing a way through, where corduroying (laying man-fern trunks together) boggy ground can still be found, and where the practice of 'benching', digging flat tracks across an incline, still remains largely intact even after the many years of heavy rainfall. On T.B. Moore's Linda Valley track, I discovered some of the remaining chain distance markers (cut into the myrtles to measure the miles) used by the track cutters. During my exploration of these older tracks it

has been relatively easy to appreciate how difficult it was to make the crossings from one side of a stream to another. These are mountain streams, fast running, and during a hailstorm can rise two to three metres very quickly. The Linda Valley track cuts across several small streams and there still remain signs of where parties constructed their own bridge by cutting down nearby trees so that they would fall across the stream. Another track which I have explored, the Dundas/Rosebery pack track, that was used by teams of horses and bullocks to ferry machinery and supplies, is now virtually gone. However, there are still some vague markings of dray tracks on the ground showing the direction which the track took. The best evidence of this I found was under the cover of the Mount Dundas myrtle forest. Elsewhere, through the button grass and flatland ti-tree clumps, all signs have disappeared, seemingly erased by the periodic grass fires and active re-growth.

Tramways and railways became the natural extension of the bush tracks that had crisscrossed the West Country landscape of valleys, ranges and plains. However, tramways and railways were not the symbols of exploration as tracks had been. Instead, they were representations of industrial confidence and community security in the future. Tramways and railways were to become the economic lifeline to the West Country.

After over one hundred years of tramways and railways the Emu Bay Railway remains the only operator. The Strahan-Zeehan, Mount Lyell Co. Abt, Dundas-Zeehan, Queenstown-Strahan railways, and a number of smaller spur lines have all closed, leaving the rainforest flora to re-take the winding lines that traversed the country's gorges, rivers and ravines. These abandoned lines, financed by thousands of pounds of venture capital, are today like ancient paths, covered in moss, bracken fern, fuschias, snow berries, native laurels and young sapling trees. The old Queenstown-Strahan Abt railway, which closed in 1963, is one of the more interesting former transportation routes through the country. This thirty-three kilometre railway

represented a massive investment by the shareholders of the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company, an investment almost as large as the cost of the Mount Lyell Company itself. Today, large sections of the line that once meandered from Strahan on Macquarie Harbour along undulating country beside the King River, and then up over an almost impossible 1/20 gradient to Queenstown, are rotting, rusting and sinking below nature's re-growth. Wet slides, rock falls, high rainfall and the fast-growing horizontal scrub⁴ have hastened the breakdown of the railway's physical appearance under the cover of the rainforest. Denying the function of the line has also quickened its demise and established its presence as a symbol of discarded waste from a former industrial society. Several of the culverts have collapsed, and the remaining trestle bridge is held together only by the twisted and sagging railway lines. The siding, hunters' huts, fettlers' cottages and platforms are empty, covered in blackberries, and now the homes of snakes and rabbits. Watering tanks for the locomotives, which are evenly spaced along the line, are punctured, torn and bent. Around their footings can still be seen the flowers and shrubs planted at the turn of the century by Mrs Sticht, the Mount Lyell Co manager's wife. Gone is the shine on the track where the Mount Lyell No. 1 Abt locomotive slipped and skidded its way along the track hauling up to twenty trucks of blister copper at a time to Regatta Point.

For the last one hundred and thirty years bush tracks, tramways and railways have provided the major corridors through the West Country landscape to the territories of mines and settlement towns. The advent of roads to the isolated mining communities set deep in the mountains came as late as 1963 when the Murchison highway linked the west coast with Burnie.

These corridors of entry into and out of the country have not resulted in great environmental damage. However, tracks, trams and trains facilitated opportunities for profit-seekers to exploit the new-found natural resources through clearfelling, and removal of the topsoils. Today the West Country

environment bears deep scars as a result of the avarice and ignorance exhibited by government, companies and individuals in their clamour for profit.

The entry of European Tasmanians into the West Country landscape has resulted in the decline, destruction and extinction of some forms of flora and fauna. The Tasmanian black swan was severely reduced in numbers and the Tasmanian tiger (*Thylacine*) is now extinct. The tiger was hunted mercilessly by snarers and shooters during the first twenty years of this century and sought the West Country as its last domain for the same reasons that the west was the last domain of the tribal Tasmanian Aborigines - this was because the pastoralists felt the land was of no use and therefore was sparsely settled. The Huon pine, which is often regarded as Tasmania's tree of antiquity, is under serious threat of extinction. This species takes from between five hundred and one thousand years to mature, and its distribution has been limited to the waterways of western Tasmania, including the banks of Macquarie Harbour and the Gordon and Pieman Rivers and their tributaries. From 1815 when Captain James Kelly won a twelve-month lease to harvest Huon pine up until this year, colonial administration and governments have had a difficult time preventing poachers from stealing logs from the last stands along Macquarie Harbour. Therefore, it becomes easy to appreciate why re-growth will never keep abreast of the exploitation of the species. The last remaining stands of the Huon pine are located on the Denison River flat in the upper reaches of the Gordon River. Short-sighted policies and ignorant attitudes by government authorities over the past two hundred years have ensured that virtually all the mature trees have fallen to the axe and chainsaw. In addition, the Hydro Electricity Commission has seen fit to permanently flood areas that were the former habitats of this unique conifer.

The high rainfall, temperate climate, soil quality, altitude and wind continue to affect the kind of vegetation that exists in the West Country. The

button grass plains country that the explorer Henry Hellyer thought were like old parklands, and that were hunting grounds for the Tasmanian Aborigines, still remain as big, open spaces grazed by possums, wallabies and kangaroos. In the winter they are windswept and wet, and in the summer tinder dry and rank. The elevated areas along the western mountain ranges are bleak, infertile, and only here and there covered with stunted scrub. This spine of jagged mountains running the full length of the island still presents an impressive physical divide between the pastoral lands of the east and the remaining wilderness sanctuaries of the West Country.

Exploring the region by air has given me the opportunity to observe and record the country in a way that the early explorers, prospectors and miners were not able to do. Air exploration has provided me with a way of looking at the landscape from a macro point of view, developing a perspective that enables an analysis of separate and distinct features, as well as building a comprehensive picture of the country's surface. The pristine rainforested areas of myrtle, sassafras and King Billy pine growing in the gullies and valleys leading to the King and Henty rivers are still largely intact. Similarly, the blackwood, celery topped pine and sassafras forests of the Pieman and Arthur river areas are flourishing and form a continuous, dense, grey-green canopy from Corinna to Rosebery. The torn and naked landscapes of Zeehan and Queenstown wrought by the mining industry's aggressive and insensitive handling of the natural rainforest, the terrain, the water table and the natural drainage systems of rivers and small streams, marks the land with boundaries that sharply define the natural and altered states of the landscape. From the air the hundreds of meandering bush tracks, tramways and small gauge railways that formed the transportation corridors at the beginning of this century have virtually disappeared under the cover of the eucalypt and myrtle forests. Occasionally one is able to detect a railway cutting, very often now a nursery for new rainforest vegetation, dilapidated trestle bridges across

mountain streams, and sidings and marshalling yards. Today's tracks, the newly constructed Murchison and Mount Lyell highways, are firmly carved into the country and provide a modern lifeline which connects the remaining isolated communities of the West Country wilderness.

¹ Marcus Clarke, *For the Term of His Natural Life*, Victoria, Lloyd O'Neill, 1970, p. 96.

² J. Godwin, *Godwin's Emigrant's Guide to Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile edn, Hobart, Tasmanian Government Printing Office, 1990, p. 1.

³ Henry Hellyer and Jorgen Jorgensen were the principal explorers contracted by the Van Diemen's Land Company to search for sheep-grazing lands in the West Country.

⁴ Horizontal scrub - A dense, fast-growing rainforest vine-like plant that grows to approximately six metres, collapses, then sprouts new runners. This growth cycle is repeated. Horizontal Scrub was the scourge of all explorers and prospectors. It was often easier to tunnel under rather than bush-bash an open path.

Chapter 3

Minescape Remnants and Relics

As a child growing up on a dairy farm in Gippsland, Victoria, I remember seeing the large-scale clearing of eucalypt forests. Complete areas of native bush were clear felled with a ball and chain dragged through it by bulldozers to make way for the development of open pasture land. These 1950s memories remain vivid and formed my initial views concerning the impact wholesale bush clearing had on wild-life and shelter for domestic animals. Coming from a rural background, I am able to understand the economic reasoning for settling and cultivation of the land, but I do not condone the insensitivity of the 'burnt earth' policy of knocking down and burning which has subsequently resulted in soil salination, tree decline and erosion on a massive scale.

Western Tasmania, too, was a steady state landscape before European intervention. However, the mining industry was more interventionist than the pastoralists of Gippsland, Victoria, or the Midlands of Tasmania. Thousands of hectares have been laid waste, and toxic waste dumps have appeared from which poisons are carried by rainwater into the mountain streams and out into Macquarie Harbour.

When the lode-bearing discoveries were verified as payable, mine sites, with their associated crushing mills, sintering furnaces, pyritic smelters, and settlement towns, developed as territories in the bush. The tramways and railways carried out as much silver, lead, tin and copper ore as could be extracted from the earth. In the case of Mount Bischoff, Zeehan and Mount Lyell, the extensive ore bodies found meant that the boundaries marking the line between virgin bush and cleared spaces (territories) of occupation became larger and larger as time elapsed. The degree of intervention was in proportion to the potential future of the site.

The Mount Bischoff tin mine was not only the first significant mine in Tasmania, but also became a major mine by world standards. One hundred and twenty years after Philosopher Smith discovered tin at this famous site at the Tin Stone creek, little remains of the bounty for which it became famous. The Waratah Falls rush through the man-made gorges, unimpeded by the wreckage of sluicing plants that were once used to dress the ore, and the waterwheels that were employed to drive pumps and ore-dressing machinery. The Brown Face workings show no evidence of where fifty men at a time hung precariously on ropes to break and clear away the ore by hand from the open cut. The steam battery is in ruins, rusting and creaking in the wind, and the once dense myrtle and sassafras forests, whose timber was used to fuel the battery and its one hundred and fifteen stampers is no more. Now it is difficult to imagine that the crushing capacity in 1914 was in excess of one hundred thousand tonnes of ore per annum. ¹

The immediate areas in and around the open-cut mine tell of a finality, even though tin scratchers like Dudley Kenworthy, a tribute miner, still talk of a new boom in the old mine. Skips and tramcars lie buried in pools of dark, stagnant water, and twisted carriage rails with rotting and broken sleepers give no clue to their former paths. The bright red clay, grey stone and poor alluvial soil of the dumped over-burden heaps dominate the immediate landscape. Rusting aerial ropeways and dismantled pyritic roasters cast a sharp profile to the backdrop of the torn, windswept and depleted environment. The continuous weathering action of the elements - wind, frost, rain and sun - draw and re-draw the shape of the Mount Bischoff minescape because the cover and binding action of the once stately rainforests are gone, seemingly forever.

On every occasion that I have explored Mount Bischoff, my entry into the mine site through the surrounding dense rainforest has always created extreme contrasts of perception. The forest seemingly exists in a dynamic state

of change where the layers of the ecosystem including under-storey, high canopy, watering systems, and sunlight are in mutual accord. The opposite is true of the derelict Mount Bischoff minescape territory which resembles a battlefield. Hectare upon hectare of the landscape is laid waste, upturned and silent.

The devastating impact of past human activity on the Mount Bischoff minescape is far-reaching and of such a monumental scale that a sustainable recovery seems unlikely. While the Mount Bischoff mine employed the open-cut process, other mines at Dundas, Heemskirk, Zeehan, Tullah and Gormanston were adit and shaft mines. These mines, like many others in the West Country, functioned on a smaller scale and generally operated for a shorter duration. Miners and mining companies cleared the land around their leases to establish the site of industry and at the same time claimed a symbolic ownership of that territory. During the heady days of prospecting in the 1880s, claim jumping was a well practised activity by independent miners, small syndicates and large companies. The Peace, Comet and Maestri's silver mines at Dundas paralleled the discoveries at Broken Hill, bringing about the dawning of a great silver age in the Australian colonies. One hundred years ago there were over 159 companies and syndicates working the leases in Dundas and Zeehan. Such confidence was placed in the mines that stockbrokers in Zeehan and in Hobart remained open twenty-four hours a day to deal with the queues of people willing to invest in the silver boom of the locality.

Today the frenzied activity is no more; it is quiet and peaceful, and there is a deep sense that nature is reclaiming by absorbing the derelict man-made structures into the bush setting. The Dundas and Zeehan mines are in an advanced stage of being re-covered by nature to form a new and altered landscape. The Dundas mines which are tucked under the rain shadow of Mount Dundas are isolated and difficult to access through the surrounding

bush. I have always regarded the Comet, Peace and Maestri's mines as an archaeological territory. Artefacts from these mines of past human endeavours are becoming increasingly difficult to associate with former functions. Their physical presences are now under a rapid state of deconstruction. Hillside tunnels have collapsed and their once open portals are fringed with button grass and overgrown with brambles; props have long since fallen into the main shafts which are now full of stagnant, black tannin-coloured water. The mullock heaps and terraces which speak of hard labour before the advent of the bulldozer are covered in wattle and an array of young eucalypts. The mine sites of Dundas and Zeehan are again the homes of wallabies, kangaroos, opossums, snakes, lizards and birds.

The passage of time and the forces of nature have taken their toll on the mining architecture and the abandoned cast iron and steel machinery. What would have been an impressive steam-powered stamping machine is now a dismembered, rusting hulk spread in many parts across the Maestri's mine. The crusher and stamper of the Comet mine is survived only by a number of concrete foundations that sit incomplete as industrial monuments of a past era. For me, these monuments now half hidden by bullrushes and ti-tree, read as symbols of profit-seeking and financial exploitation, slowly passing out of existence. Gone are the shingle and paling mine buildings that once housed the steam-driven pumps that cleared the water from the shafts. A crumbling red brick shell taken over by dogwood and brambles is located on the eastern side of the old Comet mine. The remains indicate that the building was a substantial structure, probably used as the crushing plant. Piles of moss-covered bricks, rotting wooden uprights, concrete pits, bent steel girders, and rusting coils of steel rope are slowly being covered by the seasonal wash of alluvial soil brought down from the mountain. The names of engineering companies in London, Launceston and Hobart can still be discerned through

the red oxide of rust on the sides of pulleys, the remains of boiler casings, engine blocks and winch housings.

Europeans brought steel to this region in order to overwhelm, conquer and manipulate the country. Steel is the invention of a materialist society, designed to save time, raise productivity, and ultimately increase capital returns on investment. The use and presence of heavy industrial cast iron and steel machines on the field was symbolic of the company and stockmarket confidence in a venture. As investor confidence from Melbourne, London, Launceston and Hobart rose, mine managers became more anxious to develop the leases as quickly as possible so that the momentum of confidence in a new lode would be maintained and therefore sustain market interest. Heavy industrial iron and steel machinery was dragged along the bush tracks and became a permanent feature of these gambling ventures. Today the Dundas, Zeehan, Heemskirk and Tullah sites reveal the steel machines as discarded, rusting and corroding wastes of a former industrial era gradually being reclaimed by the forces of nature. The oranges and tans of the rust-covered machines complement the deep purples, brilliant reds and terracottas of the landscape. Much of the Dundas, Zeehan and Mount Lyell districts have large geological deposits of iron pyrites, and where these formations break through as rock outcrops, cliffs, cuttings and gorges, the red iron oxide (rust) becomes an intrinsic part of the landscape. The demise of these deteriorating, man-made industrial icons represents the final stage in a physical occupation that dashed the hopes of investors and industrialists.

There were only two ways into the Dundas mines - on foot via the Dundas-Zeehan bush track, or by the narrow gauge railway which was used to carry out the crushed galena ore in bagged form to Zeehan. I have been able to locate sections of the old line still intact, although much of it is overgrown with scrub, and the tracks and sleepers are submerged beneath the build-up of new soil levels, rotting and rusting away.

In the context of the minescape and surrounding landscape, the rusting artefacts offer me visual clues as to the ways the environment was altered, and the order and processes developed to take from the land. By searching out the rusting remnants and relics I am able to analyse them both individually and collectively within the setting of the mine site territory. The store of visual knowledge gained is interpreted, recorded and then re-interpreted through the creation of my ceramic work.

The meaning of rust can be interpreted variously as decline, failure, abandonment and neglect. The presence of rust on industrial objects is a physical reminder of time past and of human activity in the landscape. The layers of rust shed from the form of an iron retort, a trolley car, or an ore-dresser reveal a narrative about place, people and events. Industrial failure has provided nature with the opportunity to re-shape these territories. Human activity has been defeated by the conditions of its own making and the finite geological resources of the land. As a narrative, the idle, rusting machines and derelict mine sites of Dundas and Zeehan speak of an unspectacular retreat from sites unable to sustain an industrial society's ever increasing urge for material and financial wealth.

The once thriving Comet and Peace mines of Dundas are now deserted. The hundreds of prospectors, miners, assayists, metallurgists and railway men who came in search of work and profit at these mines have long gone, their individual events left largely unrecorded and lost within the fading minescape. The modern-day anachronism is the lone tribute miner ² working the region, gouging and cleaning out the last remaining seams of galena.

Carl Sticht's ³ first Mount Lyell blast smelter began furnace work in 1896. This event was to ensure the long and profitable life of the Mount Lyell mine, and also signalled the beginning of destruction of the landscape which is so evident today. For over ninety years the Mount Lyell mine at Queenstown has been one of the richest copper mines in the world. The mine

continues to produce high grade copper ore that is crushed to powder form, freighted along the Emu Bay railway to Burnie, and then exported to Japan for smelting. For many years, though, the mine dressed 90% of its ore on site prior to its being transported along the Abt railway to Regatta Point before shipping to the United States. Today the Mount Lyell mine covers thousands of hectares within a mountainous territory, at one end marked by Mount Lyell, and at the other Mount Owen, both forming the major features of the Great Western Range. Up until 1972 the cupriferous pyrite (copper ore) was mined by both the open-cut process and shaft mining. Today the copper ore is located in fahlbands (linear channels of pyritic ores in bands of schist) and solid ore aggregates, and is extracted solely by the underground methods of stope mining. ⁴

The ninety years of open-cut mining and the smelting of blister copper ('the average copper content was 98.8%')⁵ is perhaps the most outstanding example of how the landscape will never recover from an industrial activity. The sulphur and arsenic fumes from the smelters have wrought complete havoc to the nearby landscape, poisoning the peat, water and vegetation. The Mount Lyell landscape is commonly referred to as 'Tasmania's moonscape'. Defoliation, tree decline and dieback are directly attributable to the pyritic smelting processes of the past.

In the 1890s the new mining settlements of Queenstown and Penghana were open spaces surrounded by heavy, dense myrtle rainforests. The Mount Lyell Company and the North Mount Lyell Company used the forest resource as fuel to fire the furnaces without knowing the longer term consequences. In 1992 I am able to stand in the main street of Queenstown and gaze in a 360 degree direction without being able to see any substantial tree or vegetation on the landscape. This ninety year-old site reveals the layering of past events, hopes, ecological mismanagement and human disaster, but exhibits little evidence of individuals having benefited from the bounty of Tasmania's

abundant resources. The extensive mine works of Mount Lyell contain all the signifiers of a past endeavour: seeping mine shafts, mountains of rust-coloured overburden, the sole remaining weathered red brick smelting chimney standing as witness in a destroyed landscape, and millions of tonnes of black slag tipped in front of where the pyritic smelters once stood. From a micro point of view, the Mount Lyell minescape is littered with the parts of an old technology including the engine blocks of large recovery vehicles, twisted and broken small gauge railway track, half buried compressors and air tanks, silted water races, upturned rakes of rusting ore trucks, and old dilapidated storage sheds left to be washed away by the torrential winter rains.

Soil erosion on a spectacular scale has denied any hope of satisfactory reforestation. The exposed tree-stump roots of former rainforest giants testify the transformation of a stable, regenerative ecosystem to a desecrated, scarred territory. Rain on Mount Lyell brings sheets of water across the now exposed rock, down into the gullies where deeply cut drains carry the water, sulphuric acid and the remaining valley topsoil and tailings away to the King River. This once crystal clear mountain stream, noted for its rainbow trout, is now a poisoned industrial gutter which has silted up the lower reaches at Teepokana at the entrance to Macquarie Harbour.

The scale of the Mount Lyell copper mine dwarfs the operations of all other mines in Tasmania. The mine's mountainous topography is now lined by heavy duty roads constructed to service the fast dump trucks taking the copper ore from the tunnel sites of Prince Lyell, Crown Lyell and Cape Horn to the crushing plants. The underground mining processes of today seem to alter the landscape little in comparison with the wholesale movement of landforms by the open-cut benching and terracing methods. Open-cutting at Mount Lyell was the cheapest way of extracting the pyrites, even though more than one hundred million tonnes of over-burden and ore were removed from the Old Iron Blow and West Lyell open-cuts. The ore extraction methods of above-

ground mining have resulted in the devastation of the Mount Lyell mountain. Both open-cut cavities have resulted in the diminishing of flora and the absence of fauna. In addition, significant changes in the natural run-off of water to streams, uncontrolled patterns of soil erosion, rising of the water table, and the ever-increasing toxicity of the King and Queen rivers has brought chaos to what was once a landmark of great beauty for the early explorers. The deep, oval, stepped cavities of the Old Iron Blow and the West Lyell are permanent reminders of human abuse, neglect and avarice. Both open-cut sites, currently covering in excess of eight hundred hectares, have been abandoned and fenced off, in a sense protecting humans from their own actions. These useless, permanently scarred territories are now slowly filling with toxic, copper-saturated water.

The Mount Lyell mine has continued to operate throughout the past one hundred years, surviving the low world copper prices, economic recessions and exhausted ore deposits. Luckily, the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company has been able to locate additional schist-carrying pyritic ores, thus ensuring the mine's economic viability.

During the many times I have explored this still functional mine territory, I have always been consumed by the concept that contemporary miners are continually reminded of the past by the presence of signifiers. The entire Mount Lyell minescape space is an outdoor museum, containing the relics, remnants and tangible evidence that is the legacy of early exploiters. For example, the October 1912 Mount Lyell accident was a national disaster that shook the confidence of the mining industry in Australia. The North Mount Lyell Mine became the memorial where forty-two miners lost their lives in the drives at the 700 foot level through smoke inhalation. Eighty years on, the fateful North Mount Lyell shaft is now sealed and the concrete and wooden shift house where hundreds of men congregated before the changing of the shifts each day is a weather-worn, roofless ruin.

¹ M. Godfrey, *Waratah: Pioneer of the West*, Burnie, Municipality of Waratah, 1984, p. 84.

² A 'tributer' is a miner who has a sub-lease agreement with the original leaseholder and the government Department of Mines to work a small section of the original leasehold. Many of the original mining leases in Tasmania were for fifty years or more - (Tasmanian Department of Mines).

³ Robert Carl Sticht, an American metallurgist, was appointed the first general manager of the Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Co. in 1896. Sticht, a revered figure in international mining circles, died while still general Manager in 1922 - (Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company).

⁴ Stope mining - the underground method of caving in sections of ore to one collection point before being brought along drives and crosscuts to the main shaft for lifting to the surface. A form of open-cut mining carried out underground - (Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Company).

⁵ R. Sticht Esq., 'The Mt Lyell Mining and Railway Co Limited', The 1905 Annual Report, Zeehan School of Mines and Metallurgy, printed by *The Examiner and Weekly Courier*, Launceston, 1906, p. 65.

Chapter 4

Townscapes

To appreciate the nature of mining towns as they are today, it is necessary to understand the reasons why some vanished overnight, and others remained, albeit in a state of decline. In the West Country of Tasmania mining concerned itself with two basic endeavours - the search for precious metals such as gold and silver, and the extraction of minerals such as coal, copper, lead and tin.

The lure of gold attracted the individual and government alike. Gold brought the chance of instant wealth and potential security for the miner, and the opportunity for the Tasmanian government to pay off its mounting public debt. Owing to the poor economic conditions of the Colony, the population declined markedly. However, the discovery of precious and non-precious metals reversed this position almost immediately.

Apart from the goldmining town of Beaconsfield and the silver mining town of Zeehan, all mining towns in the northwest of Tasmania were principally established on the basis of non-precious minerals. During the late nineteenth century world demand for tin as a protective coating to mild steel, and copper as a conductor for electricity, brought substantial national and international investment in behind the 'boom' discoveries.¹ As a result, the discoveries of tin, lead and copper, as well as silver and gold in the West Country, brought about the spontaneous creation of syndicates, companies and government-backed mining ventures. The self-employed miner who worked his small claim was unable to compete effectively with the sophisticated industrial methods used by collectives financed by venture capitalists. In effect, the way in which the West Country of Tasmania was to be dealt with in the pursuit of profit was very much determined by the decisions taken in the boardrooms of London and Melbourne. The mining companies created industrial territories in the bush directly above the locus of expected

wealth. Within these territories the venture companies surveyed off reserves for the orderly establishment of settlement towns in support of the mines. The mining towns of the West Country provided much of the infrastructure for the mines - a skilled and semi-skilled work force, amenities, security for families, and a sense of place and community.

While the meaning of the term 'town' to the nineteenth century west coaster was synonymous with a freewheeling frontier spirit, opportunity, prosperity, civic pride, family life and mateship, these meanings could always be contrasted against another meaning - uncertainty. Uncertainty arose out of the fluctuating international demand for minerals, the payable extent of the mineral lode, and continuing stockmarket support for a mining company. An unproductive mine site would essentially mean the death of the adjacent town. The downturn in the market price of metals was the major reason for the demise of the West Country mining towns in the first thirty years of this century. All the while, production costs rose, including wages and salaries, and equipment replacement outlays. As a subsequence 'the river of mining capital dried, and that was both cause and effect of the decline.'² The Beaconsfield goldmine became the classic victim of falling gold prices, worker demands for higher wages that the company could not afford, and the reluctance of the English directors to outlay on new capital equipment to increase production. In the Editorial of the Launceston *Examiner* on August 13, 1912, it was reported that 'the log (the miners' log for wages and conditions of a forty-four hour week and an extra five shillings to the scheduled rate) would close up almost all the mines in Tasmania'. One year later the Tasmania Gold Mine at Beaconsfield closed. Organised worker demands for wage increases, dwindling profits, disinterest from investors in mining stocks ³ and 'a reduction in the grade of ore mined from one ounce per ton in 1903 to approximately half an ounce in 1913 saw the demise of both the mine and the town of Beaconsfield.'⁴ The Company's assets were realised and the town of Beaconsfield fell away to

obscurity. Over four thousand townspeople moved on. Today Beaconsfield is a remnant of a bygone era displaying all the signifiers of a past glory, hope and permanence in the landscape. Weatherbeaten, four-roomed, wooden miners' huts line streets which are now eroded and overgrown. The old double brick police station must have been a major building in the town - its substantial proportions, decorative architectural finishes, and proximity to the Tasmania Mine would have given a sense of confidence to the community. The post office building, where thousands of Beaconsfield residents farewelled its troops to World War I in 1914, is now dilapidated - suffering rising damp and a collapsed roof structure.⁵ The Mechanics' Institute and the Church of England hall, once places of community pride in presenting weekend entertainment and developing town spirit, sit neglected and silent, their interiors housing memories that I can only imagine. The extent of the surveyed and occupied spaces of the original Beaconsfield settlement bears little comparison to what exists now. Over the years the town parish boundary has withdrawn in around what once was the centre of the town - the crumbling, extravagant brick Edwardian architecture of the mighty Grubb and Hart shafts. Vacant housing blocks, marked by broken picket fences, overgrown with rank summer grass and blackberries, signify a human retreat from the landscape. The taking of the land in the first place exhibited symbolism of ownership. When the miners abandoned ('walked off') their housing blocks, ownership lapsed. The block was declared valueless. Through the passage of time these hundreds of blocks have been quietly repossessed by the natural forces of nature.

Most mining towns eventually pass out of existence. The mining towns of Argenton, Linda, Magnet, Dundas and Crotty, associated with my exploration, are either no more than names on a mining map, derelict, or in various stages of abandonment. Crotty, once a thriving town of nine hundred people in 1903, and set to ride on the portent of fortune from the North Mount

Lyell mine, became an 'overnight' victim of a Melbourne boardroom decision to amalgamate with the Mount Lyell Mining Company. The demise of this pioneer town set in the Western Range was aptly described by Geoffrey Blainey:

Buildings were chopped down for firewood or auctioned at mock prices; twelve huts sold for thirteen pounds and ten shillings the lot; a cottage and a church sold for twenty-six pounds ... a two storey brick hotel, complete except for verandah, was apparently abandoned before it had sold a pint of beer. ⁶

Today Crotty displays little evidence of past occupation. The town's territory has been retaken by nature with the faint remains of dray tracks criss-crossing the site giving clues to what may have been busy thoroughfares. Crotty only exists as a pinpoint on Department of Mines maps - it is no longer a physical reality in the landscape.

Unlike Crotty, the silver mining town of Dundas died slowly and gracefully. When the Maestri's and Comet mines closed, the community still believed a new find would eventuate. While the companies had departed, old miners scavenged for minerals such as gold and silver - they unwatered abandoned shafts and re-worked adits; mulloch heaps and tailing dumps were sifted; and new holes were sunk in the hope of finding a lost seam. The train to Zeehan was maintained and parliamentary representation remained. All the while the community believed in 'the new show', the town's physical appearance wasted.

During the last seventy years the Dundas space has undergone a softening process, a process activated by people gradually relinquishing occupancy of the town. Nature's re-shaping of the town's territory brings to an end the connection between possession, settlement, function, and abandonment. The ruins of Dundas are little known. The town site is well away from conventional roads and is not identified as a modern-day tourist

spectacle. In 1827 the surveyor Henry Hellyer described aspects of the country in the vicinity of Dundas (Surrey Hills) as being like 'a neglected old park.'⁷ As a modern day explorer of the same region, my perceptions are similar to those of Hellyer. While Hellyer could only assume how the landscape had reached this pristine state, my perceptions have been informed by the acts of a one hundred year European intervention in the landscape. The remains of Dundas lie scattered across a thirty hectare site, locked in a valley surrounded by high ridges coming off the slopes of Mount Dundas. No human structure rises up above the height of the bullrushes. Fallen walls of timber and corrugated iron make homes for hares and rabbits, the legacy of introduced species that the British felt would contribute to the notion of the pastoral environment. Settlers to the new frontier towns often brought familiar objects that would give them psychological comfort in their new setting. Dundas has a wide collection of European shrubs and trees that still stand as a living reminder to a previous community that came from somewhere else. The narrow main street of blue cobblestone is broken intermittently by potholes and erosion, and the side streets meander off into the bush. The few discernible backyard rubble piles reveal old blue medicine bottles, china shards with Staffordshire marks, beer bottles and oxidised cutlery pieces. The pervading silence in the Dundas reserve is one of calmness, order, and equanimity, enduring its own history like some ancient park.

Zeehan should have passed away forty years ago; however, successive state governments subsidised and propped up speculative ventures to maintain a town that has struggled to secure its existence. The glamorous, swashbuckling days of the silver boom years for Zeehan seem to have gone forever. Attempts to re-start the Oceana silver mine in the mid-1950s by Broken Hill Pty Ltd failed. Zeehan bears no resemblance to its once local title - Silver City of the West - a thriving, internationally recognised mining centre. The adjoining buildings of the Gaiety Theatre and the once sumptuous Grand

Hotel are decaying shells of what they once represented. The dado, wallpaper, lath and plaster walls, and ornate cornices and pilasters are water-stained from the inrush of winter storms. It is almost impossible to believe that this is where Dame Nellie Melba once came to stay and perform.

The neglected, almost treeless residential reserves of Zeehan around the derelict Silver King and Silver Queen mines, and along Argent Flat tell of exhaustion, human failure and resignation. The eeriness of the half-burnt Huon pine graves in the cemetery speak of forgotten families, young deaths and terrible accidents in the mines. Nature's rehabilitation of the landscape seems to be at a standstill given that one hundred years ago these flats were covered with stately myrtle and sassafras forests. In amongst the brambles, blackberries, swamp tussocks and bracken fern sit rows of dilapidated cottages. Once the homes of miners, navvies, smelter hands, quarry men and shop owners, these shabby structures now symbolise a lost cause. The unlocked swinging doors and shutters of abandoned cottages bang in the wind, and the twisted, rusted, corrugated roof iron creaks from the weight of collapsed rafters. Some of the cottages remain occupied; however a sense of personal pride seems absent. In the boom years Zeehanites were proud of their gardens of roses and dahlias, and also boasted their skills in topiary. Today the gardens are unkept and overgrown; the fences are down, giving free-range nourishment to goats and sheep. The rush by hundreds of pioneer miners to secure possession and ownership of building blocks on 'Pegging Day' in 1890 now seems to be unimportant to remaining present-day inhabitants of Zeehan.

Notwithstanding government efforts to maintain Zeehan as a mining town and a tourist town, its fate has been pre-determined. Zeehan is the destination of the occasional tourist, a public spectacle, a site where the reality of 'now' is used in an attempt to draw mental constructs of the past. The town is devoid of spirit, there is a pervasive sense of dejection that is enveloped by

a disquieting silence, a silence unbroken by nature's sounds. The old bluestone cairn which marked and celebrated Frank Long's discovery of silver and the beginning of settlement in 1882, has now become an epitaph to a forsaken Zeehan.

¹ John Temple, *Mining: An International History*, London, Ernest Benn Limited, 1972, p. 129.

² Geoffrey Blainey, *The Rush that Never Ended*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1981, p. 289.

³ 'National and International investment interest in Australian mining, particularly Tasmanian fields waned considerably in the second decade of the twentieth century. Australian investors were attracted to the new highly profitable tin mines in Malaysia. In addition, investors became attracted to the industrial stocks as the Australian government had introduced high tariff barriers in order to protect local urban manufacturing.' Geoffrey Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended*, p. 289-90.

⁴ Janet Kerrison, *Beaconsfield Gold*, 2nd edn, Launceston, Telegraph Printery Pty Ltd, 1973, p.40.

⁵ Coultman Smith, *Town With a History*, Beaconsfield, Tasmania, West Tamar Historical Committee, 1985, p. 74.

⁶ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, 4th edn, Melbourne University Press, 1978, p. 159.

⁷ Frank Ellis (ed), *Venturing Westward*, Government Printer, Hobart, Tasmania, 1987, p. 30.

SECTION II

HOW WE GOT THERE

Chapter 5

An Historical Exploration

I have always been impressed by Margaret Atwood's comment, 'part of where you are is where you've been.'¹ My historical exploration has been prompted by this statement, which brings to mind the generations of European Tasmanians who were a significant force in shaping the 'now' of the West Country of Tasmania.

To me the 'now' is an everchanging reality, moving in a linear progression and leaving behind the past in the form of memories. The product of the 'now' is shaped by the past. The subject of my creative investigation, the West Country of Tasmania, starkly illustrates how natural states, human behaviour, and the events and industry of times past have contributed to its present state. The significance of what exists today can only be fully appreciated by examining the past through documented and oral histories. My own four-year documentation (notes, sketches, photographs and interviews) has been considerably augmented by the recorded histories of those who explored, mined and lived in that region.

My historical exploration has helped to develop my ideas and answer my questions concerning the nature of the landscape. These questions relate to my perception of reality, and the parts of that reality which I have selected to interpret in visual form. The historical exploration, then, establishes a foundation, a direct and indirect connection with the country of my research. This historical exploration does not embody history as a strict chronology; instead, it isolates significant events from the more distant past. These past events and my interpretation of their histories contribute to the imaginative exploration: the making of the ceramic work itself.

November 24, 1992 is the 350th anniversary of the discovery of Tasmania: the anniversary of the beginning of European history on this island. Landfall took place on the coast of the West Country, thereby laying the

foundation for European occupation. There is little doubt that the West Country of Tasmania is very different today from what it was when Europeans first ventured into it.

Eastern Van Diemen's Land was settled in an orderly manner. Roads were constructed linking Hobart Town and Launceston to enable the occupation of the farming blocks and stock runs. New acreages of farming land immediately beyond the boundaries of existing holdings were surveyed. Settlement fanned out from two epicentres - Hobart Town and Launceston. In the west, by comparison, the nature of the terrain, the type of vegetation, the inaccessibility of the coast and the variations of soils made the West Country settlement a chaotic and haphazard one. Various individuals, groups of people and mining and pastoral companies imposed themselves on to the West Country, naming places and delineating territories as a means of establishing 'ownership'. Their place names (such as Surrey Hills and Heemskirk) and boundaries signified European possession, and the changes they wrought contributed to the altered state of the landscape today.

Aborigines had always been part of the country. For several thousands of years the West Country and the northern part of Van Diemen's Land were part of their tribal hunting ground. History tells us that the original inhabitants were decimated by European settlers. My interpretation is that the British crown and its servants displayed a callous disregard for the Aborigines and their culture. To the Aborigines the land offered a spiritual connection to 'self'. Europeans, on the other hand, viewed the land as a commodity to be possessed and exploited: as a means for individuals to acquire wealth. The Aborigines, both physical and spiritual caretakers of the West Country, were itinerant hunters and gatherers, and lived by the seasons. Their nomadic lifestyle altered the landscape little as they moved freely through the bush, along the coastal fringes and into the plains country. Conversely, Europeans

occupied delineated spaces in permanent or semi-permanent territories which had a substantial impact on the ecosystem.

The concepts of possession, 'progress' and profiteering were uppermost in the minds of free settlers, and echoed the imperial policies of the Mother Country. The original notion of Van Diemen's Land as a distant colonial repository for recalcitrant convicts was soon displaced by more 'respectable' ambitions. The island produced abundant timber, wool and minerals, and the export of these primary resources was of mutual benefit to the Colony and Britain.

The documented history of experiences and settlement by West Country pioneers is scant, given the number of individuals who went there in search of wealth. Most of the piners who worked in the Port Davey, Franklin River and Macquarie Harbour regions were either illiterate, or did not bother with written records, and their oral histories often died with them. Similarly, much of the exploration undertaken by prospectors, fossickers and alluvial miners has gone unrecorded. Although several of these pioneers kept journals or diaries, or made their own maps, because of the fear of claim-jumping, this information was held as private research material and rarely shared with others.

My historical exploration has largely depended upon the formal reports, maps and narratives of employees of the government and private enterprise. These documents were provided by official surveyors, geologists, mine managers, newspaper journalists and company secretaries. In retrospect their histories seem exaggerated and prejudiced, largely because of a buoyed-up sense of adventure and the desire to succeed in a country that was extremely isolated, and that was regarded by Europeans as an adversary.

The West Country was generally perceived by its pioneers as pristine, vacant, and without a history of any consequence. As far as the early European settlers were concerned, their experiences as colonisers and

settlers marked the beginning of the history of Tasmania. This self-centred and proprietorial attitude towards history denied the existence of, and epitomised the lack of acceptance of, the Tasmanian Aborigine. It also reinforced the alienation of the Europeans from the country they inhabited.

¹ Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, Toronto, Anansi, 1972, p. 112.

Chapter 6

Early Sea and Land Explorers

Abel Janszoon Tasman sighted and named Van Diemen's Land in November 1642. The Governor-General of the Dutch East India Company at Batavia, Anthony Van Diemen, organised the grand expedition that would map the remaining unknown part of the world. Tasman was to sail from Batavia to Mauritius, progress south to latitude 54 degrees south, and then sail east until the sighting of 'The Great South Land'.¹ One hundred and fifty years later a navigator, Matthew Flinders, decided to name the two mountains that Tasman had seen on his arrival after Tasman's ships. Both Heemskirk and Zeehan were to play a major part in the mineral boom of Tasmania in the 1880s. The Dutch explorer believed he may have landed on what was to be called 'The Great South Land', a continent of immense wealth that navigators believed existed somewhere in the South Seas. Even though this voyage of exploration only touched on the shores of Van Diemen's Land once or twice, the reported view was that the land was not of great value. ² In 1798 George Bass and Matthew Flinders set out to cross Bass Strait in an attempt to circumnavigate Van Diemen's Land, thus proving that it was an island and not part of mainland Australia. Flinders' report of the journey was not very impressive because he felt the west coast of Van Diemen's Land was inhospitable, dreary, always wet, and very difficult on which to land a small boat.³ From the accounts of Abel Tasman and Bass and Flinders it would seem that their exploration of this part of Van Diemen's Land was essentially a coastal exploration. There seems to have been little opportunity for these explorers to land, and they did not stay long enough to explore the country close to the coastline. Both Tasman and Flinders indicated in their journals that there appeared to be life on the west coast. They had seen smoke rising to the sky, and when they landed, they saw signs of old campsites.⁴

Van Diemen's Land was not settled until 1803. However, nineteenth century fears that the French would soon send an exploration team to the South Seas in search of new territory hastened settlement and colonisation. Van Diemen's Land was formally colonised as a British penal settlement by Lieutenant-Governor Collins in 1804 at Sullivans Cove. Ten years elapsed before any attention was paid to the west coast and its hinterland, the West Country. This whole area of land remained totally ignored, unexplored, and of no interest to the colonisers of Van Diemen's Land.

It was through the exploits of James Kelly, a master mariner, adventurer, sealer and later a personality in Hobart Town, and his special relationship with Thomas Birch who owned several sailing boats in Hobart Town, that the west coast of Van Diemen's Land became more widely known in the 1820s. During the period of 1815 and 1816 James Kelly, with four companions, circumnavigated Van Diemen's Land in the opposite direction from that taken by Bass and Flinders nineteen years earlier. Kelly was given credit for the discovery of Port Davey (subsequently disputed) and Macquarie Harbour. Port Davey is an outstanding waterway, and for many years was known for its high yield of Huon pine. Many piners spent years working in that region, cutting and exporting logs to Hobart Town.

Kelly was a true adventurer. His most important discovery, Macquarie Harbour, which he named after Lachlan Macquarie, proved to be one of advantage for the Van Diemen's Land administration for two reasons: firstly, Macquarie Harbour was lined with great stands of Huon pine; and secondly, the waterway became that desperate outpost of a harsh penal settlement known as Sarah Island, where over 350 convicts were sent. Kelly and his party were the first Europeans to explore this magnificent harbour; a harbour larger than Sydney Harbour; a harbour seemingly protected by the unpredictable seas to the west, and the towering mountains of Mount Sorell,

Frenchman's Cap and the soon to be ravaged Mount Lyell and Mount Owen to the east.

James Kelly's relationship with the Aborigines seems to have been rather circumspect. We are told about the enormous fires and smoke that were created by the Aborigines in their hunt for game. On some occasions, Kelly said, there was so much smoke that it was difficult for their small party to navigate through the headwaters of Macquarie Harbour. Kelly also explained that the smoke may well have provided protection for his party, as he believed they were less than safe in these surrounds, even though they had earlier made contact and exchanged goods in barter with the Aborigines. The main purpose of this expedition was not really to map the west coast, but was an attempt by Kelly and his patron Thomas Birch to uncover opportunities that may well add to their wealth and prosperity. Therefore with an eye to profit, they were able to report that there were large stands of Huon pine growing on the banks of the Harbour at Port Davey and Macquarie Harbour. The administration of Van Diemen's Land rewarded Kelly and Birch by giving them a year's exclusive rights to Huon pine cutting in the lower western part of Van Diemen's Land. It was then in 1816 that timber harvesting really began. While Kelly was a privateer and his main interest was in locating potential wealth for himself and Thomas Birch, his view of exploration differed somewhat from that which was required by the administration of Van Diemen's Land.

In 1824 Lieutenant-Governor William Sorell commissioned Captain James Hobbs, Royal Navy, to undertake another circumnavigation of Van Diemen's Land. However, this official exploration was to be far more detailed and was to be undertaken with a view to satisfying the requirements of the Lieutenant-Governor. Some of these requirements concerned locating safe harbours, tracts of land that may well be suitable for settlement and grazing, fresh water supplies, and quality soils. Captain Hobbs took with him thirteen men in two small whale boats. Twelve of the men were sentenced convicts,

and for their part in the success of this expedition were to be later granted tickets-of-leave.

The strategy of Hobbs's expedition was to work in two ways: firstly, the expedition was to travel in two whale-boats, and secondly, when opportunities presented themselves, the party was to go ashore and explore the country close to the shoreline. The whale-boats, being small, were subject to the turbulent seas, gales and storms that often came during their five-month trip. On the other hand, the size of these tiny vessels allowed the men to carry the boats over sand-bars and across rapids, so that a deeper exploration of the land near the sea could take place. One of Hobbs's most productive experiences came at the Pieman River, where his party took the small whale-boats up over the sand-bar that Captain Kelly had had difficulty in crossing, and then, in the whale-boats, rowed twenty-four kilometres up the Pieman River to Wyatts River junction. Potential grazing land was not to be found anywhere; however Hobbs was able to report that the banks of the river abounded with pine of the very best quality. He also reported that there were good stands of myrtle, eucalypt and blackwood. Over all, it seems his prime concern was the location of suitable grazing lands, but he believed that the land was sterile and that it was sterile as far as the eye could see.⁵

Perhaps the most significant exploration of the times was a *de facto* exploration in 1828. The exploration began from a constructed physical and mental territory in the west across unknown physical space to the eastern settled parts of Van Diemen's Land. The physical territory was Sarah Island, the infamous penal settlement on Macquarie Harbour, and the explorers were the convicts Goodwin and Connelly:

Macquarie Harbour is associated exclusively with remembrance of inexpressible depravity, degradation and woe. Sacred to the genius of torture, nature concurred with the objects of its

separation from the rest of the world; to exhibit some notion of a perfect misery. There man lost the aspect and the heart of man! ⁶

Sarah Island, the main base for the convict settlement on Macquarie Harbour, was a black place. The penal territory was established in 1822, and remained functional until 1834. Macquarie Harbour was reserved for the worst convicts - usually second offenders. It was regarded as hell on earth and was subjected to the most extreme weather conditions. The Sarah Island settlement was locked away in a part of the Macquarie Harbour from where it was believed that no escape could take place. Convicts attempting escape would have to confront the western wilderness of high, snow-covered mountains, dense, rain-forested areas and open, stony plains. The prospect of a successful escape must have seemed improbable to the convict, and yet his frightening and desperate life at Sarah Island would have given hope for the success of such a venture. James Goodwin and Thomas Connelly had acquired some local knowledge and bush experience which aided the planning of their great escape. They also knew that there had been several escape attempts over the years, and that one or two had been successful. They would have known of the notorious Alexander Pearce, who spent several weeks in the western part of Van Diemen's Land attempting to make his escape, and that towards the end of the ordeal, he was forced to eat the flesh of his own accomplices. As well, there was the documented trip of the convict Jimmy the Pieman, who also survived on the flesh of his accomplices.

While there are records of convicts who made successful escapes from Macquarie Harbour, there were also many who were not successful in making the crossing over the mountains to eastern Van Diemen's Land. The notorious Jack the Savage, a prospector in the 1870s, discovered the skeleton of a convict, in leg irons, wrapped around the roots of a large tree. Making an escape from Sarah Island was extremely difficult as the waters were usually freezing and fast-running. Once ashore, the escaped convict then had to set

about making a passage through the almost impenetrable scrub and forests, over the mountains, or south along the coast, or north towards what is now known as the Pieman River (named after the convict Jimmy the Pieman). Goodwin and Connelly were no different from many of the other convicts who were sent to Macquarie Harbour as a stiffer sentence. Goodwin was a farm labourer in England before he came to Hobart Town, and Connelly was a gunlock filer from Dublin who arrived in 1819 with a seven year sentence. Both men had been at Macquarie Harbour for over a year before they actually planned their escape.⁷ Therefore both of them had become accustomed to the very harsh climate and working conditions with which they had to contend. Both convicts worked in a logging gang away from Sarah Island, up the Gordon River, near the lime kilns. The logging gang, whose job it was to bring the Huon pine logs out of the forested areas down to Sarah Island for dressing, camped at the side of the Gordon River. In many ways these convicts were more favoured than the convicts who remained on Sarah Island. They were given bigger rations than the normal convicts and they were able to take these rations as they pleased. As well as that, all the convicts who worked up and down the Gordon River pining had gathered extensive knowledge of the forests and terrain around that area. In addition, Goodwin knew something of the bush from his previous work with the surveyor Thomas Scott, and had travelled well into the high plains south of Great Lake.⁸ Both men had planned their escape carefully, choosing to go in mid-March when the rivers were low. The streams were not running against them as much as they would be in winter, and the climate was not as cold as it would be in August and September. This escape was planned in two sections. First of all, both Connelly and Goodwin would use a canoe for part of their journey. The canoe was used to paddle the first fifty miles to the upper reaches of the Gordon River, where the major tributary, the Franklin, joined. Setting aside the main danger of being spotted by the soldiers, the other dangers were that they

would become exhausted from paddling against the stream, and also that they would run out of stores. The men abandoned their canoe at the tributary and set out on foot towards Rasselas Valley. Moving east, they had a long climb to the northern end of the Prince of Wales Range where they were able to see the prominent peak of Wyld's Craig, which is one of the most prominent mountains in the State. Wyld's Craig was also known to Goodwin in the days when he worked for Scott the surveyor. Goodwin believed that he was able to pick a direct passage to the outlying stock runs of St Patrick's Plains. Goodwin's account, in his dictated report of this very difficult part of the trip showed that:

the road to the peak was very bad, very scrubby, a great deal of Stringy Bark and Myrtles and a great many vines, such as us called grape vines at Macquarie Harbour. The road up the peak was almost impassable, we however reached the top of the tier close to the peak on the day after we left the River Gordon.⁹

In Goodwin's account of the Rasselas Valley, he reported that:

There was excellent feed of all kinds upon it and plenty of kangaroo grass; we saw a number of wattle, stringy bark, gum and Huon pine trees, around about the plain. The River Gordon was about sixty yards wide, very deep and running strong towards the south west. We stopped there between three and four days, we caught some fish which weighed about four ounces each, they were like trout; we saw plenty of kangaroo upon the plain; and a great many natives.¹⁰

Goodwin and Connelly's escape brought them into contact with the Aborigines of the West Country. Their contact was such that they were able to relieve two small bands of Aborigines of food. There was no conflict. There was more of a fear of the two convicts on the Aborigines' part. The fear was such that the Aboriginal parties dropped the food that they were carrying. Both

convicts then set upon the food to help sustain them for the remainder of the trip. By this stage of colonisation in Van Diemen's Land, white antagonism, fear and suspicion of the Aborigines had developed. The supposition is that, if both men had made a friendly approach to the Aborigines, they may well have been in a more advantageous position. However, in such a difficult situation, neither Connelly nor Goodwin was willing to trust the Aborigines.¹¹

The nature of the West Country was such that both men were forced to move very slowly, some days moving no more than a mile or two. On many occasions both convicts were forced to move in a backwards direction before they were able to make any advancement across the terrain.¹² They had to cope with a series of marshy valleys, button grass, horizontal scrub and stands of eucalypt and rainforest. As well, the rocky and mountainous nature of the terrain made it extremely difficult to take sightings that would enable travel in a straight direction. Finally, after four weeks of travelling from Macquarie Harbour, both men made it to a stock hut near the River Ouse. This was the furthest settled area towards the west coast and marked the boundary between eastern and western Van Diemen's Land. Goodwin and Connelly were, in fact, unofficial explorers. As escaped convicts they had made their way into unfamiliar territory that had not been traversed before by white people. These men were not the first to cross from Macquarie Harbour to the eastern part of Van Diemen's Land, but this particular trip was quite significant in that it was undertaken by a natural bushman, Goodwin. Goodwin had worked with the surveyor Scott, so his knowledge was that of a person familiar with the landscape, who also had an understanding of and empathy with the country. His dictated report covered information concerning fauna and flora, rivers and water catchment areas, and the natural beauty of the country. Goodwin was also able to relate information about the types of timber on the ridges, dimensions of trees, and the quality of soils. The de facto four-week exploration was about the perception of an uncharted, pristine landscape in

extraordinary circumstances. The real importance of Goodwin's account lies very much in his impressions of the West Country rather than the accuracy of the finer details. Both Goodwin and Connelly were illiterate, and no diaries or journals were kept. This had some bearing on the fact that 'Goodwin's report was later shown not to be as accurate as he had first reported.'¹³ However, it had a special significance in the development of western Van Diemen's Land by showing that it was possible to make the trip overland from the Gordon River across the high mountain ridges, saddles and valleys to the plains of Ouse which, by that time, had been settled as stock runs. It was now possible, as these men had proven, that the physical and psychological barrier between the east and west could be opened by track. As a consequence, grazing and pasture lands could exist to the west of the Derwent Valley.¹⁴ Goodwin's account was particularly important to the colonial administration of Van Diemen's Land as all available land in the eastern regions of the Colony was being quickly claimed by free settlers and pardoned convicts. New grazing lands had to be found. Goodwin and Connelly's escape and subsequent report gave a new dimension to the nature of exploration in Van Diemen's Land. The Survey Department took a new interest in the West Country, particularly the area stretching from Mount Humboldt to Lake Gordon, Lake Pedder and the Arthur Range in the south.

¹ A. Tasman. *Abel Tasman's Journal 1642*, facsimile edn, Amsterdam, Frederik Muller and Co, 1898, p. 4.

² John West, *The History of Tasmania*, London & Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1981, p. 16.

³ M. Flinders, *Observations on the Coasts of Van Diemen's Land*, facsimile edn, Sydney, Form Printers, 1946, p. 39.

⁴ Tasman, *Journal*, p. 15.

⁵ Kerry Pink, *West Coast Story*, Burnie, West Coast Pioneers' Memorial Museum, 1984, p.34.

⁶ West, *History*, p. 395.

⁷ C.J. Binks, *Explorers of Western Tasmania*, Launceston, Mary Fisher Bookshop, 1980, p. 34.

⁸ Binks, *Explorers*, p. 34.

⁹ Archives Office of Tasmania, Details of Goodwin's Record CON 31/15, SC 41/1, ESO 1/403/9106, CSO 1/276/6658.

¹⁰ Archives Office of Tasmania, Details of Goodwin's Record CON 31/15, SC 41/1, ESO 1/403/9106, CSO 1/276/6658.

¹¹ Binks, *Explorers*, p. 35.

¹² Archives Office of Tasmania, Details of Goodwin's Record CON 31/15, SC 41/1, ESO 1/403/9106, CSO 1/276/6658.

¹³ Binks, *Explorers*, p. 36.

¹⁴ An account of Goodwin's and Connelly's capture and Goodwin's later exploits can be found in Archives Office of Tasmania, Record CON 31/15, CSO 1/403/9106, CSO 1/276/6658.

Chapter 7

Surveyors

Prior to 1828 little exploration had been undertaken by the Survey Department. The Survey Department's main task up until that time was the parcelling of land into small grants. By the mid 1820s most of the vast tracts of native grasslands and wooded hills of the drier, milder eastern half of the Colony, which was ideal for cropping and grazing sheep, had already been distributed to retired or serving officers, to free settlers, and to a lesser degree, pardoned convicts. A study of Thomas Scott's 1824 map of Van Diemen's Land clearly indicates that nothing was known of the West Country. This part of the country existed only as unfamiliar territory. Scott's work was widely regarded as the most authoritative carried out in Van Diemen's Land. The map shows the West Country as a blank with only two sections showing survey details - Port Davey and Macquarie Harbour.

Lieutenant-Governor Sorrell (1817-1824) was generous in his dispersal of land grants to settlers. When Governor George Arthur arrived in 1824 he also believed that there would be sufficient land for all settlers. Arthur was a hard-headed bureaucrat and his view was that there should be controlled settlement of pastures throughout Van Diemen's Land. However, he was also aware that all available surveyed blocks had been taken up by landholders and that new land had to be found.

In 1824 a new phenomenon was to shape Arthur's view of the distribution of land grants to individuals. The famous Van Diemen's Land Company, which still operates today, was formed in London as a capitalist venture with the intention of raising fine woolled sheep in Van Diemen's Land for the cloth industry in England. The Van Diemen's Land Company, which had a nominal start-up capital of one million pounds, accrued through its wealthy directors and with support from the Bank of England, had one

intention in mind, and that was profit. The strategy was to request a grant of 500 000 acres in Van Diemen's Land through the Colonial Office in London. The Company expected to select land in the best parts of Van Diemen's Land, which at that time were considered to be in the southern section of the island and the midland areas. However, after a protracted argument between the Colonial Office, the Van Diemen's Land Company, and Governor Arthur, it was decided that the Van Diemen's Land Company could select land in the north western part of Van Diemen's Land. (It should be remembered that at this time there was little knowledge of the land in the West Country of Van Diemen's Land.) Arthur believed that no large company should come to the Colony and take vast acreages of high quality land that was already divided up into small parcels for new settlers. The Colonial Office in London sought the advice of William Sorrell, the former Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land. The original request of 500 000 acres was subsequently modified to a smaller grant of 250 000 acres.

The entry into Van Diemen's Land by the Van Diemen's Land Company triggered off what was to become the first major official survey of the territory in the West Country. Although Governor Arthur was interested in the exploration and survey of new arable lands, he was not interested in exploration of the West Country towards Macquarie Harbour and Port Davey. Arthur preferred to keep that corner of the country closed, thus protecting the idea that the Macquarie Harbour penal settlement was the harshest of its kind in the world. The Van Diemen's Land Company established itself at Circular Head on the north west coast of Van Diemen's Land. Almost immediately Kerr, the Secretary of the Company, employed a number of surveyors, agriculturalists and explorers to seek out suitable grazing lands for sheep. Between 1826 and 1832 the Van Diemen's Land Company carried out an exploration and survey programme of great energy that was in keeping with the objectives of the Company back in the English board-rooms. The exploration teams worked in

a region where no white person had set foot before. Small tribes of Aborigines inhabited the region, and because the forests were so difficult to move through, the Aborigines had spent most of their time on the coastal fringes and grassy plains. While the surveyors' first task was to discover new pastoral lands, they also mapped the country, surveyed the features of the landscape and importantly, gave names to landmarks. The Company's most celebrated surveyors were the Englishmen Henry Hellyer, Joseph Fossey, and Jorgen Jorgenson. All three men had come 12 000 miles from a vastly different landscape to one that was the remotest and one of the most inhospitable regions of the known world. Their attitude to and practice of surveying would have been formed by very different elements within the British landscape setting: elements such as shallow brooks, rounded hills, open grass plains, gentle rolling countryside and forests with little understorey.

Henry Hellyer was the Van Diemen's Land Company's chief architect and surveyor. He arrived at Circular Head in 1826 with the advance party of indentured employees and the first shipload of livestock. Hellyer was an accomplished artist and enjoyed the natural beauty of the picturesque. However, as history was to show, he proved to be a poor judge of pastoral country. Hellyer's impressive verbal reports, diaries and sketches of undulating pastures and pleasant parklands were to influence the pragmatic Edwin Kerr, Secretary of the Van Diemen's Land Company.

On 5th February, 1827, Hellyer undertook his most important journey of exploration into the West Country of Van Diemen's Land. His party comprised five men, three pack-horses, and two dogs. The dogs were to be used to catch game and help supplement the rations that were carried by the pack-horses for the two-week journey. Hellyer planned to travel south from Rocky Cape to Mount Dipwood, and from there to travel in a south-easterly direction hoping to discover suitable pastoral lands. When the party reached Mount Dipwood, Hellyer soon realised that it would be impossible to take the pack-horses and

the dogs any further. The view from Mount Dipwood showed rolling sweeps of myrtle forests cut every now and again by what appeared to be fast-running streams in the valleys. Hellyer took a bearing on this open country and planned to set a course towards a distant peak which he was later to name St Valentine's Peak. From Mount Dipwood, three men including Hellyer set out on foot to explore and map the country on the line of the new bearing that was taken. During the next five days the men struggled against the elements - the weather, the terrain and the dense forest.

Henry Hellyer's journal provides a colourful insight into the hardships of the journey:

The surface soil is actually rank with constantly decaying vegetable matter; its scent is quite disagreeable, and the air in these dense forests is putrid and oppressive, and swarms with mosquitos and large stinging flies the size of English bees. Daylight is completely shut by masses of foliage impervious to the rays of the sun. Myrtle is the principal timber throughout this district: its appearance, as to a rough bark and thick foliage, very much resembles the elm; but there are no elms equal to these gigantic trees, being in general from 150 to 200 feet in height, and from 30 to 40 feet in circumference. We were not able to forc   our way on five hundred yards in an hour in some of these horrid scrubs. I was glad I did not attempt to bring the horses on any further.¹

From St Valentine's peak Hellyer and his party were the first to view the rugged hinterland of western Van Diemen's Land, a vista of craggy mountain ranges disappearing into the distant horizon. Hellyer was able to see the Farrell Range and the Murchison to the south, the awe-inspiring peaks of the Cradle Mountain country to the east, and Mount Bischoff and Mount Cleveland (future sites of mineral resource extraction) to the west. The greatest prospect,

however, was the land stretching mile after mile before them at the foot of St Valentine's Peak. Hellyer was convinced this would be ideal country for the Van Diemen's Land Company to graze sheep. Hellyer inscribed the name 'Surrey Hills' into a large, conspicuous tree, the name of the same country in England of which it reminded him. Hellyer said in his report:

The plains resemble English enclosures in many respects being bounded by brooks between each, with belts of beautiful shrubs in every vale, including blue leaf tea-tree, box, sassafras, blackwood, woodpear, birch, sloe-leaf, musk holly, celery top pine, and myrtle. The whole country here is grassy.²

Further on in his report Hellyer noted that 'the grassy hills and knolls resemble a neglected old park; a thousand to fifteen hundred acres in each patch, without a tree except a few clumps of blackwood'.³

Slightly to the north and west of Surrey Hills Hellyer named a large tract of land of similar quality 'Hampshire Hills'. In his mind they appeared even more park-like than the Surrey Hills. There was no doubt that stumbling across these open, grassy territories of several square miles provided a welcome relief to the dark rain-forest, horizontal scrub and mountainous terrain. Hellyer made mention of indirect contact with the Aborigines, commenting that several times during their travels through Surrey Hills and Hampshire Hills they had come across tracks made by the Aborigines. There was evidence of bark hunting from the eucalypts, what appeared to be old camp-sites, and signs of fires made by the Aborigines to herd game out from the tall grass. Hellyer's description of this area as a kind of ancient parkland which was the home of Aborigines would, from that time onwards, be in conflict with another function, a function devised by Europeans.

Ironically, when Hellyer mapped the western boundary of the huge Surrey Hills allotment, he was unaware that only two miles west was Mount Bischoff which, some fifty years later, was to become the greatest tin mine in

the world. Unfortunately, Hellyer's glowing report of Surrey and Hampshire Hills proved incorrect and was an abject failure as sheep-raising country. The very harsh climate and the flukey seasonal changes proved too severe for the raising of pure-bred sheep imported to establish the Company's flocks.

Another key explorer who was contracted to the Van Diemen's Land Company was Jorgen Jorgensen, an assigned convict. Jorgensen's role was not so much to discover new pastoral lands for the Company, but instead to discover a new stock route overland from the south-east of Van Diemen's Land to the principal locations of the Company's lands near Circular Head.⁴ 'Jorgensen and his party of three were instructed to travel along the Shannon River to St Patrick's Plains and then on to the Great Lake and the West Country beyond'.⁵ Jorgensen's 1826 journey proved disappointing. The party had made several attempts to go beyond the Walls of Jerusalem, but were forced back each time by the weather and by the nature of the terrain. On travelling across the central plateau, Jorgensen believed that his journey had been worthwhile because he had discovered what he regarded as very profitable lands for the Van Diemen's Land Company as a staging post for herding the sheep. He reported that:

the size and fatness of the game proves that the same food would be excellent for sheep and cattle....These plains, without a shadow of doubt the most extensive in the country, bounded by hills, a river flowing in the middle of them, and adjacent to the lakes, furnish a fine and in many parts luxuriant prospect.⁶

Jorgensen was at great pains to describe the landscape that he had crossed in Romantic terms such as 'truly picturesque', 'magnificent', 'high snowy mountains', 'bounding vast plains' and 'sweeping mountain ridges'. The scenery Jorgensen and his party had seen was not tempered by an analytical study of the potential function of the country. As it turned out, Jorgensen's journey across the plateau did not profit the Van Diemen's Land

Company. No practical stock route had been found, and the grassy pastures claimed by Jorgensen as highly desirable proved to be second-grade country and highly subject to poor seasonal weather conditions. Jorgensen's and Hellyer's tracks became known to a succession of exploration teams and provided initial pathways to new discoveries. The major failing of both explorers was their inability to see the landscape as it really was. Their perception was influenced by a more Romantic inclination. When secretary Kerr wrote an account of Mr Hellyer's character for the directors of the Van Diemen's Land Company he said:

His geese are all swans. He looks more at scenery than at land or grass and his prejudices are insurmountable. No arguments, or facts either, can ever convince him that he has made too flattering an estimate of his discoveries...He would have mansions where I have cottages.⁷

The Van Diemen's Land explorers were essentially well educated Englishmen who had a deep love for their own country and attempted to draw those experiences to the new land. Hellyer, for example, saw his Surrey Hills in much the same light as the soft, gently undulating countryside of the southern counties in England. He saw Surrey Hills as an ordered, open estate surrounded by an inhospitable terrain. This fulfilled a Romantic vision of great wealth in a hitherto unexplored space.

In 1828 George Franklin was appointed Surveyor-General in Van Diemen's Land. Franklin's approach was to spend every effort in attempting to initiate the trigonometrical survey of all that land west of the central plateau of Van Diemen's Land. This meant the incorporation of the discoveries of the Van Diemen's Land Company as well as the finds made by expeditions from the Survey Department. Franklin's appointment as Surveyor-General specifically designated that his energies should be spent on 'exploration, mapping and assessment of the island's resources, geology and other natural

features.⁸ Franklin became fascinated with the escape of the two convicts Goodwin and Connelly from Macquarie Harbour. He became particularly interested in Goodwin's verbal description of the route that was taken from Macquarie Harbour around Frenchman's Cap, across the high country and then down into the area of Ouse. Goodwin had told of open pasture lands, which was of some interest to Franklin, as the administration of the day was in search of new pasture lands to establish settlement. In 1832 W.S. Sharland was appointed as Surveyor to lead a team in an attempt to retrace Goodwin and Connelly's route. The primary purpose of the expedition was to discover a route from Ouse across the central plateau to Frenchman's Cap and then across to Macquarie Harbour. As with all surveyors and explorers before him, the push into this unfamiliar territory of Van Diemen's Land was to be a slow, tortuous one. Once across the Franklin River, Sharland's party was to experience the dark, wet, virgin forest of the valley floor. Sharland refers to the giant man-ferns 'which throw out so much foliage at the tops and are so close together that, on penetrating, it exactly resembles entering a dark room - the sun's rays being always totally excluded.'⁹ The travelling was very slow, and at some points the party was able to take advantage of the recent fires that had been through the region. Sharland notes in his report:

The whole of this ground had been burnt, apparently immediately before the late snow, and, I conclude, by the natives. The valley had the appearance, at a distance, of undergoing all the various processes of agriculture, - some parts (the most recently burnt) looking like freshly ploughed fields; and again, other parts possessing the most beautiful verdure from the sprouting of young grass and rushes.¹⁰

Sharland's other objective was to locate suitable pastures. At Aloddon Plains, where the Aborigines had burnt the long, rank grass, Sharland's route crossed what was the final point in an escape bid by convicts from Macquarie

Harbour. They found the skeletons of three convicts. The region was virtually impenetrable. Sharland's insight into the country as an adversary was evident in his report:

Some of the most dense thickets I ever saw, consisting of cutting grass, tea tree, fern tree, sassafras tree, which, with the continuance of the rain, reduced us to a most wretched condition.¹¹

The over-riding significance of Sharland's expedition was not that he was able to discover pasture land, but more importantly, that he was able to see Macquarie Harbour from Frenchman's Cap. The psychological barrier of the Gordon and Dennison Ranges, the central plateau area and the unknown parts of the West Country had now been broken. A passage from east to west was now possible. The irony of these extensive explorations is that at no time was consideration given to the exploration of minerals. Van Diemen's Land was first and foremost a pastoral and agricultural settlement. Its longer term prospects were to be in the export of fine wool to England and also to act as a repository for convicts.

The concept of mining precious and non-precious metals and ores in Van Diemen's Land was never considered. The early explorers, while gaining local knowledge of the country and assessing its value as pastoral land, had little inkling of the mineral deposits that were located in the West Country of Van Diemen's Land. Hellyer, in his 1826 expedition, had in fact surveyed the area of Mount Bischoff (that was later to become the greatest tin mine in the world) and in a subsequent expedition was also to come upon a significant landmark which he called Magnet Hill. In 1890 the Magnet galena ore body was discovered. Almost a hundred years later the mighty Magnet mine was to become the third most important mine behind Mount Lyell and Mount Bischoff in Tasmania's mining history.

Shortly after gold had been discovered in 1851 by Edward Hargreaves at Bathurst, New South Wales, Rev. W.B. Clarke, the foremost gold adviser, wrote to Governor Sir William Dennison indicating that there was every likelihood that gold could be discovered in Van Diemen's Land. Clarke described:

'the country west of Lake St Clair at the head of King's River and along the western slopes of the deeply fissured mountain chain from Mount Humboldt to Western Bluff, and about Frenchman's Cap, as deserving a search for a profitable gold field.'¹²

Hargreaves' discovery in New South Wales triggered off a new resources boom in the colonies of Australia. The law of government ownership of all discovered gold was repealed in favour of miners' licence fees. Thousands of individuals became prospectors, fossickers and miners overnight. Geologists became well-known and their theories were studied at great length. In Van Diemen's Land the Reverend Clarke had proposed that gold would be discovered along the 146th meridian. This was one of the factors which brought about a change in the attitude of the Van Diemen's Land administration, who realised the importance of the search for minerals. Transportation to Van Diemen's Land ended in 1853. This important event, together with the gold strikes in the other colonies, brought considerable pressure to bear on the already depressed economy of Van Diemen's Land. The Colony's male population dropped dramatically through migration to the goldfields of Ballarat and Bendigo in Victoria. Cheap labour, formerly provided by convicts, was now non-existent. Retail and service professions of Hobart Town and Launceston were demanding government action in order to redress the flow of population out of Van Diemen's Land. 'Victoria was growing rich on the precious yellow metal; Van Diemen's Land was stagnating without it.'¹³ By 1859 the government of Tasmania financed two geological survey parties to go into the western ranges. One of the parties was under the leadership of

Charles Gould, and the other was led by Ronald Gunn. Gould was a geologist, and Gunn was a surveyor. Each party was well provisioned with upward of twenty-two men in each group. They had pack-horses and supplies to last two months. This was a lavish, government funded project; an attempt to bring prosperity to Tasmania and stave off the ailing economy which had been in depression for more than ten years. Gould's party was to travel from the south westward across to the Alden Range, and then to Macquarie Harbour. Gunn's party was to travel north to Circular Head, the home of the Van Diemen's Land Company, and then drop south into unknown areas in an attempt to discover gold. Both expeditions failed their primary objective, although the expeditions were able to cut many tracks into hitherto unknown territory, thus providing opportunities for others who would come later as fossickers to explore the country.

The landscape as adversary was well documented by Gould in his three expeditions. In Gould's second expedition of 1862 he noted:

As far as the eye could reach it appeared to be a gently sloping plain covered with nothing but a tangled mass of bauera. Cutting grass and thread vines matted together so as to be almost impenetrable, intermixed with a small leafed specis of fern, and prickly mimosa....Limbs, spars, heaped together in endless confusion; the ground beneath when we reached it (which was often not for many yards together) a noxious swamp. Through such a country our progress was most laborious, in wet weather almost impossible.¹⁴

Furthermore, the misery of their hardships was often documented by the names given to the various landmarks they reached; for example, Misery Flat and the Long Scrub. These hardships, coupled with the uncertain weather conditions, the extreme physical difficulties in cutting tracks through the scrub, and the ultimate knowledge of the failure of the expedition to find payable gold

reduced the morale of the parties considerably. None of these government-funded expeditions found significant amounts of gold. The twenty years of gold-seeking between 1850 and 1870 produced no comfort for the merchants of Launceston and Hobart. Although the geological surveys of Gould and his associates were unsuccessful, the extensive passageways they cut through the West Country ensured that the next generation of wealth seekers were able to extend their explorations further out into the unknown. In one of Gould's reports on the West Country, sent to the Colonial Secretary on 26th June 1860, he states:

Again since a greater or less abundance of the gold existing in alluvial deposits may be assumed as a fair test of the average auriferous value of the rocks from which they have been derived, I think it improbable that rich or even merely payable, quartz veins can exist in the vicinity of spots so carefully examined, and without the slightest success, - unless indeed the gold should, as has been suggested by the Reverend Mr Clarke, be present in a microscopic state of subdivision, saturating the quartz, and inseparable its matrix by the ordinary mechanical appliances, when recourse would be necessitated to the expensive process of reducing the quartz by chemical reagents.¹⁵

From all Gould's official reports, Van Diemen's Land was going to prove no California or Lambing Flats, no Bendigo, Castlemaine or Ballarat. However, unknown to Gould, tin, silver and copper were to represent Tasmania's mining future.

¹ Frank Ellis (ed), *Venturing Westward*, Hobart, Tasmania, Tasmanian Government, p. 30.

² Ellis, *Venturing Westward*, p. 30.

³ Ellis, *Venturing Westward*, p. 30.

⁴ N.J.B. Plomley, *Jorgen Jorgensen and the Aborigines of Van Diemen's Land*, Hobart, Blubber Head Press, 1991, p. 5.

⁵ Binks, *Explorers* , p. 43.

⁶ Binks, *Explorers*, p. 51.

⁷ Kerr's Report to the Directors, 4th January 1830, quoted in A.L. Meston, *The Van Diemen's Land Company 1825-1842*, Launceston, 1958, p. 49.

⁸ Binks, *Explorers*, p. 114. (Sources of material on Franklin by P.R. Eldershaw, ADB 1785-1850, pp. 410-11).

⁹ Binks, *Explorers*, p. 118. From the Journal published in the Legislative Council Journals, Tasmania, (ed.) J.E. Calder, Legislative Council Paper 16, 1861, with the title 'Rough Notes of a Journal of Expedition to the Westward from Bothwell to Frenchman's Cap' by W.S.Sharland, Esq, Assistant Surveyor 1832.

¹⁰ Binks, *Explorers*, p. 118.

¹¹ Binks, *Explorers*, p. 122.

¹² Binks, *Explorers* , p. 160. Rev. W.B. Clarke, H. Rowcroft, Secretary of the Gold Committee, quoted in the *Examiner* newspaper 1 Dec. 1853, Archives Office of Tasmania.

¹³ Kerry Pink, *West Coast Story*, Zeehan, West Coast Pioneers' Memorial Museum, p. 38.

¹⁴ Binks,*Explorers* , p. 182.

¹⁵ Ellis,*Venturing Westward*, p. 14.

Chapter 8

Prospectors, Miners and Mining Companies

By necessity the penal and military nature of the early British settlement in Van Diemen's Land exerted a deliberate, centralised control over the composition of the population and, in particular, the assessment, utilisation and apportionment of land. For example, the Surveyor-General, through the Governor of the day, exercised total authority as to who was to receive parcels of land, the size of these parcels, and the conditions on which the land was to be farmed. Over time, the steady influx of British free settlers as tradespeople, merchants, business people, agriculturalists and pastoralists, together with ticket-of-leave and pardoned convicts, meant that the privileged officer classes of the earlier settlement were now being absorbed into a more egalitarian society. First generation colonialists began to regard this country as home, and worked towards a prosperity of which their parents could only have dreamed. The name 'Van Diemen's Land', and the stigma associated with the Colony as a penal settlement, gave way to the new name 'Tasmania' in 1855. Tasmania's ostensibly agricultural economy and its dependence on the Mother Country, drifted from one recession to another. The small economy was unable to cope with poor seasons, low overseas prices, high costs of imported goods, and most of all, the mineral boom in Victoria and New South Wales. The importance of a mixed economy where the new industry of mining would play a significant part in Tasmania's wealth was well argued by John West in 1852 when he claimed that:

The unexampled profusion of precious metal must rapidly augment our commerce and supply the means of mercantile enterprise. The capital we have so often coveted is now within our reach. The farmer desired a market; he has it in his neighbourhood, at his very door. The demand for foreign articles

will give employment to shipping directly trading from the Australian to the producing market.¹

West, of course, was advocating a condition that would ultimately lead to economic independence. In this new land economic independence ultimately meant human intervention in the landscape. A developing colony required capital, and capital investment meant that profits had to be made. The once tightly controlled and centralised system of colonial administration in Tasmania was now slowly giving way to a more liberalised approach to settlement and the development of new industries. It had to, for there was every indication that the colony of Tasmania would soon become a backwater, or else be annexed by Victoria if no new economic opportunity presented itself. Melbourne and Victoria had become prosperous on the capital that the gold rushes had brought.

The twenty years prior to 1870 had witnessed a number of Tasmanian government-funded geological surveys, exploration teams and private expeditions in search of gold. More often than not, these expeditions were failures because the official explorers were very much restricted by the Surveyor-General's specifications of their commissions, or by their own interpretation of the projects. The early official explorers were often men of science whose wish was to engage in a detailed investigation of geography, landforms and environmental conditions. Other official explorers sought to enhance their own careers by overstating the importance of their discoveries. More generally though, most explorers did not understand the signs of this new country, often reasoning from analogies associated with their homeland. Tightly focussed mission briefs often meant that expedition parties overlooked or totally ignored signs of what was later to become important mineralisation finds.

The West Country of Tasmania now tempted a new kind of individual - the pioneer-pro prospector. This third wave of European exploration and

intervention in the West Country was to become legendary. Prospectors were usually independent, solitary spirits who would often spend months alone in the bush travelling early explorers' tracks as well as cutting their own passages. The prospector generation of explorer was the true bushman of the Australian landscape. He drew upon his confidence in and understanding of the bush, and relied on his powers of being able to read the country and isolate promising formations. Most prospectors were not men of science, but rather relied more readily on fundamental signifiers such as galena outcrops, pyrites conglomerations, the colours of gold in a panning dish, oxide of tin locked in a washed river stone, or the unusual weight of a rock shard.

During the seventies and eighties the pioneer prospector extended the tracks out into the unknown spaces of the West Country. The prospector's work added definition and clarity to the maps that had been produced by the Survey Department and the Van Diemen's Land Company, and resulted in discoveries of lodes of mineralisation. All this work was done on foot in remote, isolated places far away from settlement.

The hardships faced by prospectors in their quest for wealth and profit are brought into sharp focus by the words of Frank Penn-Smith who scoured the area from Strahan to Long Plains in the 1880s.

Even when unencumbered with a swag one has enough to do in penetrating those dense grown fastnesses. Sometimes it will take a good axeman a whole day to cut his way a mile.²

For the prospector working the West Country the rainforest provided no nourishment and little protection from the elements. The dark, wet, silent rainforests did not attract migrating birds or opossums, wallabies and tigers which all preferred the open bush and grassy plains. The pioneer prospector, like the escaping convicts of fifty years earlier, engaged in journeys of hope and reward where the absence of life became oppressive. Penn-Smith eloquently describes his journey:

The slow advance into the unknown, by constant axework, demands incessant care. One eye must forever be alert for mineral indication. Rarely, except in stream beds or hillsides, are the country rocks in evidence. All this is shrouded beneath dense vegetation and surface soil. From time to time the axe is exchanged for the pick or the dish, the last being carried upside down on the swag to protect it from the wet.³

The sheer doggedness of the pioneer prospector in quest of new-found wealth pushed back the boundaries of the unknown territories into known territories. The first stages of real human intervention on the West Country landscape had now begun. The journeys of the prospectors not only marked out new territory, but were also responsible for the early 'shows', which offered hope and excitement to speculators, entrepreneurs, business people and politicians in Tasmania. The link between individual intervention and corporate intervention in the landscape of Tasmania was no more than ten years away.

One cannot escape from the fact that every society takes from its physical environment bounty that will sustain that society within its social and economic frameworks. Indeed, many human groups, as opposed to individuals, will dominate the ordered sequences of ecosystems.

Each human group develops its special collection of motives which designate the appropriate and inappropriate forms of conduct in regard to other men, other groups and the non-human environment, and these selective perceptions determine whether the non-human environment will become a resource, a taboo, or remain unseen.⁴

The first European occupiers of Tasmania saw the Colony as a strategic possession, a place that would assist in consolidating British expansion in the Pacific region. In a short time it became a dumping ground for convicted criminals of the British justice system. Nowhere else in the British empire was

the notion of setting humans apart by force of the environment more successfully undertaken than at Macquarie Harbour in the West Country of Tasmania. This wild, inhospitable country had kept secret its immense mineral wealth until the famous tin find of James 'Philosopher' Smith. The West Country, which had always been seen as a wasteland, a dark land, and a land not fit for human habitation, was about to be irrevocably transformed and become the profit seeker's 'nirvana'. James Smith, a first generation Tasmanian, and the son of Van Diemen's Land convicts, was the archetypal prospector/explorer. Smith was a first-rate bushman who had extensive practical knowledge of geology and mining. In addition, Smith acquired a sound understanding of the mineralisation theories of the Rev. W.B. Clarke which encouraged him to search for minerals other than gold.

In November and December 1871 Philosopher Smith undertook a prospecting journey that saw him travel through the Van Diemen's Land Company's stock route to Middlesex Plains, and then on to Surrey Hills. Smith then cut tracks to what is now known as Waratah. Smith's own diary tells of the discovery:

On the afternoon of Saturday December 2nd, I arrived at what I believed, owing to the old and inaccurate map I had, to be the junction of Waratah with the Arthur. I rested there till Monday. On the morning of that day I proceeded a short distance up the branch stream. I washed a little of the detritus and obtained about half a teaspoon of what I thought, in the gloom of the forest, looked like oxide of tin.⁵

Two days later Philosopher Smith had traced the source of his first find upstream to the western slope of Mount Bischoff (named after Mr Bischoff who was an English director of the Van Diemen's Land Company) where Smith estimated that the cassiterite showed three pounds weight to the ordinary prospector's dish. 'In the silence of that wild and romantic spot, Smith sensed

that he had struck it rich. The deposit appeared full of promise. It was.¹⁶ Smith's lode was a mountain of tin, the richest tin find in the world. The discovery immediately precipitated a concentration of human industry into the landscape on a scale formerly not thought possible. The Mount Bischoff discovery had set alight mining, banking, mercantile and government interests across Australia and Great Britain. Waves of prospectors moved from the northern part of western Tasmania through the Van Diemen's Land Company runs down and beyond the Mount Bischoff discovery. By and large, most of the prospectors were uncertain when they were exploring for other minerals besides gold. Gold had been the glamour metal, but the uncertainty of finding strikes in western Tasmania meant that prospectors also had to be alive to the signs of other metals. Their skills in panning for gold using a cradle and sluice box, sinking a shaft to bottom on an ancient stream bed, now had to be augmented by other skills. These new skills included opening trenches and cutting adits to intercept possible lodes, and learning to read the crumbling gossan or pyrites outcrops as indicators of copper, nickel, lead and silver finds.

Ironically, most of the major prospector finds did not benefit the discoverers. Philosopher Smith's Mount Bischoff tin mine, the Zeehan silver lead field discovered by Frank Long in 1882, the cassiterite deposits found by the Meredith Brothers at south Mount Heemskirk in 1879, were all developed, exploited, and ultimately laid waste, their fates sealed by the profit-seeking investors of Launceston, Melbourne and London, the stock markets, and the variable prices of the world's metal markets.

The final phase of the prospecting era was to come with the greatest discovery of all: the Mount Lyell Copper fields. There were still many prospectors fossicking along the country of the Pieman and King rivers, as well as the valleys at the foot of Mount Owen and Mount Lyell, where alluvial gold was found at Linda. Two brothers, Bill and Mick McDonough, both wage

labourers from Bischoff, and a young Scandinavian seaman, Johannes Stephanos Karlson, pegged out what was to become the famous Iron Blow - an iron ore outcrop that was to become the locus of the great Mount Lyell copper field. The three prospectors mined their lease for gold not knowing that just below the surface was going to be the Commonwealth's largest copper field, which would see continuing service as the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company Limited from 1892 until today. The syndicate of the McDonoughs and Karlson overlooked the potential of this mountain, as did Charles Gould, Tasmania's first official government geologist in 1862 when he prospected this site.

The era of the prospector working alone or in small syndicates was almost over. Miles of tracks had been cut through the rainforests, names had been given to outstanding landmarks, and claims had been pegged, officially surveyed, and authorised. The tracks, the names and the pegged claims functioned as signifiers of European possession.

Capital was required to develop the premier mineral discoveries in the West Country. No single prospector, miner, or small syndicate had the financial backing or technological expertise to realise the potential of the finds. Mining was a speculator's business, and the mines of Mount Lyell, Renison Bell, Rosebery, Mount Farrell, Mount Heemskirk, Zeehan, Magnet and Beaconsfield attracted national and international capital. Mining companies were formed and led by directors and mine managers. The simple methods of the prospector and fossicker were replaced by the specialist techniques of the assayer, mining engineer, geologist, chemist and metallurgist. All these mines needed heavy machinery, a large labour force of miners, and an infrastructure including transportation networks. The speculators' assault on this erstwhile empty country was now under way. Industry and settlement would forever change the shape of the physical environment. The narrow strip of country in Tasmania known as the West

Country was to become a sharply focussed example of European possession and exploitation, of the despoliation of nature, and of nature's ultimate repossession of the environment.

The remoteness of the mines and the over-riding imperative of extracting profitable ores provided little time for sensitivity in handling the changes wrought to the landscape. 'At best, environmental management at official levels was carried out by empirical testing, occasionally ad hoc decisions, and frequently great irresponsibility.'⁷

The first industrial territory in the country was established in 1875 with the functional mine of Mount Bischoff. Other major mine sites including the tin mine at Mount Heemskirk, the silver mine at Zeehan and Dundas, the gold mine at Linda, and the copper mine of Mount Lyell soon followed and were to become important functional sites in the re-establishment of the Tasmanian economy, which had been languishing since the 1850s. The merchants and politicians of Launceston and Hobart, together with the investors and miners, were at long last reaping their rewards. However, the landscape was paying a terrible price. In the search for profit, the natural environment so well described by Hellyer over fifty years earlier, was becoming irrevocably disfigured wherever this new wave of exploration, industry and settlement appeared. The new communities initially comprised mine managers, engineers, scientists, miners, carpenters, axemen and teamsters.

While many of the working men had arrived in the West Country as prospectors, fossickers, and owner/operator miners hopeful of riches, most ended their mining careers by working for wages in mining companies. These men, who began their mining with the open sky overhead, were later to mine in the darkness of shaft and adit mining.⁸

The boom and bust cycle of the financial markets and the variable world prices for minerals hastened the disorder in these mining fields. News

of strikes and rumours of new lodes brought a rush of treasure seekers to the established mine areas. Wildcat mines listed on the stock exchange such as the Tasman and the Crown Lyell Extended at Comstock Valley, Mount Lyell, drew short-lived interest from investors. Another technique used by promoters was to link their new mines with the established sites of Zeehan and Lyell by referencing their new companies to the existing name; for example, King Lyell, Mount Lyell Consols, and North Crown Lyell.⁹

Visual pollution and environmental degradation became the hallmarks of the mining enterprise. The emerging mining landscape transformed wilderness areas into wastelands. Mining interests including large companies as well as smaller operators were permitted unbridled control over the Colony's forests and water resources. All the West Country mines were situated in wooded hills, ranges and valleys, where the finely balanced ecosystems were maintained by a mutual adjustment of water-tables, drainage systems, terrain, flora and fauna. Capitalistic adventurism, with its attendant mode of industrial organisation, brought deep sinking, open-cut mining, tunnelling, water jet excavation, and steam and hydro-electric power to the West Country. Clear felling became a necessary activity in the development of the mines and the mining communities. Great quantities of firewood were needed to power the steam engines driving the crushing plants, stampers and smelters at all the major mines. Good quality timber was needed for timbering the shafts and drives underground, poppet heads, tramway rails, winch frames, head frames and building scaffolding. In addition, trees were felled to provide timber for mine buildings, miners' houses, public buildings, corduroy footpaths, and generally to provide warmth to the community. At Zeehan, Mount Lyell and Beaconsfield, teams of axemen were employed to clear the land and harvest the timber. Initially the area immediately around the mine leases provided sufficient timber for the purposes of building and construction. However, it was not long before further sweeps of forest were

clear felled, enlarging the occupied spaces in the country. Beaconsfield was an extreme example:

Because of the crumbly nature of the ground, vast quantities of timber were required for support. Beaconsfield had long been denuded of trees, and timber was being brought from further and further afield as virtually a whole forest went underground.¹⁰

By the turn of the century the foothills of Mount Zeehan were stripped, as were the mountain ridges of Mount Lyell right through to Linda and Gormanston. The stately eucalypt and myrtle forests also suffered the wanton destruction of ring-barking. Miners took sheets of bark from eucalypts and employed these as roofing material for their huts. Very often only one sheet of bark was taken from each tree, leaving it standing to eventually die. Mine managers required large areas of land to be cleared so that industrial spaces could be developed. At Mount Lyell, the new timber frameworks of the pyritic smelters, crushing plants, reduction works, storage bins and clusters of miners' huts rose up where eucalypt and sassafras trees had been felled, leaving nothing more than black peat and tree stumps. Small mine operations also felt the need to clear the forest floor. It seemed that in their living state trees hid important micro-geological features which the technology, topographical maps and scientific data of the day was unable to identify.¹¹ Industrial mining techniques of the day employed by companies and smaller syndicates demanded that areas surrounding the lodes be cleared. The cumulative effect of razing hundreds of hectares of forests and sinking many kilometres of tunnels, shafts and adits, brought about the lifting of the water table to an alarming degree. This unforeseen natural phenomenon characterised much of the entire life of the mining operations at the Beaconsfield and Zeehan mine sites. The more shafts, and the deeper the miners went, the more water they would collect.

But the Company's (Beaconsfield) answer was to dig deeper and to buy more pumps, ignoring the fact that steam driven pumps have a limited capacity, cost money, and eat costly fuel (wood).¹²

The Mount Lyell area also had its problems with water. The Gormanston mine site has known only four years in its history when there has been less than 100 inches of rain per year. The taking of the trees to feed the furnaces and the boilers, and the practice of surface trenching and shallow sinking meant that hillside soils were soon washed away by the winter rains. This left savage gulying which scarred wide areas that were formerly the site of a fragile ecosystem containing primitive man-ferns, sassafras, myrtle, and eucalypts. The rivers that carried away the topsoil also carried away the sludge and the toxic materials from the mines. Natural drainage systems became silted, and their ability to maintain a variety of life forms was greatly reduced. The King River suffered permanent injury in this way.

At Gormanston, for example, miners complained that running water was often impregnated with copper, and miners complained that sulphur fumes contaminated tank water.¹³

By the turn of the century the hillsides and gullies of the Mount Lyell region were dotted by hundreds of shafts, adits, mullock heaps and miners' huts across the four square mile copper field.

The shift from tunnel mining to open-cut mining by the Mount Lyell Mining Company ensured that an even greater havoc would be perpetuated on the landscape. The long terraces shaped into the slopes and stretching down the hillside enabled greater tonnages to be drawn from the mine. 'For every two thousand tons of waste rock a thousand tons of ore was being mined daily.'¹⁴ Increased ore extraction meant that the capacity of the pyritic smelters needed to be enlarged. The product of the pyritic smelter is blister copper, which is obtained by a process using sulphur and iron to separate gangue from the copper. This heat process produced inordinate amounts of

sulphur gas, which had adverse effects on the climate, and today continues to show the disfigurement it caused on the physical landscape. 'On still days the heavy pall of sulphur gas hung over the Mount Lyell region and could be seen as far afield as Macquarie Harbour.'¹⁵ Queenstown was regularly in a state of polluted fog; sulphur was taken in by everyone; mine horses bled at the nose; and all things metal - machines, houses, head frames, telegraph poles - corroded very quickly. The sulphur fogs emanating from the pyritic smelters began killing all grass, shrubs and fertile soil for miles around. The collective forces of clear felling, the shifting of topsoils, torrential rains, bushfires, and sulphur fumes ensured that the Lyell landscape was to become denuded and poisoned - a wasteland of a kind that could never have been foreseen by the early explorers.¹⁶

Known as 'Copperopolis', Queenstown, together with Zeehan, Mount Bischoff, Heemskirk, Dundas and Beaconsfield, were regarded by the *Australian Mining Standard* as a talismatic virtue to Tasmania's progress. These sentiments were indeed reinforced by the fact that Tasmania went into federation with 'minerals supplanting wool as the greatest source of production and export income.'¹⁷

¹ John West, *History of Tasmania*, London & Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1981, p. 532.

² Frank Penn-Smith, 'From Strahan on the West Coast to Long Plains in the North', in Hillary Webster, *The Tasmanian Traveller: A Nineteenth Century Companion for Modern Travellers*, Canberra, Brolga Press, 1988, p. 169.

³ Penn-Smith, 'Strahan', p. 171.

⁴ J.M. Powell, *Environmental Management in Australia 1788-1914*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 3.

⁵ Margaret Godfrey, *Waratah: Pioneer of the West*, Waratah, Tasmania, Municipality of Waratah, p. 3.

⁶ Lloyd Robson, *A History of Tasmania Vol II: Colony and State from 1856 to the 1980s*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 88.

⁷ Powell, *Environmental Management*, p. 146.

⁸ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1981, p. 294.

⁹ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1954, p. 81.

¹⁰ Coultman Smith, *Town With a History: Beaconsfield*, Beaconsfield, Tasmania, The West Tamar Historical Committee, 1985, p. 44.

¹¹ Powell, *Environmental Management*, p. 38.

¹² Coultman Smith, *Town*, p. 53.

¹³ Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 88.

¹⁴ Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 179.

¹⁵ Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 181.

¹⁶ Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, p. 181.

¹⁷ W.A. Townsley, *Tasmania from Colony to Statehood 1803-1945*, St David's Park Publishing, 1991, p. 133.

Chapter 9

Towns and Townspeople

The concepts of place and community in the West Country were facilitated by the discovery of mineral concentrations during the latter part of the nineteenth century. These new communities and places contrasted markedly with the earliest European settlement territory - that of Sarah Island on Macquarie Harbour. As a site for European habitation, the Macquarie Harbour penal settlement was viewed in much the same way as the British government viewed its convicts - to be kept out of sight away from society. Without hard factual knowledge of the region, the West Country was conveniently publicised by the colonial administration (particularly in Governor Arthur's time) as a dark, empty land. The small community on Sarah Island was necessarily an alienated one, controlled by European law and defended by the realities of place. This first European settlement comprising people alienated against their will was functioning as a result of two conditions set down by the colonial administrations. The first condition was a psychological territory where the colonial administration had empowered its officers to enact the law in such a way that members of this community would remain disciplined and productive in the name of the Mother Country. The second condition was also a territory, the territory contained within the surrounding landscape. The small Sarah Island settlement in the middle of Macquarie Harbour was in fact a subset of a much larger territory, that being the land contained within the boundary of the snow-capped central ranges and the storm-lashed west coast. In effect, the territory and boundary conditions of the landscape used so effectively in the administration of the Sarah Island penal settlement was both a physical and mental deterrent. Few convicts challenged these conditions.

By contrast the settlements generated by the discoveries of minerals took on a more evolutionary process rather than being imposed by

government edict. Although the country had remained basically unchanged over the years, the reason for this new settlement was very different. To the convict on Sarah Island the landscape offered the principal hope of escape to freedom; for the new arrival on the mining field the landscape held the hope of acquired wealth. In their quest for financial rewards, miners and their families were prepared to set aside many of the difficulties that isolation, weather and terrain brought them. Prospectors, miners and mining companies began to grid the country by marking boundaries and perimeters as potential sites for new discoveries. The rush to acquire an authorised territory gave a sense of ownership and a right to deal with the landscape in a way that would best suit the ambitions of the stake-holder.

During the formative years on the prospecting fields, little collections of huts and tents were scattered throughout the claims, hidden from one another by the dense rainforest. Towns could not take shape on prospecting fields until commitments by mining companies were given to develop the lodes. The investment of large sums of capital by Launceston, Melbourne and London companies ensured that work would be available at these new sites. By 1890 confidence began to grow in Tasmania's West Country industry, and the demographic composition of the Colony began to change. 'For the first time in fifteen years the Colony recorded an excess of arrivals over departures.'¹

Working men with and without mining experience came to the mining fields of Tasmania. They came from Cornwall, Northumberland and Birmingham in England, as well as from Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, the United States and later, China. As a result of the mineral discoveries, Tasmania's economy was set to move out of the stagnation period of the previous forty years. Mining companies gave birth to mining towns, which meant that European settlement of the West Country would forever change the character of the country.

The pioneer prospectors had travelled across the country to their leases by using the early explorer tracks and by cutting out of the rainforests their own

single person bush tracks. During the twenty years after 1890 the Survey Department and the Public Works Department constructed several tracks of their own as an aid to prospecting endeavours. Known as exploration tracks, their main purpose was to give prospectors access into new country.

Government parties of up to half a dozen axemen, led by a surveyor, worked through the summer months of each year pushing through new tracks 'of a standard to foot traffic only, with due regard to creek and river crossings.'²

The tracks, then, became the tenuous link between settled land and established government communities and potential new frontier mining communities in the western districts.

The first tin won from Philosopher Smith's Mount Bischoff mine was carried out in 1872 by teams of pack-horses, each horse carrying 100 kgs of ore. This event was particularly important as it was to herald the first real concentration of free settlement and industry on one site in the West Country. As production increased from alluvial mining to tunnel mining, other methods of transporting the ore from the mine along the 100 kilometre bush track to the Van Diemen's Land Emu Bay headquarters (now the site of the city of Burnie) had to be found. Teamsters were employed to take bullock teams into Mount Bischoff with mining equipment, food supplies and mail, and out of the mine site with ore. The difficult terrain, the thick rainforests, and the very wet climate made the journey by bullock team and dray an arduous one. A farmer-cum-teamster, Richard Hilder, describes the last part of a journey in 1873 in these words: 'We give the steaming bullocks a rest, then pass through Bog Lane - a tunnel cut through horizontal scrub just large enough to allow a dray to pass, and completely covered overhead by bush and vines. Away over small streams, up hills, through stretches of bog with mud up to the bullocks' shoulders, along a slippery corduroy road and narrow side cuttings ... we come to the surveyed site of part of Waratah township, just a small clearing among the trees.'³ As the Mount Bischoff mine continued to prosper, and its

town of Waratah surveyed and prepared for development, a more sophisticated means of communication and transportation was required in order to sustain this burgeoning frontier territory. After three years of construction, the Van Diemen's Land Company had built the Emu Bay Mount Bischoff tramway passing through the famous Surrey Hills and Hampshire blocks surveyed by Henry Hellyer. The seventy-seven kilometre long tramway was eventually replaced in 1884 by the Van Diemen's Land Company financed railway. Exploration tracks, bullock tracks, tramways and railways had provided the fundamental means by which Europeans could enter and take possession of the landscape and exploit the minerals it held. 'Within ten years of the discovery of tin Waratah had a population of 1,500, and a year or so later 2,500.'⁴ The new town of Waratah was a desolate, lonely place situated at the foot of the tin mountain, Mount Bischoff. Importantly, Waratah was the symbol of the new frontier, it was the symbol of permanence and a journey's end for many. Geoffrey Blainey describes Waratah:

The town was a foothold in the forest, a supply base and stepping stone to the mineralised mountains stretching south. These mountains always seemed about to produce great new mining fields, but after twenty years were still tormenting prospectors and miners.⁵

When the Silver Queen, Silver King, and Silver King Extended mines opened at Mount Zeehan, thousands of hectares of the surrounding countryside were under mineral lease. These silver and lead mining companies provided work for hundreds of people in what had been difficult economic circumstances for Tasmania. Experiencing the circumstances of the time, Wilburton Tilley wrote:

Tents, huts and shanties of every description, shops and hotels appeared like magic, and the desolate bush gave place to a busy, excited human community, all eager with the one object, to

make haste to be rich. The influx of population caused business to increase with great rapidity.⁶

The rapid influx of mine workers and other tradespeople caused awkward problems for the Survey Department as the new arrivals had not pegged claims, and by and large decided to clear a site and put up a tent or erect a simple paling hut alongside the track into Mount Zeehan. The government had already set aside the Reserve for the future township of Zeehan; however, this was not a popular site for the miners, as they wanted to live as near as possible to their place of work. Naturally enough, the other tradespeople wanted to be in the same area where the mine workers lived. After considerable pressure, official recognition was given to the de facto settlement in favour of the town Reserve. The de facto site was re-surveyed, and where there were disputes concerning ownership, lots were drawn from a hat on the famous 'Pegging Day' of November 1890. The government-authorized new survey grid for the town of Zeehan enabled progress to be made with a new confidence. Re-surveying the town site set the pattern for all other mine and town sites in the West Country - miners wanted to live as close as possible to the mine and smelting sites, as they had to walk to work. Providers of amenities and services simply followed the miners, and situated their services on either side of the main street of the new town. Unlike the late twentieth century mining complexes of Weipa, Nhulumbuy, and the Pilbara, where the town sites are separated by several kilometres from the mine sites, the nineteenth century mining towns of Zeehan, Queenstown, Heemskirk, Dundas and Beaconsfield were inextricably linked with the mines they served as single territories of settlement and industry.

The last years of the nineteenth century saw a silver boom of unprecedented intensity in Australia. Zeehan, known as the Silver City of the West, was reaping vast financial rewards for its largely English and interstate investors. In excess of 'one hundred and fifty-nine companies and syndicates

had leases on the Zeehan field.' ⁷ As a result of the mining boom, Zeehan gained new stature, there was an air of permanence, and a sense of community was fast developing. By 1890 the population had grown to 8,000, which made Zeehan one-third the size of Hobart. A sense of security and long-term work prospects encouraged the miners to bring their wives and families to this new town. What previously had been a frontier workplace for males now emerged as a mixed gender society. The thriving new town enjoyed the services of a hospital and a school; the main street of Zeehan had mine offices, bakers, tailors, greengrocers, auctioneers, livery stables, and blacksmiths. The two busiest bank branches in Tasmania were at Zeehan, the Bank of Tasmania and the Bank of Van Diemen's Land. Zeehan boasted eighteen hotels that serviced the accommodation, business and social needs of the townspeople and travelling commercial people. 'For the prospector and miner the hotels were the necessary mineral academies, the places where knowledge was exchanged concerning the latest prospect or "show".'⁸ Zeehan had its own stock exchange and a school of mines which was affiliated with the University of Tasmania. Much of the town's entertainment centred around the Gaiety Theatre Royal, which had seating for over a thousand patrons. The Gaiety presented several J.C. Williamson stage shows that were brought direct from the Tivoli in Melbourne. The recently connected rail link between Waratah and Zeehan, and Strahan to Zeehan from the south, reduced the sense of isolation a great deal. For example, the Gaiety Theatre Royal productions attracted people from as far afield as Strahan, who would come by train to one performance and then return home the next day. In a first-hand description of Zeehan, the new frontier town, Wilburton Tilley, who was a resident correspondent to the *Examiner* newspaper in Launceston, remarked in 1891:

For about half a mile from the Silver Queen workings Zeehan is very thickly populated, and from daylight to dusk presents an

animated scene. Heavily laden drays, pack-horses and mules, form constant processions, journeying to and from Dundas and Trial, miners with their swags, surveyors and their 'blueys', groups of men here and there or on the hotel verandahs, clad in rough but often picturesque bush costumes, discussing the latest new finds, all aid effectively in the panorama, while the varied characteristics of the habitations themselves, peculiar to a city built in a day, add a sort of romance to the scene. Canvas dwellings, from the diminutive tent just rising above the cutting grass with which it is surrounded to really commodious and pretentious structures, bark and weatherboard huts alternating with imposing hotels and stores, make up a singular but not unpleasing picture.⁹

The picture described by Tilley of Zeehan in 1891 was not unlike that of other mining towns in the West Country. Queenstown, Beaconsfield, Waratah, Gormanston and Dundas all went through a period of frenzied growth, when stock market and investor confidence was at an all-time high in the so-called mineral bonanzas that these finds were to bring. Reality was exaggerated as a means of profiteering. Through man's perception of the bounty to be extracted from this landscape, he became addicted to the pursuit of profit. In a sense the frontier mining towns became a gambler's paradise. Prospectors and miners were joined by promoters and pushers, confidence men, speculators, investors and so-called expert metallurgists. The stock exchanges at Zeehan and Queenstown became central to the creation of new wealth. Of Queenstown in 1897,

it was said that you could not meet a business man who was not dabbling in mining shares; and in Hobart it was said to be just as rare to meet anyone from Lyell who did not own a lease as good as the Mount Lyell Mine.¹⁰

The art of conjuring as a means of speculation was no better described than by Charles Whitham when writing of his experiences in Zeehan at this boom time:

You could float anything into a company; you did not need to have any actual mine; just so you knew of a good thing, or that someone had told you he knew of a 'cert'.¹¹

These frontier mining towns were sustained by hopes and dreams. So-called bonanzas such as King Dukes and Prince Darwin in the Mount Lyell region, and Golden Gate and Leviathan on the goldfields of Beaconsfield, epitomised success in the minds of prospective investors.

The creation of artificial wealth through paper transactions far outstripped the value of the ore bodies recovered from the country. The mix of these characteristics set the precedent for the exploitation and desecration of the landscape in future years. Europeans seized by opportunism in this dark, brooding landscape, were blind to the impact their kind of settlement and work had on the country. The extent to which prospectors, miners and speculators separated themselves from the realities of the country is aptly put by Charles Whitham:

Foxy men and honest men, cadaverous men and stout men, men who would not walk six feet to see a waterfall or a sunset, men who preferred a malodorous billiard room to a breath of mountain air, men who viewed the landscape through the backs of their necks - toiled and sweated, swore and grunted, through the bush tracks in order that they might see the gold brick in its matrix and chant horse milk *nunc demittis*.¹²

Bush tracks, tramways and railways cut through the landscape like corridors, provided the connections between established communities and the new frontier territories. The climate and terrain made macadamised road-making prohibitive, confining any such activity to the main streets of towns.

The shortcomings of the transport system and the nature of the landscape meant that communities, even though some of them were no more than eight kilometres apart, were isolated from one another. In a sense the isolation caused by the impediments of the environment helped fashion a strong sense of community and civic consciousness not found in the more settled parts of the Colony. Additionally, the fact that both mine and town were located adjacent to each other on the one site meant that there was a sharp awareness by the community as to its dependence on a single industry. As a matter of necessity people had to adjust to the fluctuations in the fortunes of the mines. The unpredictability of life set against the urge to make profits in a country commonly regarded by many as a wilderness, galvanised societies. The speculative and exploratory nature of mining enterprise in an isolated environment also brought out the interdependence of one community member to another. Solidarity in the workplace was established through the formation of a miners' union - The Amalgamated Miners' Association which, 'by 1891 had enrolled over one thousand members in Zeehan.'¹³

These tightly knit communities were well aware of the major role they played in the Colony's/State's economy.¹⁴ In the early years of the twentieth century the mining towns formed Town Boards as lobby groups to gain basic facilities from the State government including water and sewerage, hospitals and schools, as well as fair political representation in government. The local press was a successful conduit in advocating political viewpoints, progress and conditions in the mines, and the social roundabout. The *Mount Lyell Standard*, and the *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* were published daily, and became an inextricable part of the community fabric of these two towns, often fostering a keen sense of regional parochialism.

Over time the physical reality of isolation and the prevailing view of separateness and difference allowed for the development of full community life. In a sense, hotels were community centres for the men:

where much heavy drinking took place, and where the 'shouting' system illustrated the idea of comradeship and mateship. Riotous behaviour and 'little differences', which it must be owned are frequent, are generally easily settled by a round or two in the old English style.¹⁵

By and large the standard of accommodation in these mining territories ranged from living in tents, small two-roomed huts, one bedroom accommodation in hotels, and later, once the towns had developed, small four-roomed cottages. It is not difficult to understand, then, why the residents turned to more public forms of community life. Mechanics' institutes, libraries, theatres, public halls, amusement parlours and recreation rooms, as well as hotels, provided opportunities for meetings and entertainment.¹⁶ Freemasonry and church-going were particularly strong as they provided moral and spiritual security to the members. People enjoyed promenading, particularly on pay-days when the shops and hotels would stay open late into the night. Processions, outdoor public recitals by visiting musicians, Sunday school picnics and sports days with wood-chopping, foot races and sawing competitions drew the communities together.¹⁷ The Athenaeum Hall in Waratah was famous for its dances and concerts and, in later years, the picture shows. Waratah, like the other towns, had its champion brass band that would entertain in the rotunda on Sundays, and march at the front of public parades such as the one in 1914 that bade farewell to the local troops leaving for World War I, and later at Anzac Day marches.

Thousands of people had come to a part of the Colony/State which was particularly isolated, wet and wild, in search of wealth. The physical hardships of carving out territories and establishing towns, and the lack of knowledge and understanding of the country developed attitudes of the landscape as adversary, and as empty, useless wilderness. The 'look' of the West Country

bore a sharp contrast to the rest of Tasmania where agricultural and pastoral pursuits were romantically associated with activities of the Mother Country.

¹ Lloyd Robson, *The History of Tasmania, Vol 2: Colony and State from 1856 to 1980*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 93.

² Binks, *Explorers*, p. 237. From the Appendix to the Report to the Minister for Lands, 29 December 1899 by Surveyor-General Counsel, held in the Archives Office of Tasmania.

³ Margaret Godfrey, *Waratah: Pioneer of the West*, Waratah, Tasmania, Municipality of Waratah, 1984, p. 11.

⁴ Godfrey, *Waratah*, p. 16.

⁵ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Rush that Never Ended: A History of Australian Mining*, 3rd ed. Melbourne University Press, 1988, p. 212.

⁶ Wilburton Tilley, *The Wild West of Tasmania: Being a Description of the Silver Fields of Zeehan and Dundas*, Zeehan, Tasmania, Evershed Brothers, 1891, p. 37.

⁷ Kerry Pink, *West Coast Story*, Zeehan, West Coast Pioneers' Memorial Museum, 1984, p. 62.

⁸ Geoffrey Blainey, *A Land Half Won*, Macmillan Co., Melbourne, 1980, p. 167.

⁹ Tilley, *Wild West*, p. 29.

¹⁰ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Peaks of Lyell*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1954, p. 84.

¹¹ Mt Lyell Tourist Association, *Western Tasmania: A Land of Riches and Beauty*, 1924, p. 43.

¹² Mt Lyell Tourist Association, *Western*, p. 147.

¹³ Tilley, *Wild West*, p. 36.

¹⁴ Tasmania gained statehood on January 1st, 1901, when the existing colonies federated into the Commonwealth of Australia.

¹⁵ Tilley, *Wild West*, p. 30.

¹⁶ Tilley, *Wild West*, p. 37.

¹⁷ Tilley, *Wild West*, p. 37.

SECTION III

THE ARTIST/EXPLORER

Chapter 10

An Imaginative Exploration

My imaginative exploration is the crystallisation of visual and aural perceptions. These perceptions are recorded from spatial explorations, times past and present, and the written histories from the West Country of Tasmania, understood through first-hand accounts and memories. The spatial exploration is by necessity physical, demanding direct contact with the mine sites in an attempt to uncover visual and aural information as it is experienced at the time of the exploration. The land is like a text, waiting to be read, absorbed and interpreted. There is no subterfuge; the landscape is truth: it is a testament to its own history. My macro and micro spatial explorations have opened a dialogue where meanings concerning the landscape's evolution in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times can be adduced and produced. These meanings have been drawn from the 'now' - the dishevelled terrain, poisoned rivers, man-made territories, the native hardwood forests, and dying towns.

My spatial exploration attempts to do more than merely note the country, irrespective of the variety and form of its external face. This exploration is to do with experiencing nature's rhythms and being 'inside' the landscape, rather than a spectator on the edge gazing in. My physical explorations of space parallel those of the nineteenth century explorers, surveyors and bushmen Henry Hellyer, Jorgen Jorgensen and T. (Tom) B. Moore. These men not only mapped and recorded the West Country, but they also became saturated with the aesthetic of the pristine landscape. Despite the often impassable country and foul weather conditions, Jorgensen referred to aspects of nature in his journal as 'a large and magnificent sheet of water', 'truly picturesque', 'the beautiful blue lake is altogether most delightful' and 'high snowy mountains'.¹ The ambition of the three explorers was to understand and develop an empathy with the new environment. Over the years all three made several

expeditions to sites they knew, building on their personal store of knowledge of the region, and at the same time debunking the colonial administration's constructed myth of the West Country as a dark and sinister place, a biblical wilderness.

Hellyer's, Jorgensen's and Moore's intimacy with the landscape enabled them to see beyond the surface of objects, beyond the function of land clearings for sheep grazing, and the exposed outcrops of pyrites conglomerations signifying possible copper deposits. They saw the landscape as a living entity dependent on the natural order and dimension of its interconnected parts.

My spatial exploration, like that of the early explorers, attempts to come to terms with the fact that the country has seemingly existed in a kind of 'cosmic' time-scale, where most changes of state occur as an evolutionary process, and where changes are considered in terms of seasonal change. Contemporary constructs of space and time are continually revised as the pace of human life quickens. Late nineteenth century European settlement of the West Country overlaid a construct of time, broken up into seconds, minutes and hours, onto a landscape and its inhabitants accustomed to the natural forces of seasonal passage. The discordant relationship Europeans had with nature quickly subjugated the landscape by creating industrial territories. These territories, constructed by Europeans, were responsible for spoiling and setting off-balance the long established natural rhythms of the ecosystem.

My spatial explorations have concerned themselves with repeated visits through the country into the mine sites and abandoned man-made territories. I have observed the subtleties of the continuous re-shaping, altering and layering processes of seasonal time, and have experienced the more dramatic and extreme changes wrought by flash flooding, temperature variation and land slides. In a sense the casual interloper/tourist/visitor has no local context in which to engage the landscape that is observed. This kind of observer sees

the surface of the landscape as it is now, and passes on. However, the context and reference point for my interpretations is the territory itself - its recent histories as I have experienced them. Each new experience of the territory elicits meanings from the 'now' - time present cast in the physical space of the country, while past explorations of the territory evoke a history set within an elapsed slice of time. The aggregation of these individual explorations builds a knowledge of place - a familiar territory - through personal experiences (visual, written and aural documentation) and through the creative forces of memories.

As I have claimed, much of my imaginative exploration has to do with experiencing the mining territories first-hand. These experiences in turn become personal histories indicative of those places. This is very much in keeping with Margaret Atwood's comment 'Part of where you are is where you've been'.² There is a regular need to sift back through time and call up those primary experiences that have been supported through various forms of visual documentation. This becomes an important way of informing the present. It must also be said that as these primary accounts are lodged in a past time zone, they can never be revisited as originally experienced, for that time is past. Instead, either singularly or collectively, these past spatial explorations are conditioned by subsequent experiences in my life, and by the mental and physical environments of the present.

The imaginative exploration is also informed by the histories of place as observed and experienced by others. Explorers, writers, newspaper journalists and photographers who lived during the time of occupation and settlement offer their personal, first-hand accounts for interpretation. In addition, contemporary authors writing of the past provide secondary sources regarding the history of towns and mines in the West Country. My own interpretation of primary and secondary sources, particularly primary

references, contributes another dimension to understanding the present-day nature of these territories.

Although my spatial explorations have been similar to those of Hellyer, Jorgensen and Moore, I have had the advantage of being able to refer to the contributions of others, those who created and experienced the history of the West Country of Tasmania. In contrast, virtually all of the early explorers and pioneers made no profitable contact with the Aborigines, and therefore had only their own experiences and knowledge from which to form conclusions concerning the country and their own survival within it.

I believe that the imaginative exploration is the creative search for ways in which pieces of information such as histories, personal experiences, form and shape are brought into union with intellectual, aesthetic and physical judgments. This function is effected through the production of the tangible object, the individual expressive outcome. The production of the tangible object, whether a ceramic plate or a vase, demands accord between physical and mental capacities. The accord functions within the parameters of time and space. Time is an integral part of the working processes in ceramics. The ceramic artist is obliged to respect the properties of the material - the preparation of the clay body, drying, glazing, firing and cooling. The natural laws of clay determine the length of time for each of the creative processes. A violation or ignorance of these steps in time unsettles the balance and spoils the work. By having regard for the inherent rhythms of the material, the work grows naturally over a period of time.

The point where my imaginative exploration begins to manifest a reality is when the clay is shaped to take on a form, a structure and a surface. For example, the wet clay forms of my ceramic plates are the spaces - the positive and negative elements that receive the drawn marks. The linkage between my ideas, the physical act of creating, and the space accepting the marks, stains

and glazes is indispensable to the satisfactory outcome of the tangible product.

In essence, the imaginative exploration is intuitive. It is an instant by instant activity of testing, mixing and refining ideas that flow from a variety of external sources and the subconscious. The completed ceramic object represents the end of one chapter of the imaginative exploration. My ideas always extend into series and families of objects, and from one exhibition to the next. The imaginative exploration is a continuous process that reflects the 'now' by drawing on personal experiences of the past.

¹ A. L. Meston, 'Jorgensen's Journey Across the Central Plateau - September to October 1826' in W. Meston and R. A. V. McCulloch (eds), *Royal Society of Tasmania*, Vol 89, 1954, p. 25.

² Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*, Toronto, Anansi, p. 112.

Chapter 11

Eliminating Boundaries

Throughout this dissertation I have paid close attention to the idea that British settlers wanted to create territories and boundaries in the landscape of the West Country. To the pioneer prospectors, miners and settlers, this was both a physical and mental way of taking control, possession and sovereignty of the land. Paul Carter makes the point that what lurked behind the concept of settlement in Australia was 'the imperial project of permanent possession through dispossession'.¹ Carter was referring to the displacement of the original inhabitants by the British colonisers' incessant drive for wealth, profit and power. To fulfil that ambition, control of territory was essential. In Tasmania that control not only meant the dispossession, displacement and annihilation of the Aborigines, but also control over the country itself. The West Country of Tasmania was always viewed as an adversary, a stubborn geographical area that had to be overcome and tamed. In the process of subduing the country, its natural functional processes of growth and regrowth, modelling and remodelling were set off balance through intrusive acts of British colonial exploitation. When the colonisers took from the land, nothing was returned or re-established, resulting in a massive dysfunction in the ecosystem.

In the open, pristine land of the West Country, the British colonial idea of 'boundary' manifested itself through settlement. Hundreds of prospectors and syndicate miners staked claims at Gormanston and Dundas; miners purchased surveyed blocks in Zeehan on 'pegging day', 1890; and pioneers erected picket fences around cottages in all the mining towns. A lawful right to a territory provided a sense of security, and symbolised permanence and control. In a sense it also signified that the boundary around the territory identified the outer limit of a now familiar place, the mine site, the home and the town. For the pioneers the space beyond familiar territory represented

uncertainty, was uncharted, and teased the imagination as a space of opportunity. As great mining bonanzas such as Mount Lyell and North Mount Lyell emerged, the strike or lode became the centre from which the territory spread outward. By comparison the boundary of Sarah Island, the former convict settlement on Macquarie Harbour was fixed. The actual physical boundary and the constructed mental boundary of place was supposed to distance the so-called hardened convicts from the civilisation of Hobart Town. Connelly, Goodwin and other convicts soon proved that the idea of boundary as containment and separation was flawed when put to the test.

The body of ceramic work I have produced as a result of this investigation explores those spaces that have a history of mining. However, the focus is not on the kind of history which depends on the imposition of a chronology of the events of the past. What the work explores, rather, is the concept of spaces and the human activities that have gone on in these spaces at various times. A space or territory is delineated by a boundary which separates the space from what it is not. This point is illustrated by physical examples of man-made bush clearings, town sites and town reserves, pegged out building allotments, and fenced-off mine sites. The physical boundary defines the space and divides it from its 'otherness'.

The paradigms of centre and boundary have been central to much of the ceramic work I have done during the last four years. The ceramic vessel form has been the vehicle for the exploration and testing of these concerns.

The mineral strike, which became a locus and physical centre in the West Country, draws a close parallel to the creation of the ceramic vessel. Shaping clay from an amorphous mass into a vessel by hand building or throwing, places the maker at the physical centre and axis. From the centre the form swells outwards and upwards. To me the centre pinpoints the locus, and the locus extends outwards, creating and containing its own space. The notion of centre mentally and physically positions me 'inside' the vessel, 'inside' the

space that is being contained during the making process, a situation similar to that which would have been experienced by the miners and settlers when making man-made mine sites in the bush country. The vessel, then, becomes the metaphor for the mine site territory, the space container, and the object of limited or no utility.

The subject of the ceramic pot and ceramic vessel has to be dealt with in the context of my ceramic work in order to distinguish the line of thought taken with regard to the notion of utility and non-utility. There has been a clear intention on my part to deconstruct the meaning of utility through the creation of the vessel form. The ceramic pot is one of man's greatest affirmations to the concept of utility; is a primary object conceived for the purposes of storage; and, in the hands of the individual, makes the symbolic connection between nourishment and continuing existence. From the time of the first Ur-pot, the ceramic pot has been regarded as a fundamental tool and icon for most of the world's cultures.

By contrast the ceramic vessel can display virtually all the formal qualities of the pot, with the exception of one, the essential quality of utility. Although I attempt to use and express the intrinsic characteristics of pottery including symmetry, shape and space, I consciously set about deconstructing the idea of utility, which subsequently changes the nature of the ceramic pot to that of a vessel form. I view the ceramic pot and ceramic vessel as a pair. Both exhibit the same physical structures, and both contain space. The degree to which one becomes the other is dependent upon the extent to which the essential essence of utility is deconstructed or constructed. To me the creation of the mine sites in the bush country is analogous to the functional pot and ceramic vessel. Gradually withdrawing the mine's function through the exhaustion of the mineral deposits is similar to denying the utility of the ceramic pot. My ceramic vessel forms give carriage to the expressed idea of deconstructing man's functional use of created territories within the country. In

this regard, the pair comprise the desecrated man-made territories on the one hand, and the untouched expanses of rainforest in the West Country on the other. The original status of mine sites as territories, holding the centre or superior position is now being undone, returning the ascendancy to nature itself.

My works take on the form of plates and vases, but are neither. They suggest utility; but in actuality cannot function as objects of everyday use. The pieces are made from potter's clay, glazed and fired in the same way as utilitarian pottery; however, I do not regard them as pots. The plate forms are meant to be exhibited on the wall, not as functional plates on a dinner table. Even if they were sited on the table, they would be too big and too heavy to accommodate a utilitarian purpose. The vase forms have shoulders, necks, waists, feet and lips, all identified features of the functional ceramic vase. However, these ceramic vase forms will not hold liquid or display flowers.

By establishing settlement in Van Diemen's Land, the colonial administration claimed sovereignty over all the island. The natural state of the country and concern for the original inhabitants was irrelevant to the strategic imperatives of the Mother Country. The island was sub-divided so that both the individual and England could profit. Boundaries delineated territories, and territories became the possession, the personal space of the colonial settler, miner and business person. In order for the occupiers of these spaces to survive and engage in profit-making activities, these spaces had to become functional spaces, as opposed to the country beyond the boundary which was largely regarded as useless, under-developed or virgin land. Most of the physical boundaries were in straight lines, marking out territories in the shape of rectangles, squares, triangles, or a mix of all three.

While I have attempted to assert the idea of the vessel form as foremost or principal in the pair consisting the ceramic pot and ceramic vessel through diminishing the position of utility, another element, that of extending the

condition of boundary, has also been germane to my work. As discussed earlier, the physical boundary provides certain mental conditions of confidence and self-esteem to individuals, communities and cultures. However, while the idea of the boundary line separating the property of one person from that of the other is understood, no such understanding or accord exists between humankind and nature. People have the control or dominant position only while the space within the boundaries remains functional to their needs. The abandoned mine sites of the West Country, which have been the central subjects of my creative investigation, illustrate how the constructed, one-time functional spaces or territories are gradually being subsumed into the bush as their utility diminishes. Although the mines may be abandoned, the mining towns associated with the territories including Zeehan, Waratah, Derby and Beaconsfield remain, albeit in an attenuated state. The one-time smaller but more dominant territories (the mine sites) are now subject to changes in meaning rendered by the larger, more finely balanced territory, the country itself.

Within the context of my ceramic work, I have expressed this change of meaning by consciously engaging in a mental and physical process curtailing utility and eliminating accepted notions of perimeters and boundaries. As a representation of non-utility, the vase-like and plate-like vessel forms speak of what remains of the West Country after European intrusion and intervention. Like the thick layers of rust on dilapidated machinery lying half buried in the mud at Dundas, these pieces, too, tell of a subsidence, a re-shaping, and an hierarchical change between humankind and nature. The vessels contain space like the valleys, gorges and natural clearings, but will not contain for a utilitarian purpose. The work in fact symbolises the 'now', incorporating an understanding of the past - events, places and people through the passage of time. The 'now' tells of the diminution of man-made boundaries, of a closing in, like the dying town of Queenstown. The ceramic pieces represent this idea

through their own perimeters and boundaries being irregular and fragmentary. This supports the concept of nature coming from 'outside' the boundaries to re-cast what 'was' into the 'now'.

¹ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History*, London, Faber & Faber, 1987, p. 24.

Chapter 12

Processes, Techniques and Making

I have already discussed the notion of imaginative exploration as it evolved from a search for ideas, to the construction of these ideas as a reality. The reality is the representation of the concepts manifested in the form of the ceramic object. The act of making is a linear process through time, fusing together mental abilities, emotional states and physical skills. Each part of this tripartite relationship is heavily dependent on the other two parts for a satisfactory outcome.

In this section I wish to describe those physical skills which have been important to me in realising the potential of the ideas. This essentially concerns process and technique.

I have used clay as the principal medium of expression for the past twenty-seven years. During that time I have been able to develop a 'one-ness' with the material, a relationship where the intuitive act of making is in harmony with the working properties of clay. Such properties include wet and dry strength, malleability, plasticity, surface texture, and colour. I believe the making process is a rhythmical one which begins with the kneading technique, and ends as the work is cooled in the kiln. Each working step offers an opportunity to re-enter the art work where new information can be overlaid, or worked back into the existing condition of the piece. Similarly, the work can be edited where deletions are made, or the piece even abandoned. The manner in which I work makes the creative process a journey where the outcome can never be pre-determined or designed - a journey of exploration.

In order to work in a manner that enhances creative opportunities, I have shed many of the technical restrictions associated with making pots. This has involved reducing the need for 'props' - plaster molds, repeat firings, exotic glazes, and post-firing methods. Doing this has not negated advantages that modern technology may bring to the creative process, but

rather has allowed me to get closer to the basic material (clay), the earth itself, about which my creative expression is concerned. The immediacy and responsiveness of the wet clay creates the conduit for the flow of ideas that emerge as form and surface.

The body of work ostensibly consists of two types of vessel form - the plate and the vase. The clays used are Geoff Walker's Raku blend, a tough, highly grogged body with good dry strength and an excellent thermal shock-resistant capacity. The second body is Mervyn Feeney's Buff Raku clay, which is a first-class hand-building clay for large-scale, three dimensional objects. Feeney's Buff Raku is extremely plastic, has excellent dry strength, and can be re-worked at the bone dry stage. Both these clays suit my methods of construction.

During the past five years I have developed and employed two different forms of construction. The large vase forms, which are built with reference to various kinds of terrain, are produced by laying up large slabs of hand-stretched clay. The slabs are made semi-dry, giving them a board-like character which means that external and internal supports such as crumpled paper, polystyrene or wire armatures are not required. The 'dry' method of building means that 2 cm thin slabs up to 60 cm square can be shaped. The technique that I have perfected is much like building a crate from Craftwood (high density timber fibre board). The edges of the slabs to be jointed are made damp, heavily scoured, and welded with slip containing approximately 90% clay, 9% water and 1% white vinegar. This very effective welding technique allows the slab form to be built in only a couple of days. The form is shaved with a carpenter's rasp, drawn on and then painted. The fact that I work in a temperate (cool and wet) climate means that no special slow drying facility is required.

The second construction method enables the shaping of an infinite variety of large plate forms. Rather than use plaster molds, I fabricate free-

form, concave rests made of vermiculite pellets. The vermiculite will conform easily and quickly to any shape, and provides a firm hollow for slabs of clay. The slow drying process, so important to all flat slab forms (drying equivalency between the outside and inside of slabs), is not impeded by the use of vermiculite. Any unwanted pellets on the underside of the plate form vaporise in the firing cycle, often leaving an attractive iron blush on the under surface.

While the forms are under construction the drawing, painting and glazing begins. Form, surface and colour are worked in tandem throughout the making process. I draw with a potter's knife across the leather-hard clay, and scratch and etch lines and marks into the bone dry surfaces. As well, lines are painted with calligraphic brushes, mops and sponges on both leather-hard and dry clay. The surfaces are worked and re-worked with line, painted with high viscosity coloured slips, commercial underglaze stains, copper oxide, copper carbonate, ferric oxide and a clear lead fritted earthenware glaze. The base engobe contains 70% Ferro Frit 3304, and 30% ball clay with additions of body stains. The base white slip comprises 30% ball clay, 30% flint, 15% talc and 25% Ferro Frit 3304. Again, a range of oxides and commercial slip stains is added to provide a variety of palette.

Creating three dimensional form and working into the surface space by means of the intuitive process leaves open the opportunity for continuous shifts in expressive direction. The search, the exploration to find the satisfying mixes of ideas and ways of expression, is carried out at the face of the work. For example, surface images can be drawn and painted and then cast aside by painting out or layering other images within the same spaces. Similarly, form can be altered by re-shaping and re-scaling if it does not complement surface or suit the idea. The making process abides by the working characteristics of the material - wet, leather-hard and dry, and it is within these states, over time, that the dynamics of making conceive the work.

All pieces are once fired over a fourteen hour heating period in a gas-fired, silica alumina blanket kiln to standard Orton cone 02 and 01. An oxidising atmosphere is maintained throughout the firing. The large plate forms, some in excess of 80 cm in diameter, are stacked in a vertical configuration on small 6 cm beds of Fiberfax blanket. Wedges of fireclay separate each piece so as to prevent possible glaze run from one piece to another. Due to the rapid cooling feature of silica alumina blanket kilns, I down-fire the kiln to 600 degrees centigrade in an attempt to prevent the possible occurrence of dunting on the large-scale plate forms. The cooling rate from 600 degrees centigrade to 30 degrees centigrade is normally ten hours.

Once the pieces are taken from the kiln, rarely, if ever, are they re-fired, or altered by post-firing methods.

Conclusion

The altered state of the West Country of Tasmania, illustrating as it does the impact of colonial imperialism, unsympathetic land management, industrial pollution and profiteering, has been the subject of my investigations.

The prosperity of the Colony depended on 'progress', which was linked to net profit generated from primary industries. The Tasmanian economy began to decline in the 1840s, and the exploitation of its mineral wealth was seen as the last opportunity to compete with the improving economic fortunes of Victoria and New South Wales. In 1875, Governor Frederick Weld, in addressing the House of Representatives, made a prophetic remark regarding the urgent need to discover payable mineral sources in the West Country: 'Death or victory should settle the matter'.¹ This melodramatic comment underlined the desperation rife in the Colony at the time.

The mineral boom did come to Tasmania. The profits of the short-lived bonanzas were shared between the distant Mother Country and the self-governing Colony. The long-term price paid for these immediate gains, however, is desecration of the natural environment on a scale that emphasises European disregard for the management of the West Country.

Paradoxically, Governor Weld, in a speech given to the Tasmanian Royal Society in 1876 believed 'the habits of close observations of nature adds [sic] to our pleasure and refines [sic] our minds'.² Presumably Weld was referring to the milder, more accommodating English-style countryside of eastern Tasmania. The West Country was regarded as a biblical wilderness. Weld's 1875 phrase, 'death or victory', epitomises colonial disregard for this country.

My ceramic work is concerned with the 'now' - with the 'altered states' of the West Country. This idea has been informed by three interconnected perspectives - my physical, historical and imaginative explorations. I believe I have come to terms with the dilemma posed by European desecration and

destruction on the one hand, and the aesthetic aspect inherent in these 'altered' mine territories on the other.

This largely marginalised and forgotten region of Tasmania, comprised of industrial territories with their remnants and relics, signifies the human avarice of times past. Nature's ongoing struggle to restore these once human, functional territories to their pre-industrial condition highlights the natural process of the deconstruction of European constructs.

¹ Jeanine Graham, *Frederick Weld*, Christchurch, Auckland University Press, 1983, p. 149.

² Graham, *Weld*, p. 151.

**APPENDICES
AND
BIBLIOGRAPHY**

APPENDIX I

BOTANICAL NAMES, MEASUREMENTS and NOMENCLATURE

Botanical names:

The Latin names for species that have been discussed throughout the document are listed beside the common name.

- Myrtle (*Fagus cunninghami*)
- Blackwood (*Acacia melaerfoxydon*)
- Huon pine (*Dacrydium franklinii*)
- King William pine (*Anthrotaxis cupressoides*)
- Celery-top pine (*Phyllaclinadins rhomboidalis*)
- Sassafras (*Atherosperma moschatua*)
- Eucalypts (*Eucalyptus muelleri*, *vernica*, *viminalis*, *gunnii*)
- Native laurel (*Anopterus glandulosus*)
- Horizontal scrub (*Anodopetatum biglandulosum*)
- Man-fern (*Dicksonia antarctica*)
- Bauera (*Bauera rubioides*)
- Cutting grass (*Gahnia psittacorum*)
- Tea-tree (*Leptospermum manuke*, *Melaleuca ericifolia*)
- Button grass (*Mesomelaena sphaerocephala*)
- Black wattle (*Acacia mollisma*)
- Silver wattle (*Acacia dealbata*)
- Banksia (*Banksia marginata*)
- Prickly mimosa (*Acacia verticillata*)

Measurement:

For the sake of preserving relative accuracy in describing facts of history, I have retained the form of measurement used at the time in question. This particularly refers to: pounds, shillings and pence; miles, chains, yards and feet; acres; tons and cwt. Conversions for these are:

Monetary units:

- | | |
|------------------------|-------|
| 1 pound (20 shillings) | = \$2 |
| 1 shilling (12 pence) | = 10c |
| 1 penny | = 1c |

Linear measure:

1 mile	= 1.609 kilometres
1 chain	= 20.108 metres
1 yard	= 0.9144 metre
1 foot	= 0.3048 metre

Area:

1 acre	= 0.405 hectares
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Weight:

1 ton	= 1.016 tonnes
1 hundredweight	= 50.80 kilograms

Nomenclature:

It should be noted that Van Diemen's Land became known as Tasmania in 1855. I have used both these names according to the era they signified, as a way of providing clarity to the events of the time.

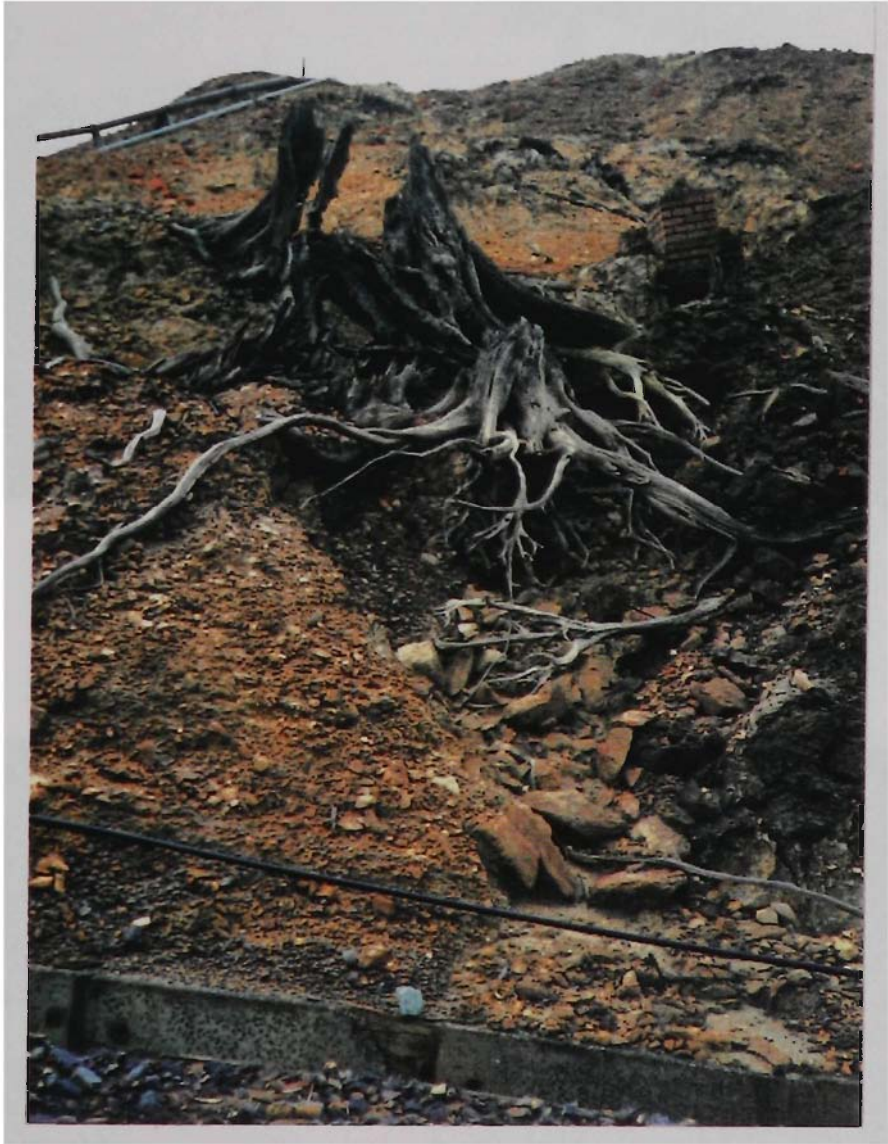
APPENDIX II

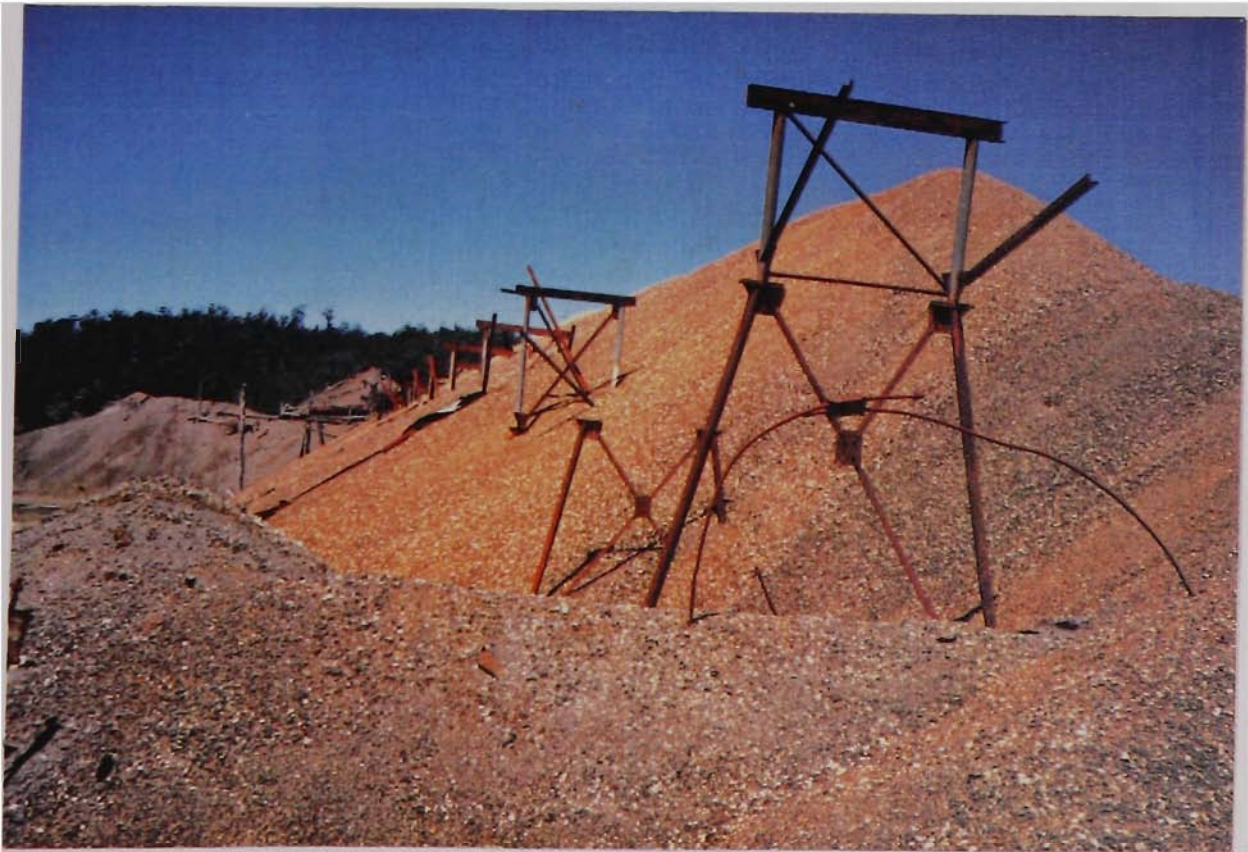
IMAGES OF MINE TERRITORIES

A collection of photographic images taken on my field trips of exploration to the mine territories of the West Country of Tasmania. These include:

**Argenton
Beaconsfield
Crotty
Dundas
Gormanston
Linda
Mount Bischoff
Mount Lyell
Zeehan**





























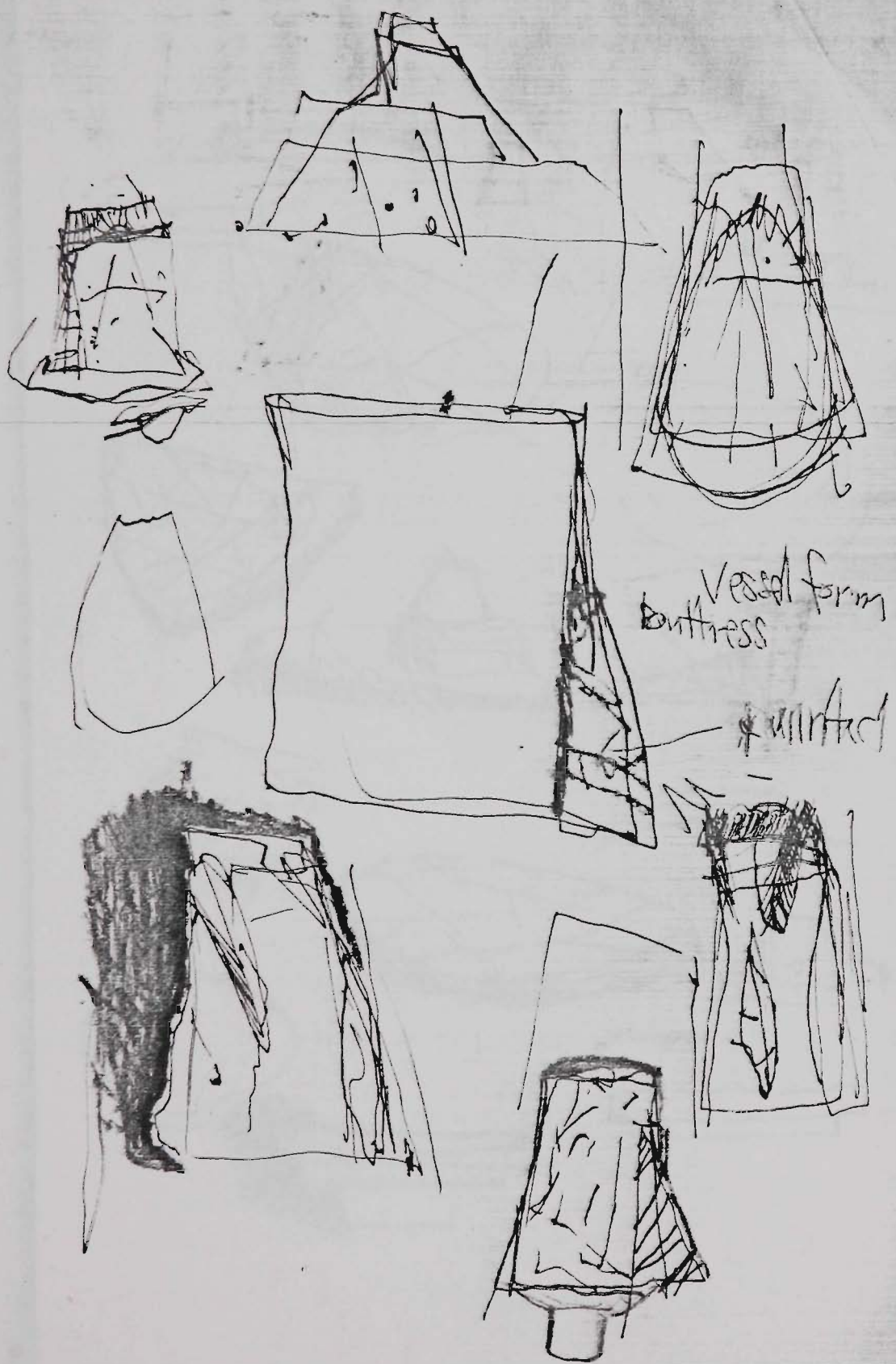
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JOURNAL SKETCHES

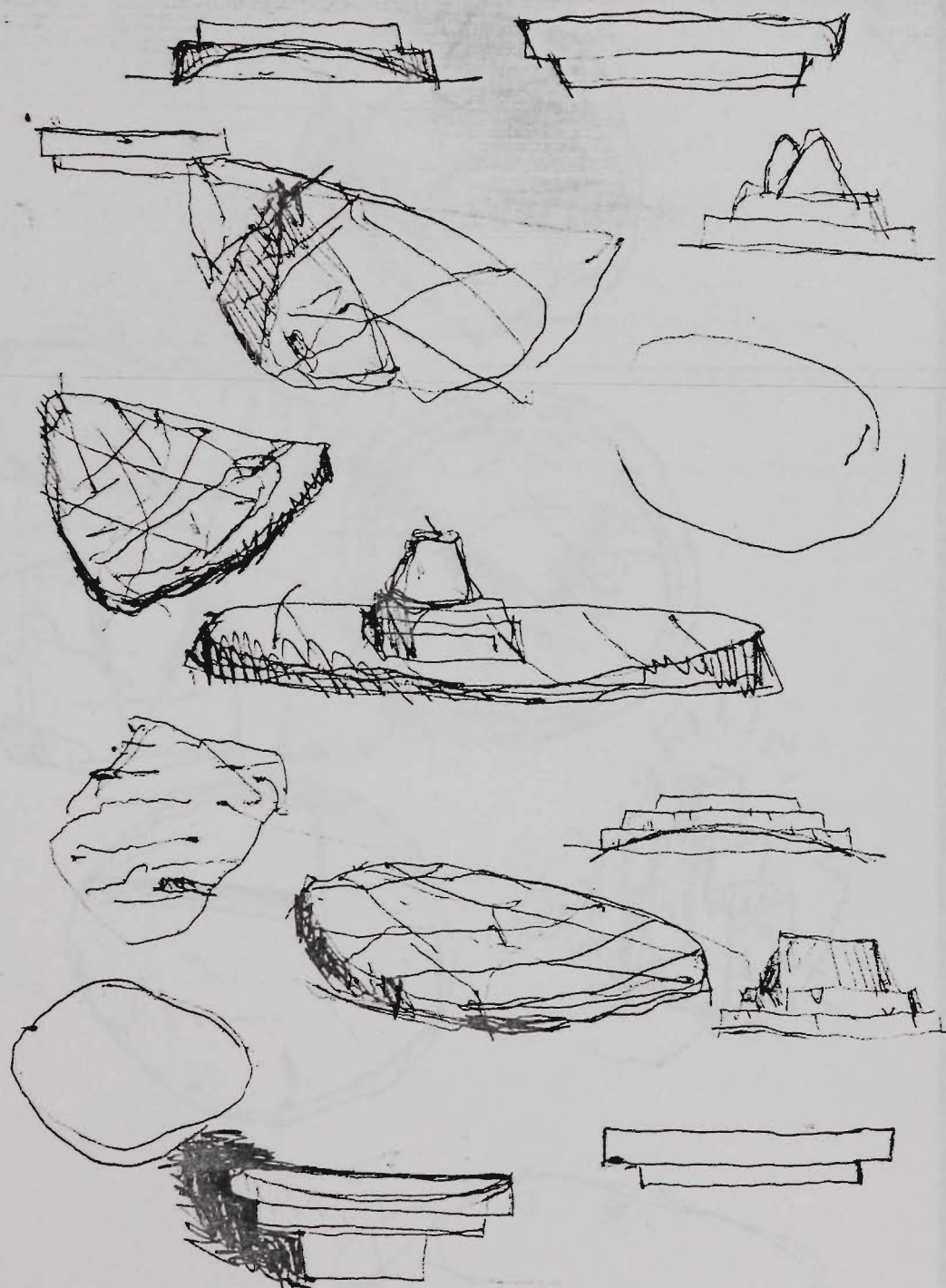
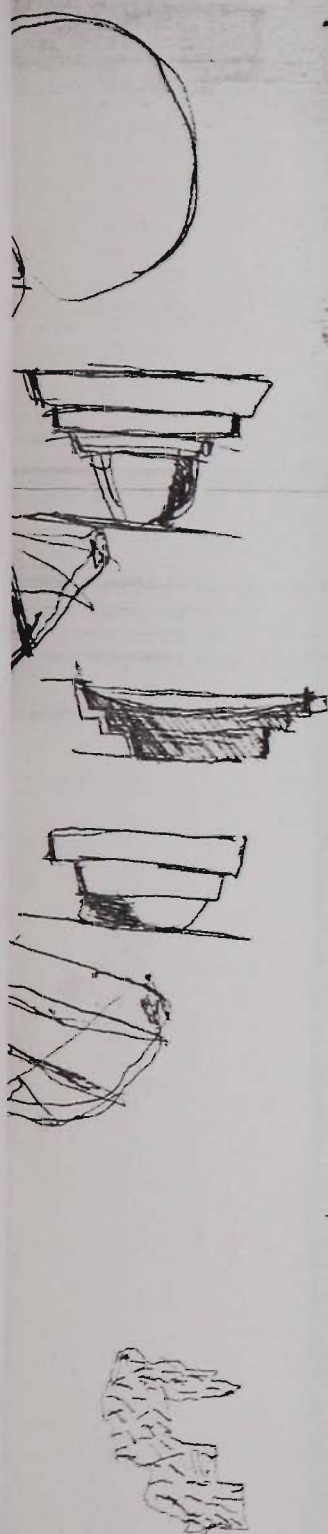
A photocopy selection of my journal sketches made on the field trips to the mine territories of the West Country of Tasmania. The journal sketches are from:

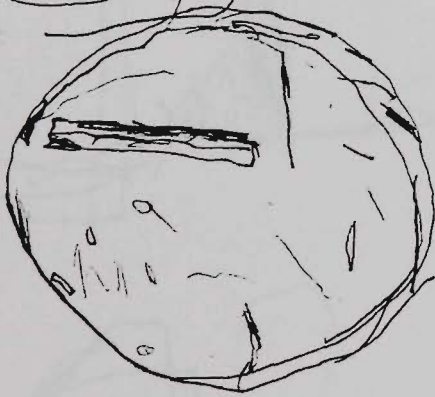
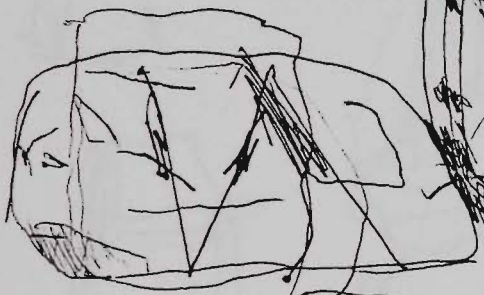
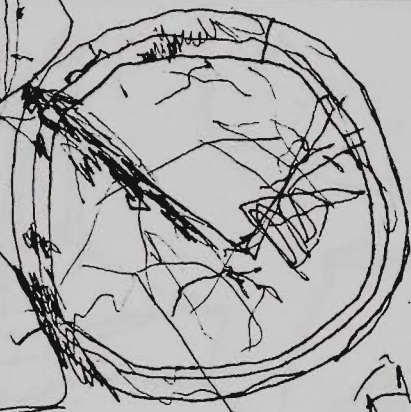
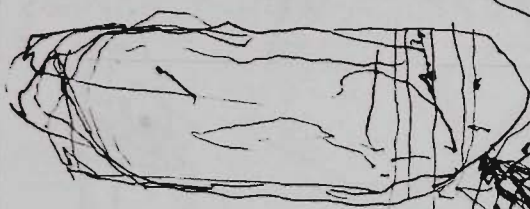
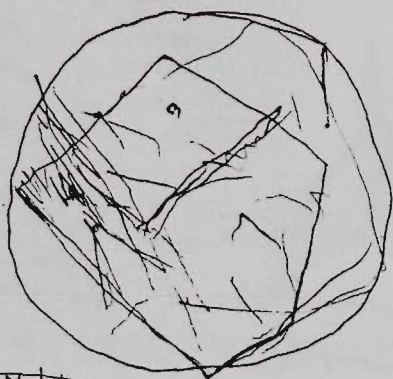
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Williamsford
Zeehan**

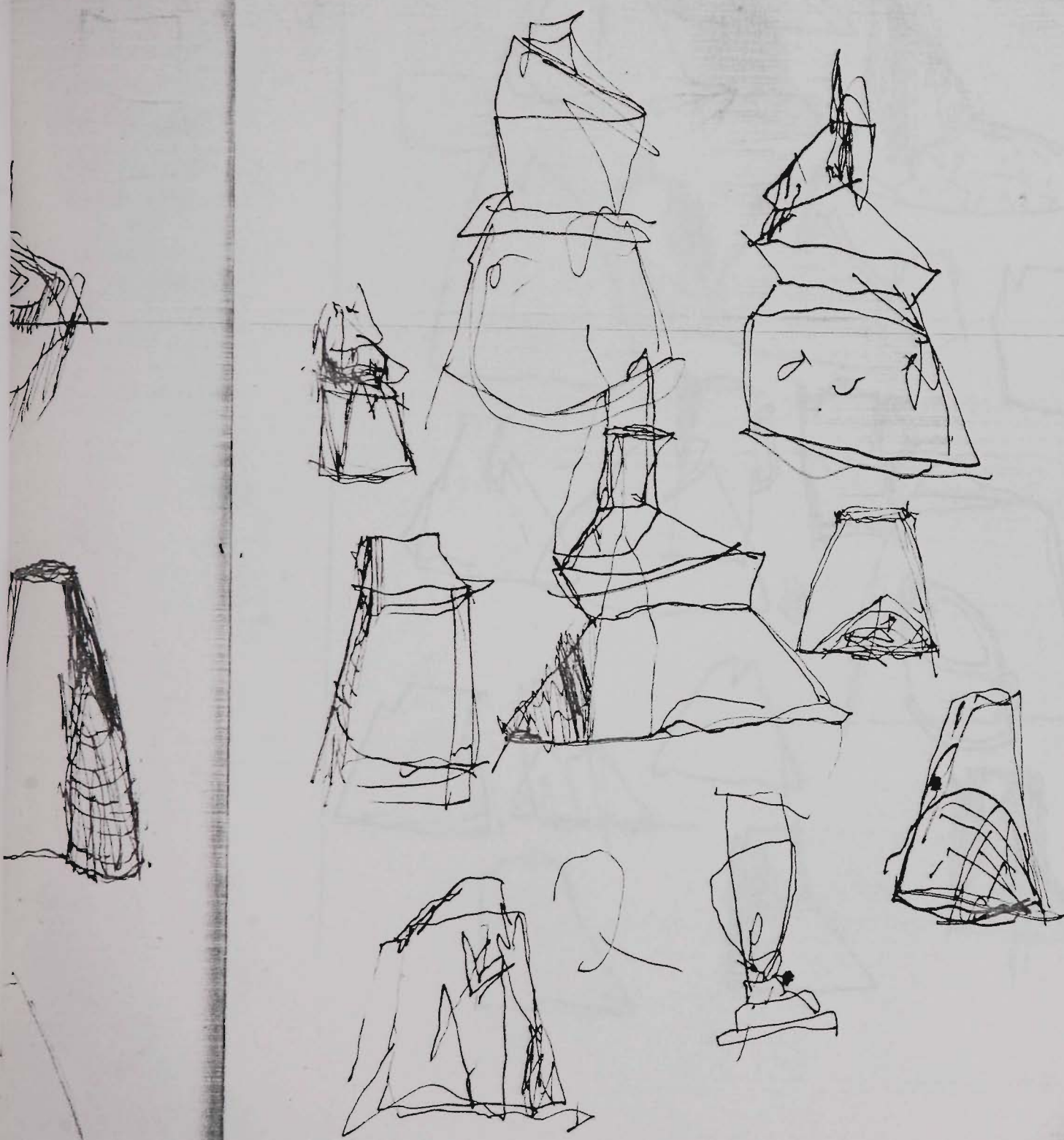


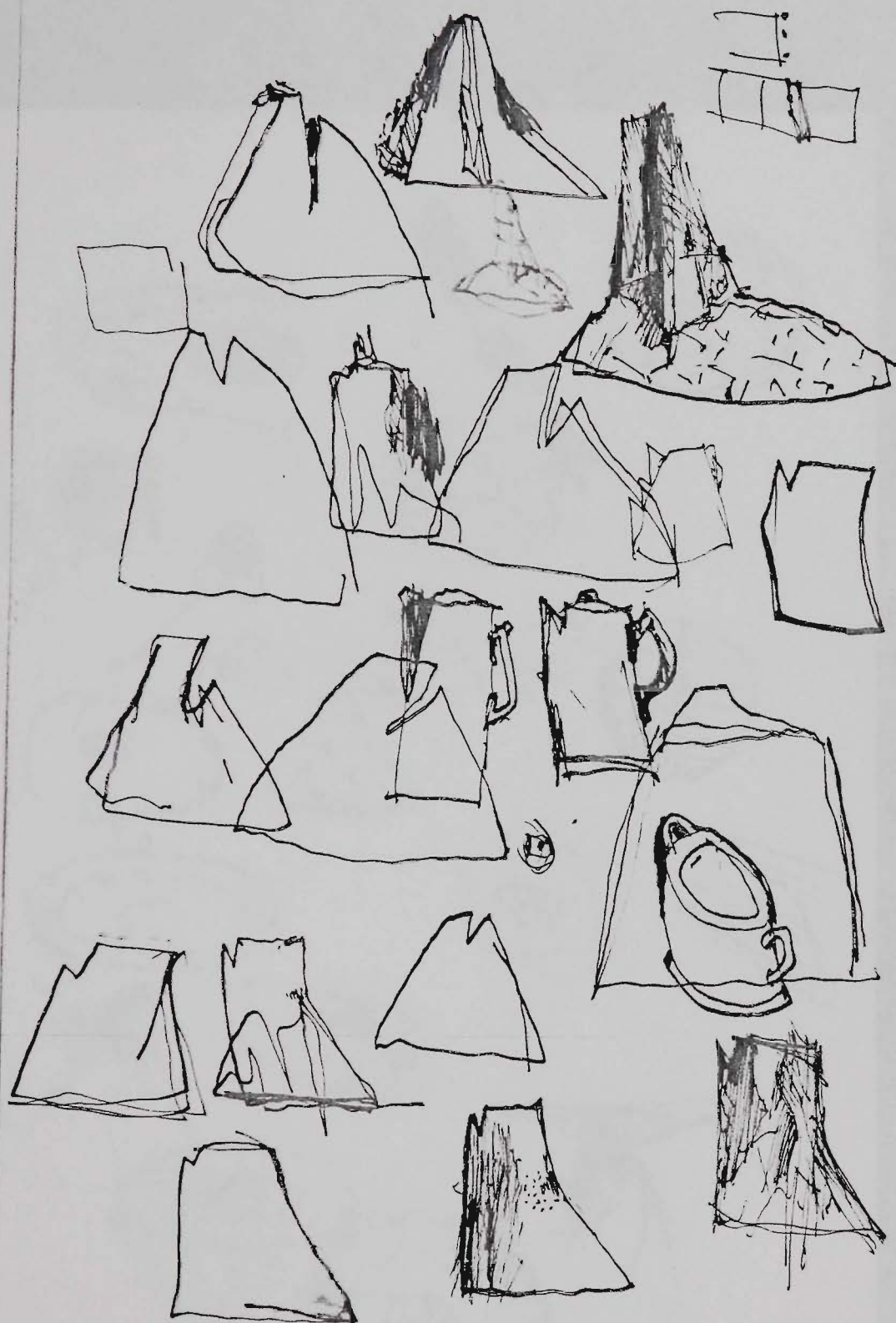


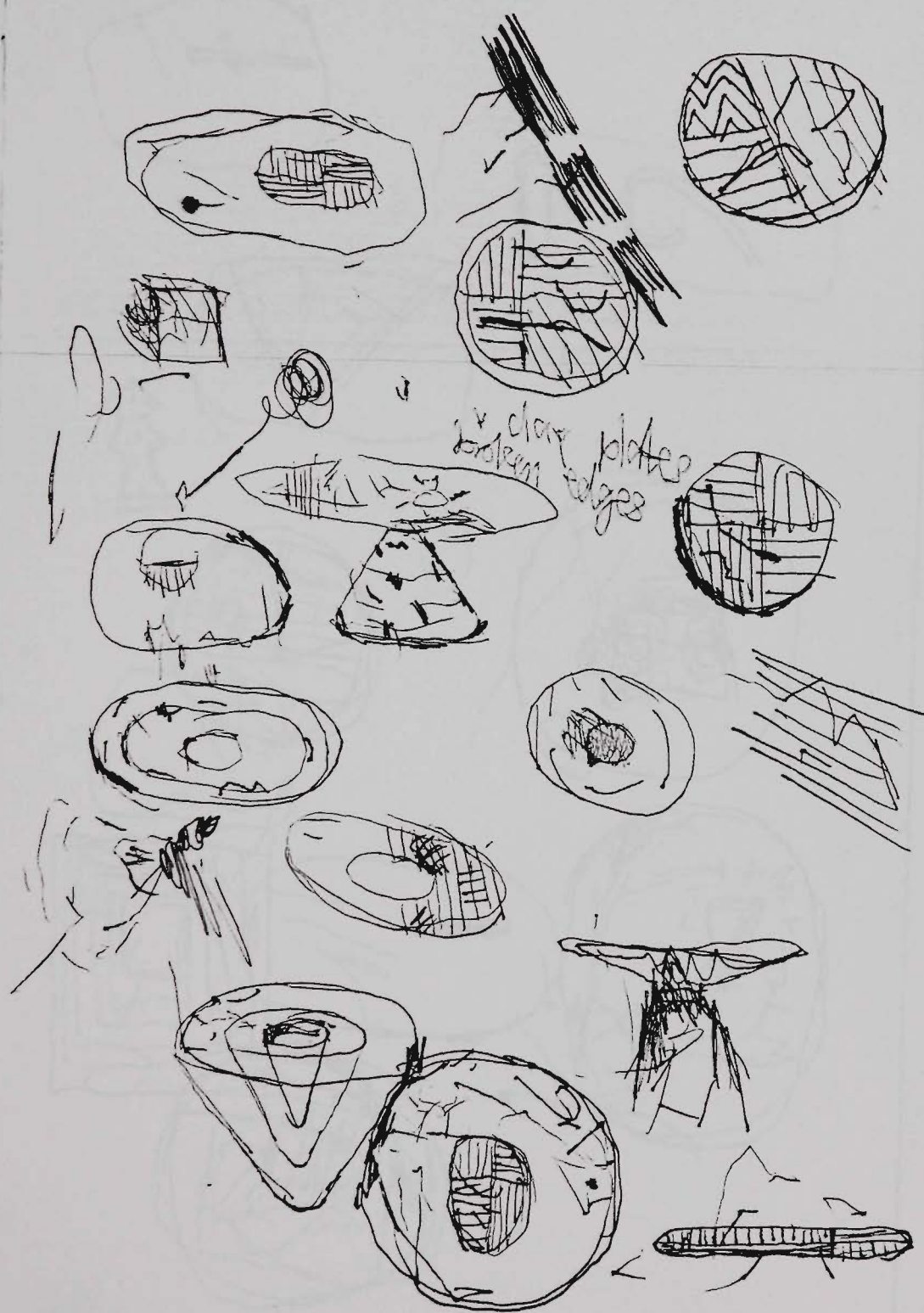
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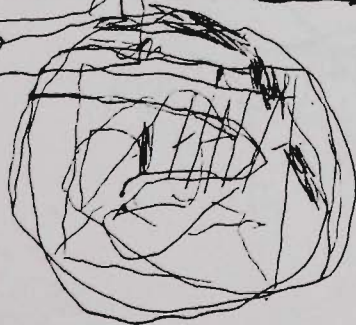
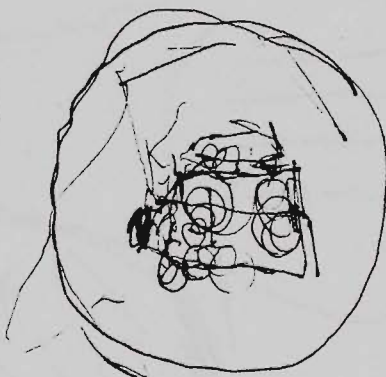
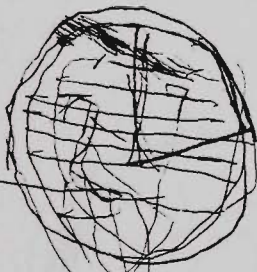
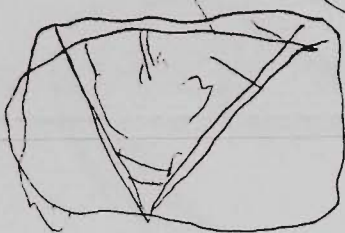
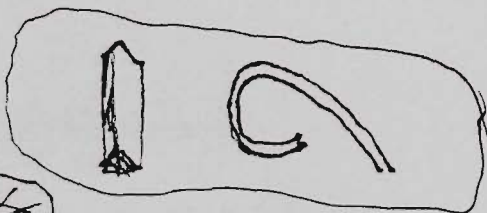
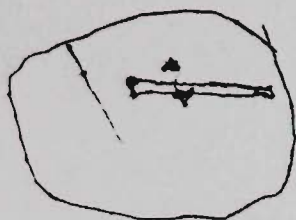


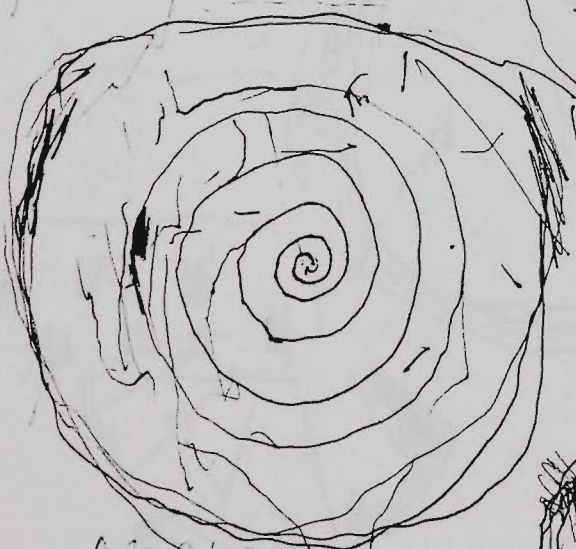
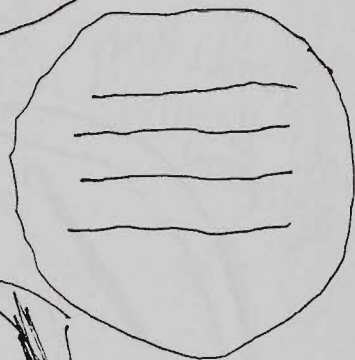
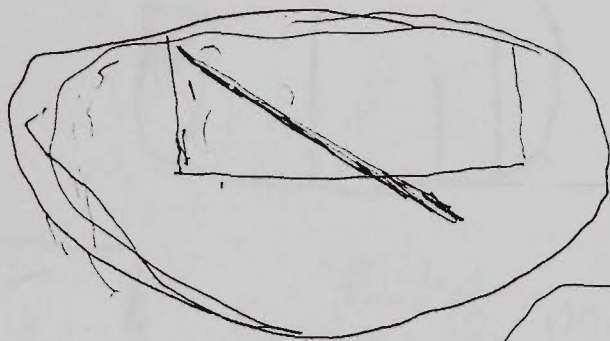




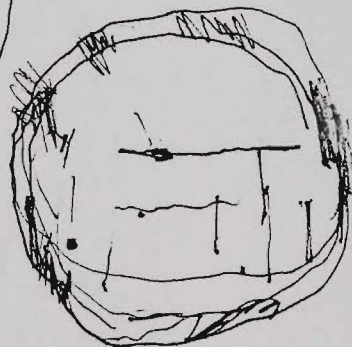








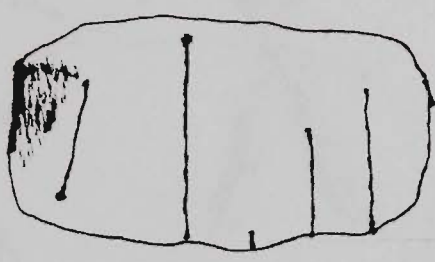
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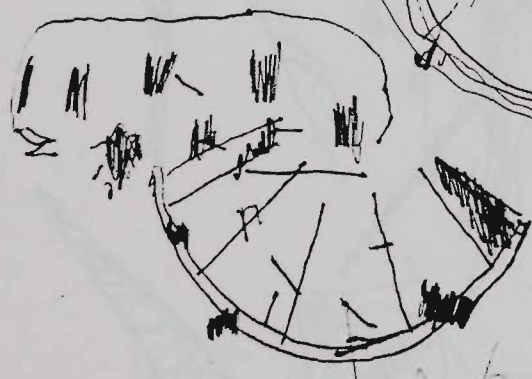
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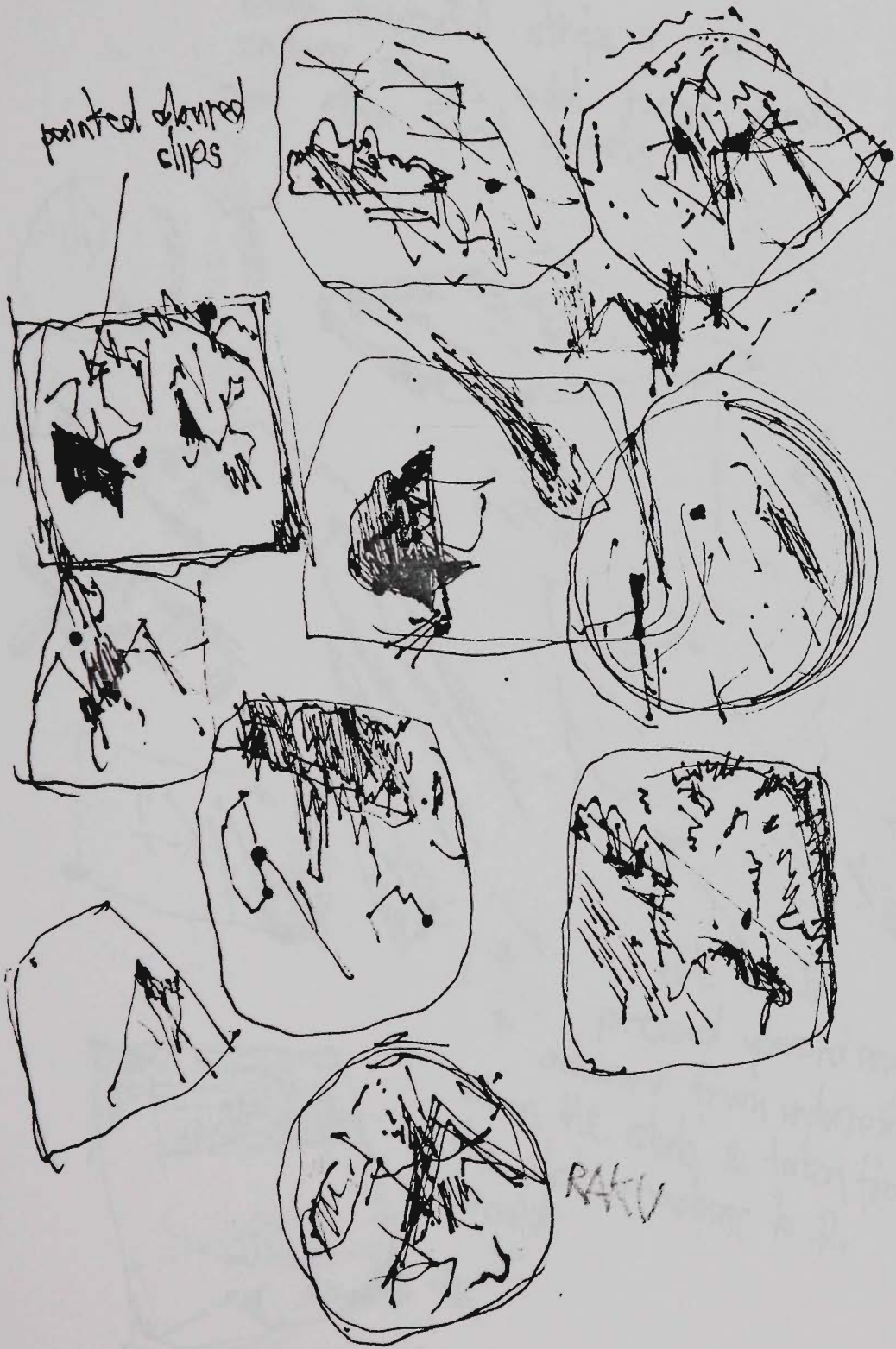
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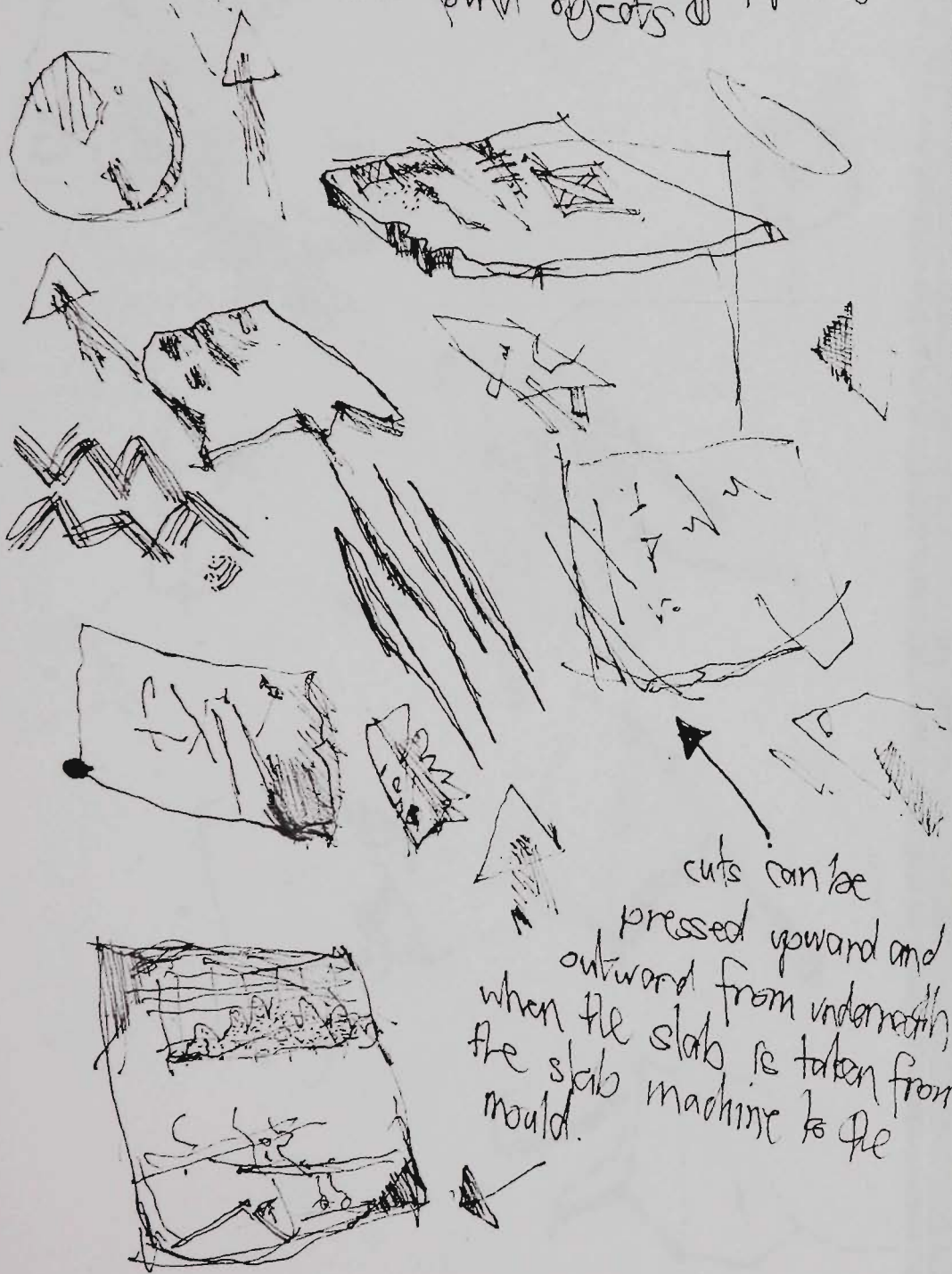
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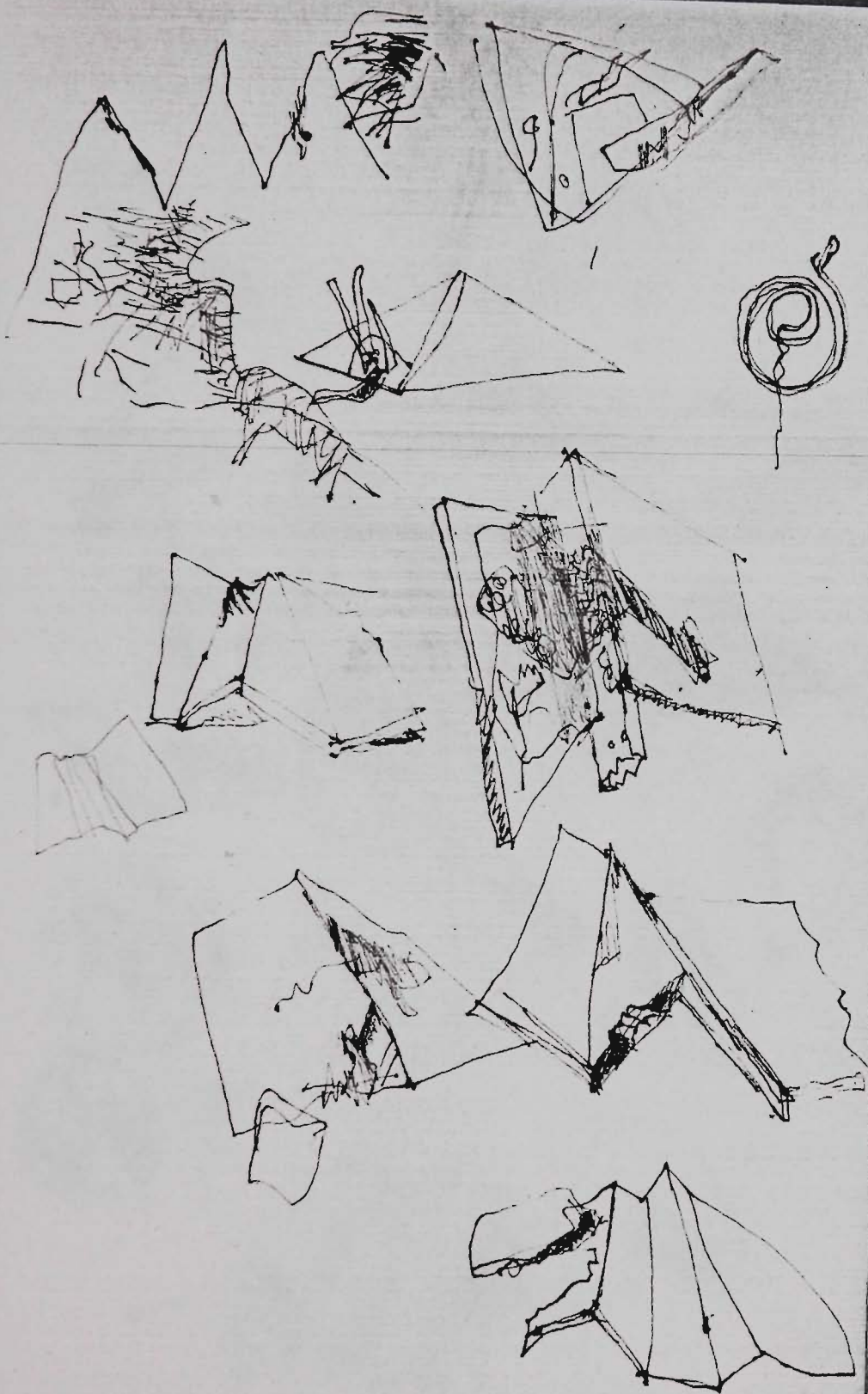
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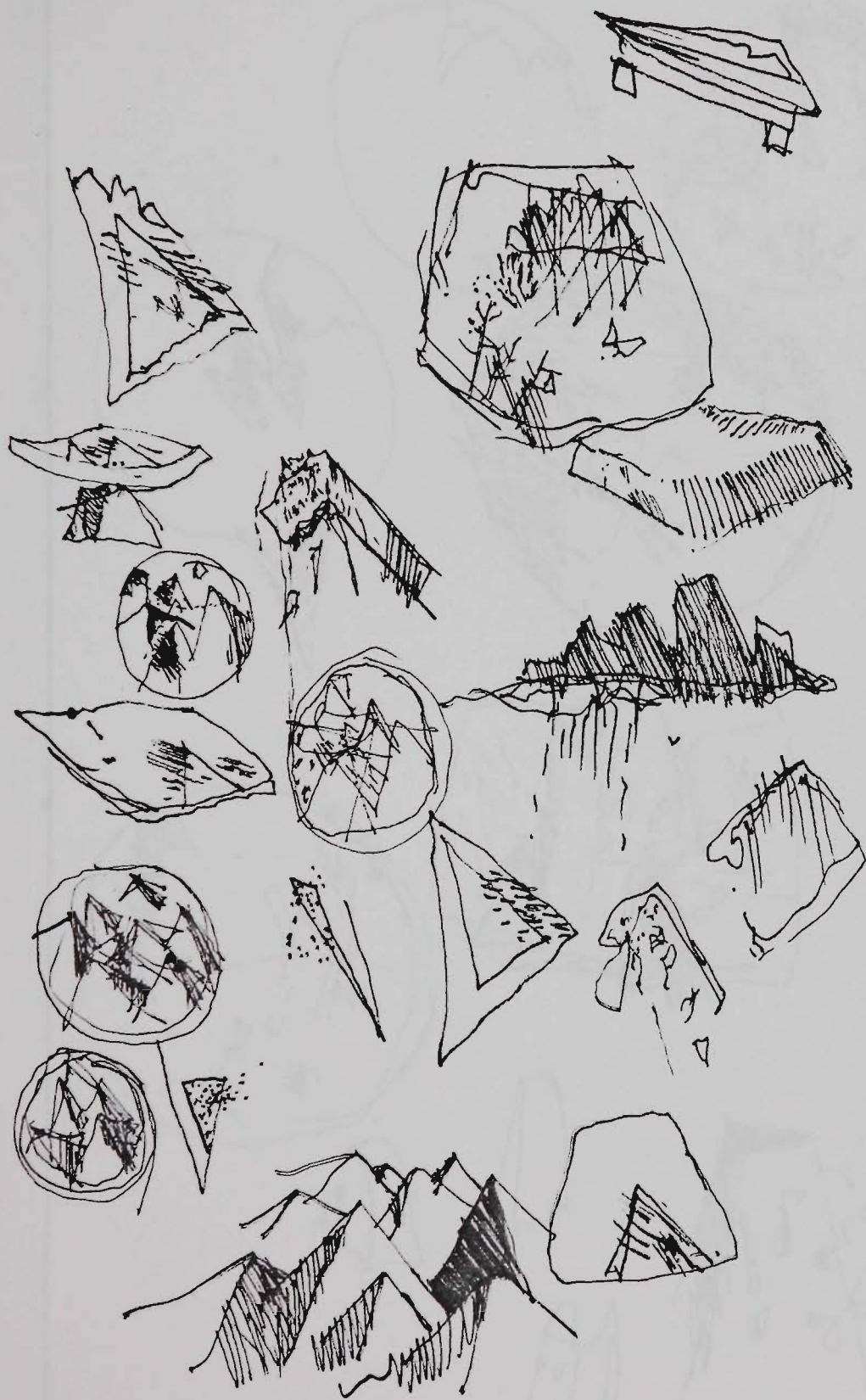


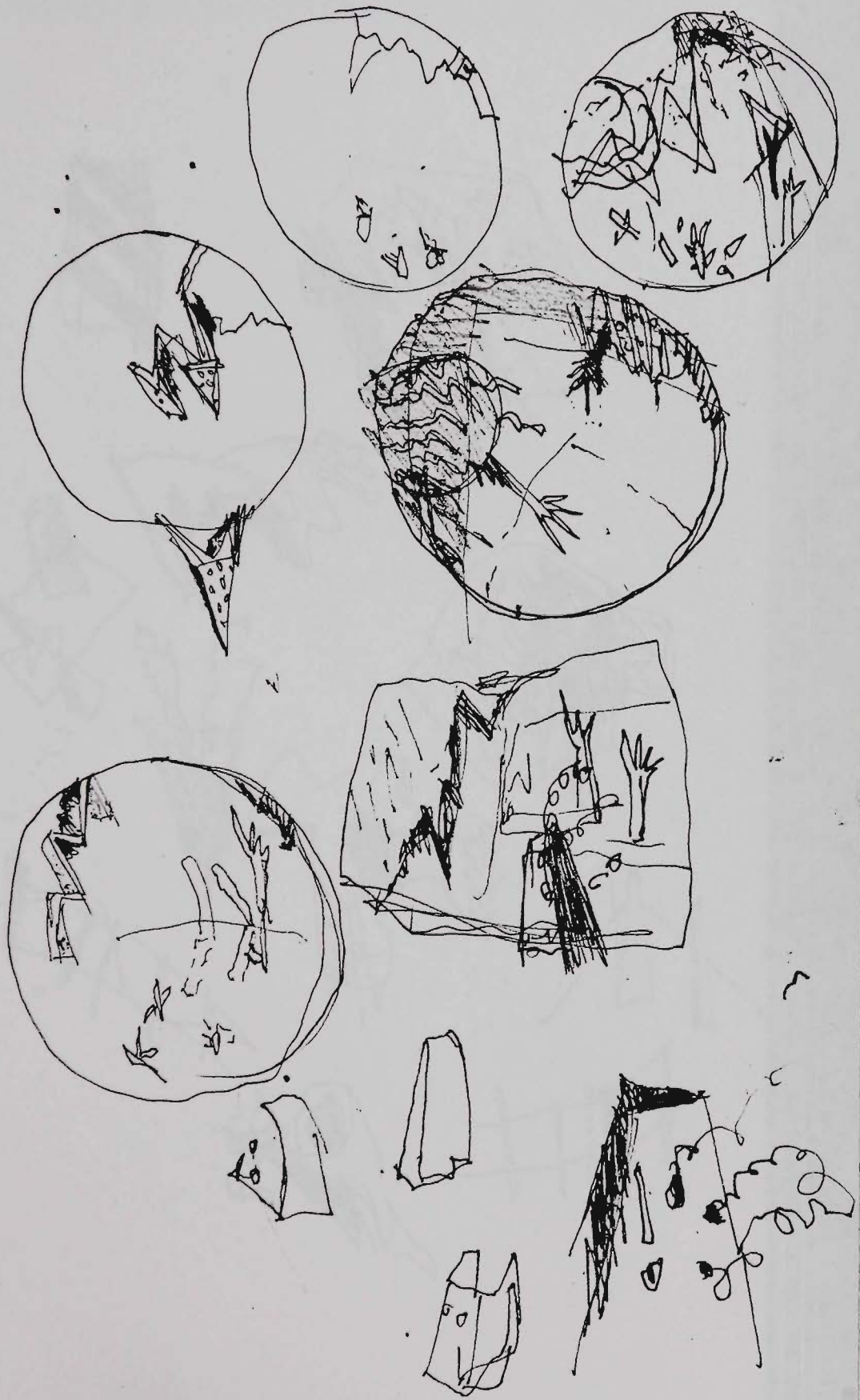
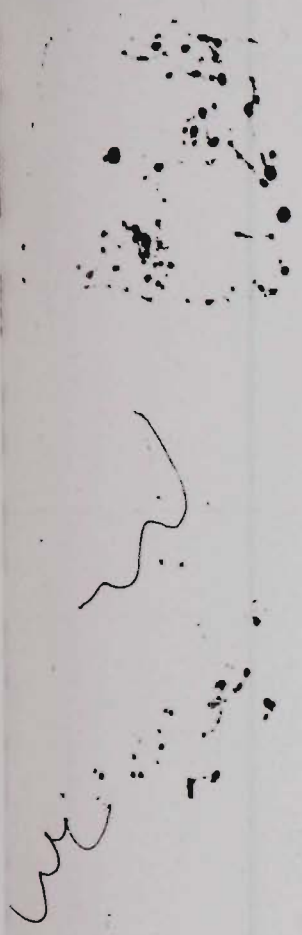
soak material strips in slip
 under strips add twigs, pencils
 and other found objects



cuts can be
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 outward from underneath
 when the slab is taken from
 the slab machine to the
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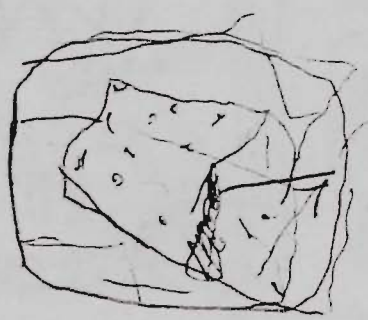
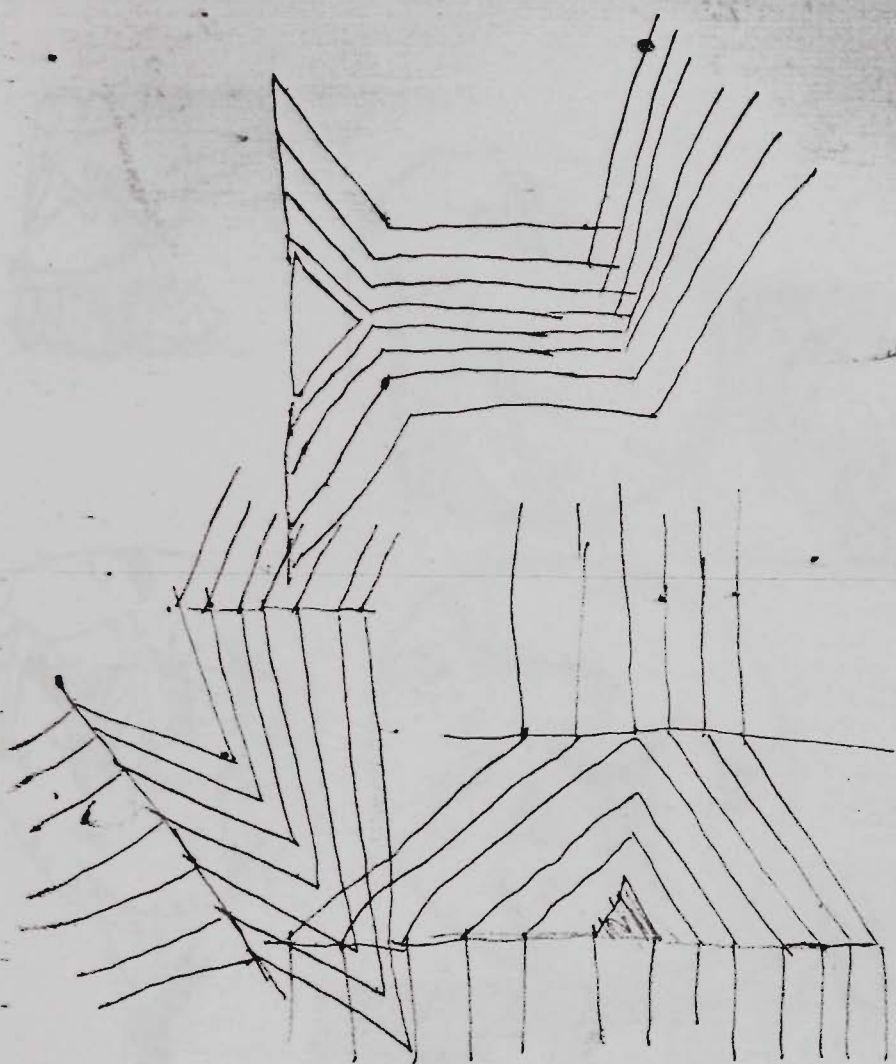
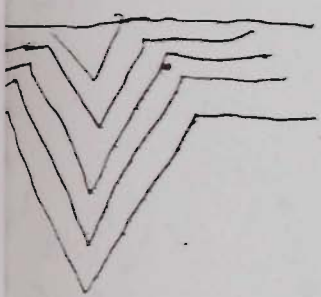
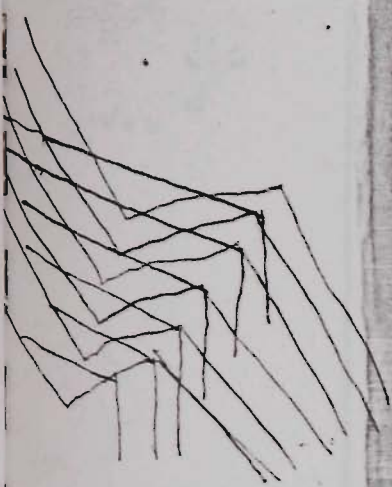


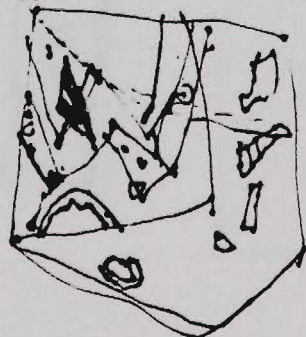
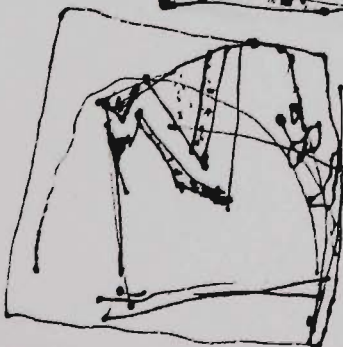
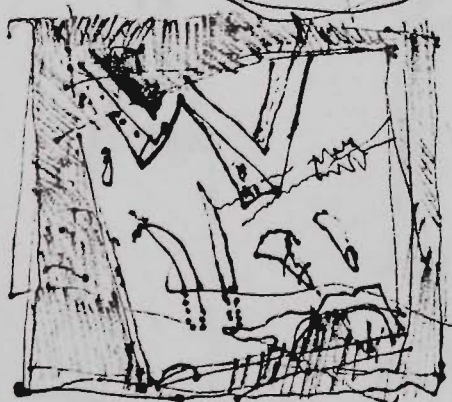
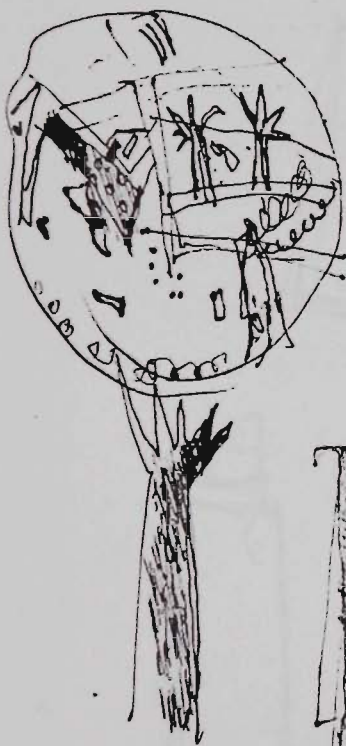
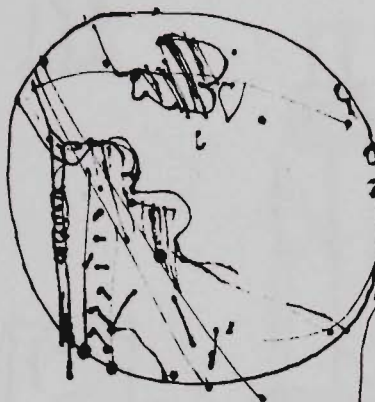


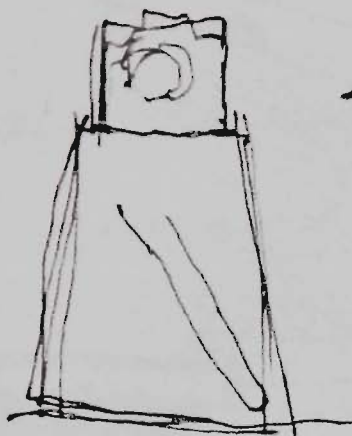
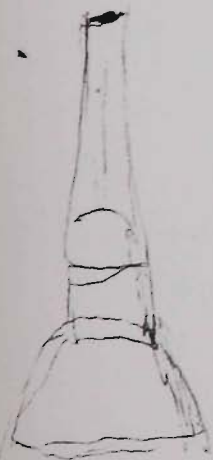
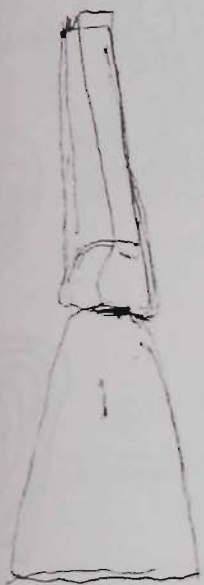




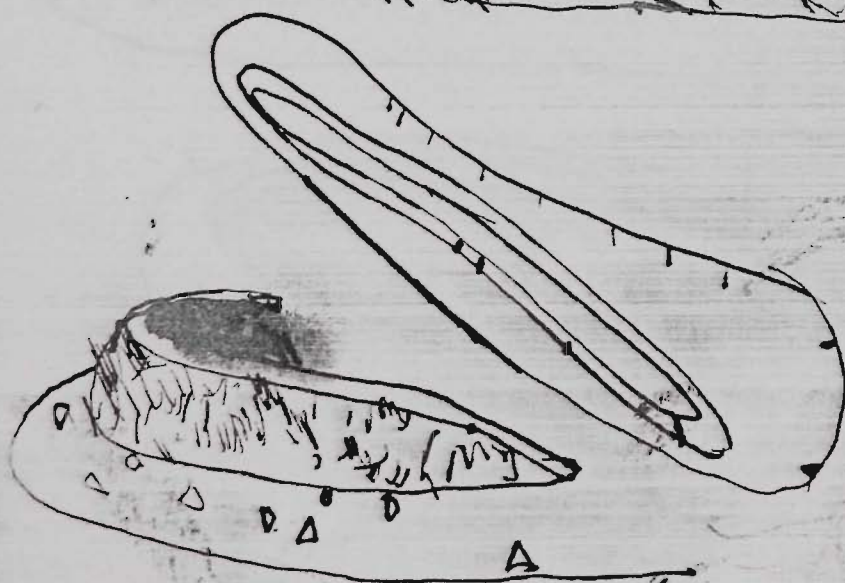
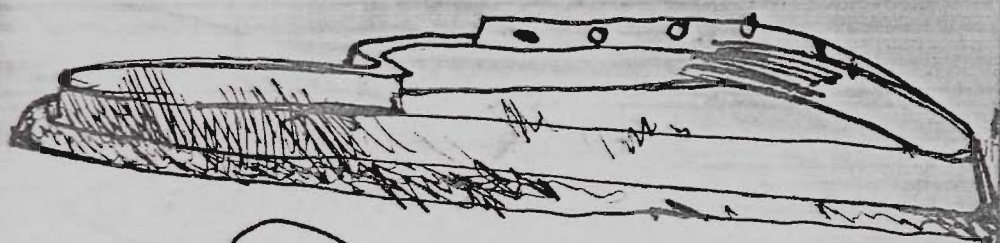
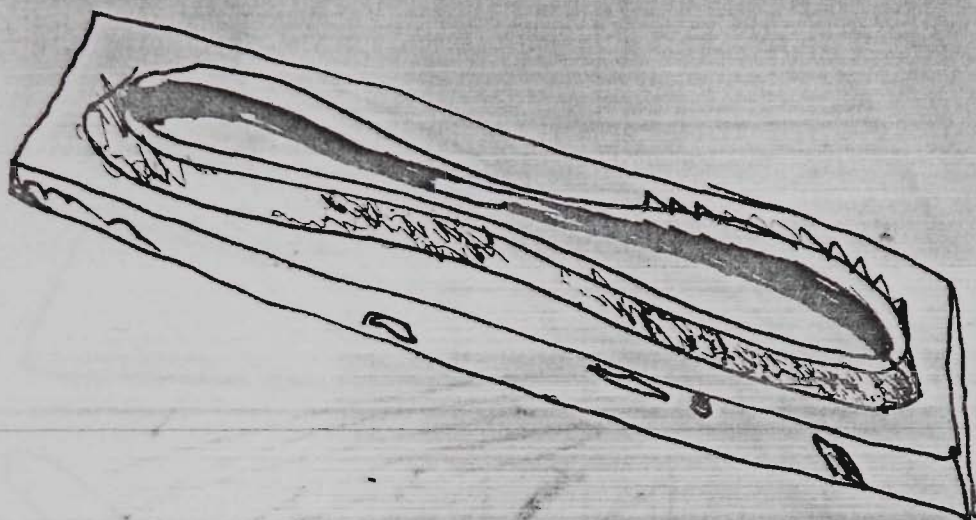
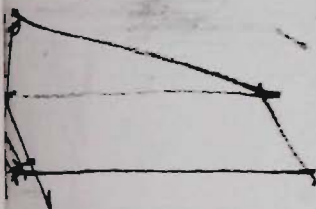
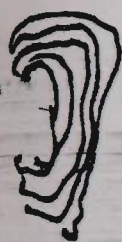


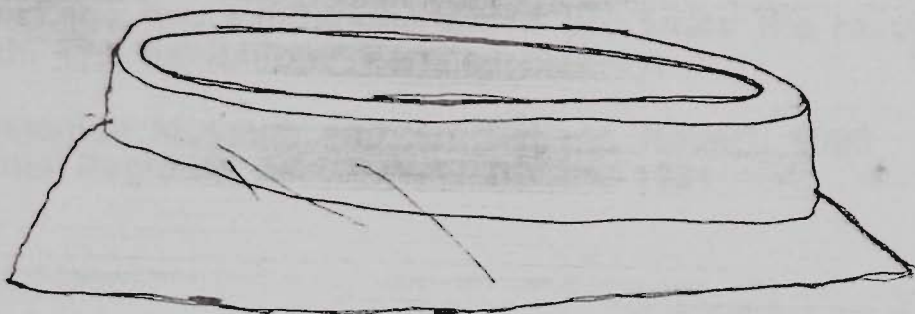




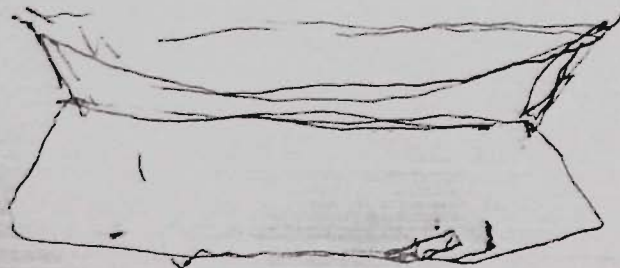
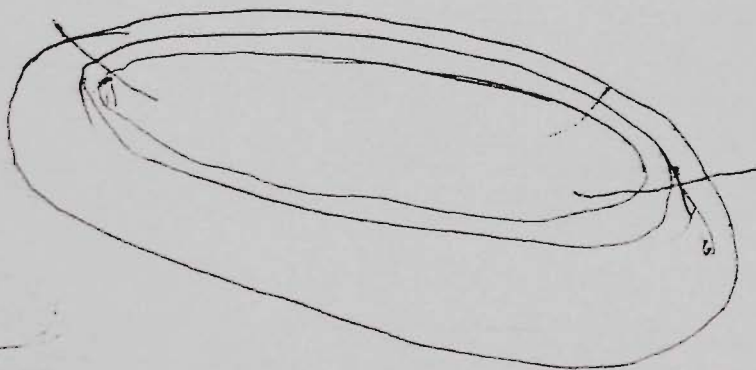
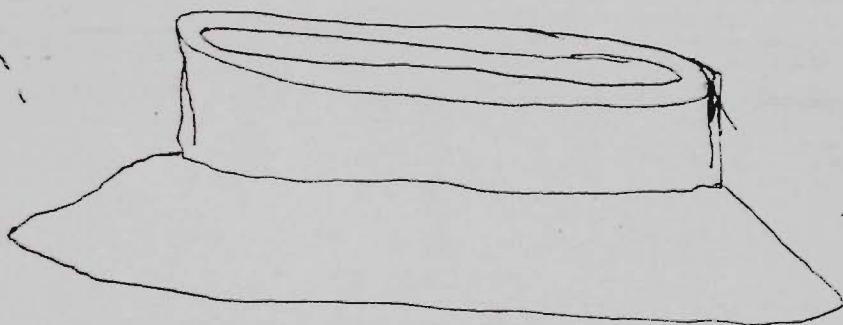


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APPENDIX IV

EXHIBITION CATALOGUES

Catalogues from the two exhibitions which presented the results of the research. The exhibitions were curated by:

The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, 1990
The Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Burnie, 1991

VINCENT McGRATH



T I M E P R I N T S

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
20 December 1989 – 30 January 1990



The artist as an observer and interpreter of human endeavours can be identified in the work of Vincent McGrath. The driving force of his work has been his attempts to come artistically to terms with the nature of the Australian environment and in particular the impact of European man on the Australian landscape. The emblems of man's intrusion into the landscape and the chronicles of his attempts to deal with unique environmental, social and political conditions have been interpreted as personal graphic icons over the last ten years as McGrath's work has evolved from earlier concerns relating to more functionally orientated forms. His earliest sculptural ceramics and murals attempted to "reflect and expand on the form, shape,

pattern, as well as the visual and tactile textures associated with the elements of nature".¹ This was a conscious move away from current teaching which was focusing primarily on the traditions of Anglo/Oriental ceramics and their application to contemporary practice.

Through a successive development of theme and form, McGrath's work has achieved a maturity and confidence demonstrated by his utilisation of clay as a plastic element of construction and expression. The late 1970's and early 1980's were a period of transition in his work and were important direction pointers for this current series of works. In a personal statement for the catalogue to the 1984 Mayfair Ceramics Exhibition, McGrath wrote:

*"My earlier work relied a great deal on effect through the execution of sophisticated clay process methods. I realised that the scale of the pieces was a limitation, the techniques often superficial and the work in general nothing more than clay exercises. The objects did not communicate anything about contemporary life or address themselves to a lasting beauty. When I was commissioned to undertake three major installation pieces, my thinking towards clay as an expressive medium altered radically. I found that clay responded more sympathetically when it is worked instinctively and intuitively. As the scale of the pieces increased I found the medium became more accommodating, more responsive and more forgiving."*²

This critical assessment of his own work illustrates a recognition of a personal requirement for his ceramics to become more expressive. The potential to achieve this was realised by moving away from the production of primarily vessel directed forms. The resolution of these new directions, through an altered approach to methods of production and a focusing of conceptual objectives, is demonstrated by the developments in McGrath's work from simple graphic slab platters to complex three-dimensional enclosed sculptural forms which incorporated varying degrees of scale and applications of personal descriptive imagery.

Prior to McGrath's move to Tasmania in 1985, his ceramics were profoundly influenced by the dominating landscape of the Northern Territory where he was resident for eight years. The harsh realities of the Top-End landscape, the sharpness and intensity of light and the range of human narratives of both optimism and dismal failure to come to terms with the environment all combined to provide a rich cache of imagery and inspiration. The narratives recorded were often about misadventure and oppressiveness, both human and environmental, of personal interactions and struggles of dealing with life in a unique part of Australia. In contrast to earlier ceramics which predominantly dealt with the landscape, works of this period saw the introduction of the figure in the landscape. The figure represented both observer and participant, at times a victim, on other occasions a visual narrator, but always a vehicle for communicating McGrath's particular interests in a landscape of seemingly endless space.

The vigorous works produced over the period of 1980-85 were not only a reaction to the harsh and often brutal environment of the Top-End but also to the frailness of man's attempts to maintain a long term impact on the landscape. The stark, strong colours of the northern landscape and the uncompromising brilliance and intensity of light were interpreted by McGrath to reinforce the graphic elements of his ceramics. Visual narratives tell about the bush, the wet season, the desecration of the landscape, the hopeful settler and the results of conflict within and beyond the individual. These works were testimony to McGrath's concerns for the temporary nature and influence of man in such an environment. They facilitate an understanding of his pre-occupation with the relationship of people, places and events.

McGrath's move to Tasmania in 1985 exposed him to a dramatic contrast of physical environment from his previous location and to an environment which presented a significant degree of historical evidence of European man's cultural impact and intervention in the landscape. McGrath's work was at this stage moving towards an emphasis on interpreting man's past events and away from his more exclusive statement of the human narratives of the northern end of Australia.

"Tasmanian 19th. century history rekindled my interest in the pioneering spirit – the pastoralists, the miners, the ship builders and the adventurers. ... The notion of introducing the elements of man's settlement as an opposition to the purity and resolve of nature has provided an interesting discourse."

His explorations and observations of this new landscape, in particular the coal mining areas of Derby and Cornwall, were significant influences on the first series of Tasmanian works exhibited at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in 1986.

"It is not the act of mining but rather the desecration that is my primary concern. Mullock heaps, wrecked vehicles, dilapidated buildings and twisted structures are all symbolic of a past presence. A testament to a cause abruptly finished, leaving no alternative but to yield to the forces of nature, but at the same time scarring it."

The contrast in the work was stark. Gone was the brilliance and intensity of colour and the narrative elements of human endeavours in the Northern Territory; this time replaced by a more sombre palette and forms devoid of identifiable human symbols.

The earlier dynamic graphic quality had decreased significantly. Gouged dark surfaces with small areas of restrained colour appeared on the dark terrain of the forms, reminiscent of the valleys themselves. The human presence, once again transient, was suggested only by the reference to the visual disturbance of the landscape. The colourful and aggressive statements of the Northern Territory works had given way to powerful yet grave monumental forms. The works directly reflected the longer periods of darkness evident in the Tasmanian climate and the lack of clarity of individual landscape elements that emanated from a more subtle light source and confined environment.

The subject which has come to be of primary influence to McGrath is the long history of mining in Tasmania. Initially, the works focused around the coal mines but McGrath's interest in industrial archaeology and the remnants of past enterprise provided inspirational elements in the landscape. The towns of Rossarden, Beaconsfield, Fingal and Queenstown have been direct sources and references for the works in this current exhibition. Finding an aesthetic satisfaction and resolution from the rubble, from the yielding of these forms to the forces of nature, and from a landscape which had at the same time been altered beyond redemption, presented a challenge. The desire to articulate a concept of a passing of time which allows for both the layering of events in human chronology and the eventual resurgence of the natural environment provided an important conceptual direction for the works.

McGrath's conceptual approach to his work is not related to concerns about the environment, but rather his direction is that of an interpreter of historical events and the transitional process from that which was once functional and highly utilitarian to that which is now useless. Out of this discord he has identified a personal aesthetic which is a prime source of motivation. The current works in the exhibition highlight this change of emphasis from those influenced by the coal mines. The previous works were very much the result of a feeling towards total decay and observations of a landscape caught in that process. The recent works focus on the notion of mining but deal predominantly with man-made objects in the environment. The large constructions associated with mining – the cranes, old chimneys, the architecture of the mine buildings themselves are embodied in these works which are constructed and assembled, with strong visual references to the architectural qualities of the source material.

A feature of this recent body of work is its continuing relationship to the vessel form which has pre-occupied McGrath through much of his previous work. McGrath views his current work as an artist who deals with the notion of vessel forms on a number of levels of perception and application. Though he has departed from this for a number of years and made ceramic sculpture, the most challenging question for him is that of dealing with complex aspects of the vessel form as a container of space internally and externally – a direct link with the man-made structures on the landscape.



VINCENT McGRATH



ALTERED STATES

BURNIE REGIONAL ART GALLERY
TASMANIA
13TH MARCH — 14TH APRIL 1991



The vitality of the graphic quality and the development of a complex richness of the surface texture reflects the influence of the remnants of minings' past as they are scattered on the landscape's surface. The application of marks into and onto the exterior of the forms extends beyond a painterly quality and provides a means for McGrath to present his interpretation of the layering of man's past presence, relics and fragments in a graveyard of human activity.

A quote from McGrath in 1988 is relevant to his approach to his works today:

"I consider my work to be in a state of flux. It is a continual progression of conceptual thinking rather than a change in method or expressive vocabulary. The means by which the statement is made is always changing to suit the expression... I am never dictated by a process just because I am comfortable with it."

As an object maker, Vincent McGrath selectively identifies and re-orders the relics of times past. Like the figures in some of his earlier works, McGrath works as a story-teller drawing on elements and remnants of past human endeavours to record the effect of the passage of time and the evolution which unfolds a complexity of experiences and interpretations as surface layers are peeled back. McGrath's source of inspiration has shifted in focus and his descriptive icons have been replaced by more subtle but no less complex surface treatments. A new energy and direction reiterates his ability to utilise his medium as a powerful mechanism of interpretation and conceptual expression.

Glenda King
Curator of Craft
Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery

- 1 The Living Space
An exhibition of Crafts for Architecture
Crafts Council of Victoria, Catalogue, 1976
- 2 Emmett, Dr Peter
1984 Mayfair Ceramic Award Exhibition
Craft Australia, No 2, 1984
- 3 Armstrong, Tish
Vincent McGrath
Craft Tasmania, Vol 15/4, 1985-86
- 4 Ibid
- 5 Mansfield, Janet
A Collector's Guide to Modern Australian Ceramics
Craftsman House, Australia, 1988



Catalogue

Measurements are in centimetres, length, width then height. All works are earthenware using low fired glazes, underglazed stains and body stains.

- 1 Derby Relic I 42 x 18 x 28
- 2 Derby Relic II 38 x 18 x 31
- 3 Derby Relic III 47 x 21 x 37
- 4 Derby Relic IV 46 x 21 x 29
- 5 Derby Relic V 40 x 24 x 33
- 6 Queenstown Legacy I 35 x 18 x 79
- 7 Queenstown Legacy II 28 x 23 x 81
- 8 Queenstown Legacy III 31 x 23 x 81
- 9 The Stack, Queenstown I 29 x 23 x 68
- 10 The Stack, Queenstown II 33 x 27 x 65
- 11 Mine Site I 48 x 31 x 66
- 12 Mine Site II 47 x 28 x 58
- 13 Mt Bischoff Morning 48 x 32 x 79
- 14 Mt Bischoff Dusk 48 x 29 x 87
- 15 Overburden at Cornwall 42 x 17 x 52
- 16 The Steps at Beaconfield 54 x 24 x 57
- 17 Beaconfield Memory 59 x 23 x 49
- 18 Storys Creek I 41 x 27 x 65
- 19 Beaconfield Metal 56 x 29 x 56
- 20 Fingal View 55 x 29 x 55
- 21 Mine Slope 35 x 22 x 43
- 22 Rossard Re-visited 59 x 27 x 39
- 23 At the top, Mt Bischoff 61 x 26 x 53
- 24 Along the Line 55 x 26 x 43

Biographical Notes

- 1946 Born Leonagatha, Victoria
- 1968 T.S.C. Melbourne State College, Melbourne
- 1969 S.A.T.C. Melbourne State College, Melbourne
- 1973 Fellowship Diploma of Art, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne
- 1976 Senior Lecturer, Department of Fine Art, Darwin Institute of Technology
- 1980 Head, Department of Fine Art, Darwin Institute of Technology
- 1984 Master of Fine Art (Hons), University of Puget Sound, Washington, U.S.A.
- 1985 Head, School of Art, Tasmanian State Institute of Technology

Solo Exhibitions

- 1978 Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory, Darwin
- 1981 Potters' Gallery, Sydney
- 1981 Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory, Darwin
- 1982 Canright Street Gallery, Vancouver, B.C., Canada
- 1982 Kitebridge Gallery, Tacoma, Washington, USA
- 1982 Traver Sutton Gallery, Seattle, Washington, USA
- 1984 Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory, Darwin
- 1984 Jam Factory Gallery, Adelaide
- 1984 Touring exhibition: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston; Burnie Art Gallery, Devonport Art Gallery, Crafts Council of Tasmania Gallery, Hobart
- 1986 Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston
- 1989 Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart

Selected Group Exhibitions

Overseas:

- 1960 Recent Ceramics, an Exhibition from Australia, touring major galleries in Europe for three years
- 1982 Contemporary Australian Ceramics, touring New Zealand, USA and Canada for two years
- 1983 Concorso Internazionale della Ceramica d'Arte Contemporanea, Faenza, Italy
- 1985 International Ceramics Exhibition, Harbourfront Gallery, Toronto, Canada
- 1985 Expo 85, Australian Art, Australian Pavilion, Tsukuba, Japan
- 1989 Launceston, Ikeda, Ikeda, Japan

State and national:

- 1976 Living Space, Crafts Council of Australia, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Melbourne
- 1977 Represented Northern Territory in the permanent exhibition at the Crafts Council of Australia, Sydney
- 1978 Arts Victoria 78, purchase award exhibition
- 1978 Territorian Craft Acquisition Award Exhibition, Northern Territory
- 1979 Territorian Craft Acquisition Award Exhibition, Northern Territory
- 1979 Crafts Council of Australia Exchange Exhibition, Northern Territory and Canberra
- 1980 Meat Market Craft Centre Centenary, Melbourne
- 1980 Mayfair Ceramic Award, Melbourne
- 1980 Annual Exhibition, Darwin Contemporary Artists' Cooperative
- 1980 From the Top of the Bottom of the World, Ceramic Faculty Exhibition, Darwin Institute of Technology
- 1981 The Gift, Crafts Board, Australia Council, Canberra
- 1981 Plates and Platters, Crafts Council of the ACT Gallery, Canberra
- 1982 Faculty Exchange Exhibition, Purdue University, USA
- 1982 Festival 82, Brisbane
- 1982 Australian Contemporary Crafts, a Survey, Queensland Art Gallery
- 1982 Function to Abstraction, Crafts Council of the Northern Territory Gallery
- 1983 New Directions, Jam Factory, Adelaide
- 1983 North Queensland Ceramic Awards, Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville, Queensland
- 1983 Sneakers Exhibition, Union Gallery, University of Adelaide
- 1983 Faculty Exhibition, Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory
- 1983 New Directions, Distillink, Melbourne
- 1984 The Northern Territory Collection, a selection, Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory
- 1984 ACT - Northern Territory Exchange Exhibition, Canberra
- 1984 Faculty Exhibition, Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory
- 1984 Craftworks in Australian Architecture, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Sydney
- 1984 Mayfair International Ceramics Award Exhibition, Crafts Council of Australia Gallery, Sydney
- 1985 Ceramics in Architecture, University of Melbourne
- 1985 Common Ground, Devise Gallery, Melbourne
- 1985 Impulse and Form, Art Gallery of Western Australia
- 1985 This Year 85, Cockatoo Gallery, Launceston
- 1985 Staff Art, touring Tasmanian regional galleries
- 1986 Earth Plastics, Lovers Bequest and Penrith Regional Gallery, Sydney
- 1986 Australian Crafts, Meat Market Craft Centre, Melbourne
- 1986 State of the Crafts, Fine Art Gallery, University of Tasmania
- 1986 National Ceramics Touring Exhibition, touring Tasmania
- 1987 Australian Ceramics (Mayfair), Meat Market Craft Centre, Melbourne
- 1987 Contemporary Australian Ceramics, Manly Art Gallery and Museum, Sydney
- 1988 Classics, The Craft Centre Gallery, Sydney
- 1988 Common Ground, Irving Sculpture Gallery, Sydney

- 1988 Australian Decorative Arts 1788-1988 Australian National Gallery, Canberra
- 1989 Collaborations, Cockatoo Gallery, Launceston
- 1989 Optimum, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Gallery, Melbourne
- 1989 Index 89, Darling Harbour, Sydney
- 1989 Ann Winter Diddams Show, Handmark Gallery
- 1989 Dis-integration, 4th National Ceramics Biennale, Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville

Collections

- Artbank
- Art Gallery of South Australia
- Art Gallery of Western Australia
- Australian Consul General's office, San Francisco, USA
- Australian Consul General's office, Vancouver, Canada
- Australian National Gallery
- Burnie Art Gallery, Tasmania
- Crafts Council of the Northern Territory
- Curtin University Art Collection, Perth
- Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, Toowoomba, Queensland
- Devonport Regional Art Gallery, Tasmania
- High Court of Australia, Canberra
- Institute Statale d'Arte, Cesine, Teramo, Italy
- Japanese Embassy, Canberra
- Larrobe Valley Arts Centre, Morwell, Victoria
- Manly Art Gallery, Sydney
- McGregor Collection, Queensland
- Museum of Art, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney
- Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory
- National Gallery of Victoria
- National Museum of Art, Brasilia, Brazil
- Northern Territory Government Collection, Darwin
- Ontario College of Art, Toronto, Canada
- Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville, Queensland
- Portland State University, Oregon, USA
- Queensland Art Gallery
- Queensland Potters Association, Brisbane
- Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, Tasmania
- Royal Australian Military Collection, Melbourne
- Shepparton Art Gallery, Victoria
- South Australian College of Advanced Education, Adelaide
- St Vincents Hospital Art Collection, Sydney
- Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart
- Toowoomba Potters Association, Queensland
- University of the Northern Territory
- University of Puget Sound, Washington, USA
- University of Washington, USA
- University of the Pacific, Washington, USA
- Victoria Government, Ministry for the Arts

Public Commissions

- 1970 Font Bowl Collection, St Pauls Cathedral, Darwin
- 1979 Ceramic Mural, Casuarina Hospital, Darwin
- 1980 Ceramic Mural, Law Courts Building, Alice Springs
- 1982 Ceramic Installation, University of Puget Sound, Washington, USA (with two other artists)

Designed by Adrian Sprinks
Organised by Julia Clark

Exhibition touring programme for 1990

- Devonport Regional Art Gallery
- Burnie Regional Art Gallery
- Crimline Street Gallery

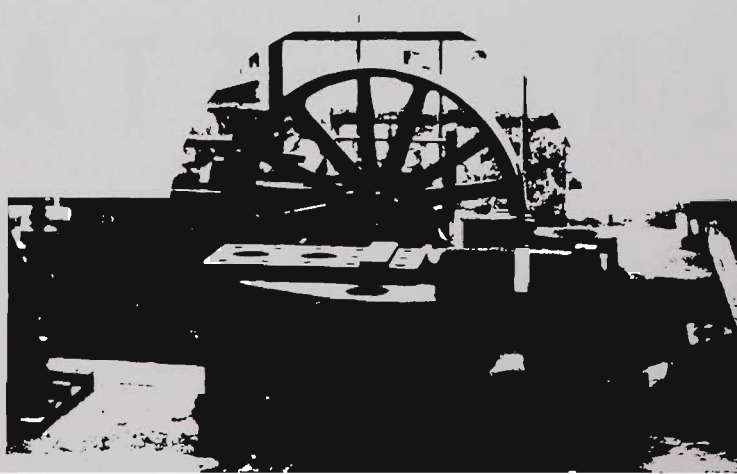
INTRODUCTION

The present exhibition stands as an integral statement by Vincent McGrath on issues which concern him now or have done so in the past.

Like all those whose regular employment also forms the foundation to their dedicated personal values, McGrath is subject to preconceptions of his audience which are based on their perceptions of directions in his preceding work. His resistance to confinement of this kind by changes in media, form and decoration is a measure of his comprehensive technical skills, fluent expression and, above all, intellectual integrity. In these circumstances, it may be predicted confidently that an objectively balanced, retrospective review of his work must wait for many more years.

There has always been, however a clear consistency in the ideas expressed in his work. These concepts and attitudes will have their full expression through his formal and informal contacts with students, colleagues and the art community as a teacher in a tertiary institution.

In the turbulence of post-secondary education since 1968, budget-driven reviews have several times raised doubts about the priority for the arts and humanities among the many pressing requirements for "vocational" training. Simultaneously, in the world outside, the community has experienced the adverse effects of economics and engineering (in their various applications) which have been undertaken with insufficient regard to common human values, including aesthetics. To their credit, many of the senior members of these professions (and almost every politician) have learned, albeit empirically, to include these human needs into their planning and cost/benefit analyses. This process will only be fully efficient when all



undergraduates are able to view the social and environmental contexts in which their future professional work will be undertaken by access to relevant courses in aesthetics and humanities or, at least, some passing contact with teachers and other students who are themselves engaged in these fields within the community of the University or College.

Vincent McGrath spent eight formative years in the Northern Territory. Like the painters Robert Juniper, John Olsen and many more, the vast, rugged, ochre-brown landscapes had a potent influence on his work which has persisted into his vision of the Tasmanian scene, giving a universal quality to his visual statements, even to those which are specifically identified. Similarly, the influence of Asian ceramic forms and decoration in Australia during his early years remains imbedded in his palette. To some, such influences encourage mere eclecticism; McGrath has experienced, absorbed and adapted them into his mature style.

The School of Art at the Launceston Campus of the re-formed University of Tasmania has to achieve much more than train practising artists and art teachers. Vincent McGrath heads that School after a consistent career built upon dedication, hard work and aptitude. One hopes that he will be encouraged also to extend the format of his work to townscape proportions by producing more ceramic murals in Tasmania, as he has done already in Darwin and Alice Springs. The "platter" forms featured in this exhibition foreshadows the contribution which they could provide to urban Tasmania.

FRANK ELLIS

DIRECTOR
BURNIE REGIONAL ART GALLERY

CATALOGUE

Measurements are in centimetres — length, width then height

1	Through Rossarden 1	1019 x 48 x 13
2	Through Rossarden 2	1018 x 51 x 15
3	Salvage 1	1004 x 44 x 12
4	Salvage 2	1011 x 48 x 13
5	Rension Bell Tin 1	60 x 60 x 12
6	Rension Bell Tin 2	62 x 60 x 12
7	Rension Bell Tin 3	60 x 60 x 14
8	Que River Mine 1	63 x 44 x 12
9	Que River Mine 2	61 x 43 x 14
10	Que River Mine 3	61 x 42 x 12
11	The Smelter Stack, Queenstown 1	57 x 55 x 9
12	The Smelter Stack, Queenstown 2	58 x 56 x 8
13	Gormanston Metal 1	65 x 44 x 11
14	Gormanston Metal 2	68 x 45 x 12
15	Mt Lyall West 1	62 x 48 x 11
16	Mt Lyall West 2	65 x 51 x 10
17	Shaft-head 1	75 x 31 x 7
18	Shaft-head 2	78 x 29 x 8
19	Grubb Shaft	64 x 24 x 5
20	Beaconsfield 1990, 1	64 x 27 x 5
21	Beaconsfield 1990, 2	64 x 28 x 6
22	EZ Mt Read	58 x 55 x 8
23	Aberfoyle Cleveland	45 x 46 x 10
24	Rosebury	47 x 44 x 8
25	The Dreadnought	52 x 46 x 10
26	Into Tullah	48 x 48 x 10
27	Zeehan Field	52 x 44 x 8
28	Zeehan Now 1	43 x 42 x 8
29	Zeehan Now 2	45 x 43 x 10
30	The Hercules 1	42 x 41 x 6
31	The Hercules 2	43 x 41 x 6
32	The Hercules 3	43 x 42 x 6

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

All pieces in this exhibition were handbuilt in cradle moulds using a high refractory clay (Walkers Raku). Each piece has once been fired in an oxidizing/neutral kiln atmosphere to 1150 degrees centigrade.

Colour was derived mainly from the use of body stains, underglaze pigments, oxides and the natural colour of terracotta and white clays. Some pieces have glazed sections developed through the use of a low-fire transparent glaze.





Biographical Notes

- 1948 Born Leongatha, Victoria
 1968 T.S.T.C., Melbourne State College, Melbourne
 1969 S.A.T.C., Melbourne State College, Melbourne
 1973 Fellowship Diploma of Art, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne
 1976 Senior Lecturer, Department of Fine Art, Darwin Institute of Technology
 1980 Head, Department of Fine Art, Darwin Institute of Technology
 1984 Master of Fine Art (Hons), University of Puget Sound, Washington, U.S.A.
 1985 Head, School of Art, University of Tasmania, Launceston (formerly T.S.I.T.)

Solo Exhibitions

- 1978 Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory, Darwin
 1981 Potters Gallery, Sydney
 1981 Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory, Darwin
 1982 Cartwright Street Gallery, Vancouver, B.C. Canada
 1982 Kittredge Gallery, Tacoma, Washington, USA
 1982 Traver Sutton Gallery, Seattle, Washington, USA
 1984 Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory, Darwin
 1984 Jam Factory Gallery, Adelaide
 1984 Touring exhibition: Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston; Burnie Art Gallery; Devonport Art Gallery; Crafts Council of Tasmania Gallery, Hobart
 1986 Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston
 1989 Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart
 1990 Gallery Clinkers, Launceston
 1990 Devonport Regional Art Gallery, Devonport

Selected Group Exhibitions

Overseas:

- 1990 *Recent Ceramics: an Exhibition from Australia*, touring major galleries in Europe for three years
 1982 *Contemporary Australian Ceramics*, touring New Zealand, USA and Canada for two years
 1983 *Concorso Internazionale della Ceramica d'Arte Contemporanea*, Firenze, Italy
 1985 *International Ceramics Exhibition*, Harbourfront Gallery, Toronto, Canada
 1985 *Expo 85*, Australian Art, Australian Pavilion, Tsukuba, Japan
 1989 Launceston, Ikeda, Ikeda, Japan
 1990 *The Third, Wood Triennial of Ceramics*, Zagreb, Yugoslavia

State and national:

- 1978 *Living Space*, Crafts Council of Australia, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Melbourne
 1977 Represented Northern Territory in the permanent exhibition at the Crafts Council of Australia, Sydney
 1978 *Ans Victoria 78*, purchase award exhibition
 1978 *Territorian Craft Acquisition Award* Exhibition, Northern Territory
 1979 *Territorian Craft Acquisition Award* Exhibition, Northern Territory
 1979 *Crafts Council of Australia Exchange Exhibition*, Northern Territory and Canberra
 1980 *Meat Market Craft Centre Centenary*, Melbourne
 1980 *Mayfair Ceramic Award*, Melbourne
 1980 Annual Exhibition, Darwin Contemporary Artists' Cooperative
 1980 *From the Top of the Bottom of the World*, Ceramic Faculty Exhibition, Darwin Institute of Technology
 1991 *The Gift*, Crafts Board, Australia Council, Canberra
 1981 *Plates and Platters*, Crafts Council of the ACT Gallery, Canberra

- 1982 *Faculty Exchange Exhibition*, Purdue University, USA
 1982 *Festival 82*, Brisbane
 1982 *Australian Contemporary Crafts: a Survey*, Queensland Art Gallery
 1982 *Function to Abstraction*, Crafts Council of the Northern Territory Gallery
 1983 *New Directions*, Jam Factory, Adelaide
 1983 *North Queensland Ceramic Awards*, Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville, Queensland
 1983 *Speakers' Exhibition*, Union Gallery, University of Adelaide
 1983 *Faculty Exhibition*, Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory
 1983 *New Directions*, Distellink, Melbourne
 1984 *The Northern Territory Collection*, a selection, Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory
 1984 *ACT - Northern Territory Exchange Exhibition*, Canberra
 1984 *Faculty Exhibition*, Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory
 1984 *Craftworks in Australian Architecture*, Royal Australian Institute of Architects, Sydney
 1984 *Mayfair International Ceramics Award Exhibition*, Crafts Council of Australia Gallery, Sydney
 1985 *Ceramics in Architecture*, University of Melbourne
 1985 *Common Ground*, Devise Gallery, Melbourne
 1985 *Impulse and Form*, Art Gallery of Western Australia
 1985 *This Year 85*, Cockatoo Gallery, Launceston
 1985 *Staff Art*, touring Tasmanian regional galleries
 1988 *Earth Plastics*, Lewers Bequest and Penrhin Regional Gallery, Sydney
 1988 *Australian Crafts*, Meat Market Craft Centre, Melbourne
 1986 *State of the Crafts*, Fine Art Gallery, University of Tasmania
 1986 *National Ceramics Touring Exhibition*, touring Tasmania
 1987 *Australian Ceramics (Mayfair)*, Meat Market Craft Centre, Melbourne
 1987 *Contemporary Australian Ceramics*, Marly Art Gallery and Museum, Sydney
 1988 *Obscure*, The Craft Centre Gallery, Sydney
 1988 *Common Ground*, Irving Sculpture Gallery, Sydney
 1968 *Australian Decorative Arts 1788-1988*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra
 1989 *Collaborations*, Cockatoo Gallery, Launceston
 1989 *Optimum*, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Gallery, Melbourne
 1989 *Index 88*, Darling Harbour, Sydney
 1989 *Art Winter*, Dodrums Show, Handmark Gallery
 1989 *Disintegration*, 4th National Ceramics Biennial, Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville
 1990 *Sculptural Ceramics*, Distellink Gallery, Melbourne
 1990 *Disintegration*, Gold Coast Regional Gallery

Collections

- Artbank
 Art Gallery of South Australia
 Art Gallery of Western Australia
 Australian Consul General's office, San Francisco, USA
 Australian Consul General's office, Vancouver, Canada
 Australian National Gallery
 Burnie Art Gallery, Tasmania
 Crafts Council of the Northern Territory
 Curtin University Art Collection, Perth
 Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, Toowoomba, Queensland
 Devonport Regional Art Gallery, Tasmania
 High Court of Australia, Canberra
 Istituto Statale d'Arte, Castello, Teramo, Italy
 Japanese Embassy, Canberra
 Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, Morwell, Victoria
 Marly Art Gallery, Sydney

- McGregor Collection, Queensland
 Museum of Art, Sao Paulo, Brazil
 Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney
 Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory
 National Gallery of Victoria
 National Museum of Art, Brasilia, Brazil
 Northern Territory Government Collection, Darwin
 Ontario College of Art, Toronto, Canada
 Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville, Queensland
 Portland State University, Oregon, USA
 Queensland Art Gallery
 Queensland Potters Association, Brisbane
 Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, Tasmania
 Royal Australian Military Collection, Melbourne
 Shepparton Art Gallery, Victoria
 South Australian College of Advanced Education, Adelaide
 St Vincent's Hospital Art Collection, Sydney
 Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart
 Toowoomba Potters Association, Queensland
 University of the Northern Territory
 University of Puget Sound, Washington, USA
 University of Washington, USA
 University of the Pacific, Washington, USA
 Victorian Government, Ministry for the Arts

Public Commissions

- 1979 *Font Bowl* Collection, St Pauls Cathedral, Darwin
 1979 Ceramic Mural, Casuarina Hospital, Darwin
 1980 Ceramic Mural, Law Courts Building, Alice Springs
 1982 Ceramic Installation, University of Puget Sound, Washington, USA (with two other artists)

This exhibition is in partial fulfilment of the D.C.A. award from The University of Wollongong, N.S.W.

Cover Photograph: Zeehan Now 2
 Insert Photograph: Gormanston Metal 1

Photography by Mark Tripp
 Printed by Noels Printing Co.

APPENDIX V

TRANSPARENCIES

A selection of thirty works representing the outcome of the Altered States research.

The earthenware pieces were once-fired in an oxidizing atmosphere to standard Orton Cone 02 and 01.

Measurements are in centimetres: length x width x height. All works are earthenware using low fired glazes, underglaze stains and body stains, and were completed during the period 1988-1991 inclusive.

1	The Hercules 1	42 x 18 x 28
2	The Hercules 2	38 x 18 x 31
3	The Hercules 3	48 x 20 x 42
4	The Hercules 4	36 x 18 x 44
5	The Stack, Mount Lyell, Queenstown, 1	29 x 23 x 68
6	The Stack., Mount Lyell, Queenstown, 2	33 x 27 x 65
7	Mount Bischoff Morning	48 x 32 x 79
8	Salvage 1	51 x 31 x 1019
9	Bischoff	42 x 35 x 41
10	Mount Lyell Standard 1	34 x 28 x 76
11	Mount Lyell Standard 2	36 x 31 x 78
12	Derby Slope	60 x 25 x 40
13	Aberfoyle Cleveland	51 x 38 x 54
14	Dundas and Comet	70 x 12 x 70
15	Gormanston Metal	53 x 10 x 53
16	Shaft-head 1	49 x 11 x 54
17	Gormanston Ground	55 x 11 x 54
18	The Dreadnought	52 x 10 x 46
19	Tullah	49 x 11 x 58
20	Grubb Shaft	61 x 12 x 41
21	Iron Blow Relic	71 x 14 x 70
22	Beaconsfield	128 x 16 x 49
23	Gormanston Metal 1	65 x 11 x 44
24	E.Z. Mount Read	74 x 12 x 30
25	Dundas Summer	71 x 12 x 71
26	Zeehan Now 1	43 x 8 x 42
27	Zeehan Now 2	45 x 10 x 43
28	Crotty 1	56 x 8 x 26
29	Crotty 2	55 x 8 x 28
30	Crotty 3	56 x 9 x 28

① The Hercules 1, 1989
42 x 18 x 28



Vincent McGrath

② The Hercules 2, 1989
38 x 18 x 31



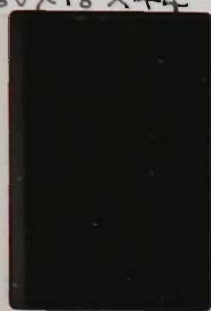
Vincent McGrath

③ The Hercules 3, 1989
48 x 20 x 42



Vincent McGrath

④ The Hercules 4, 1989
36 x 18 x 44



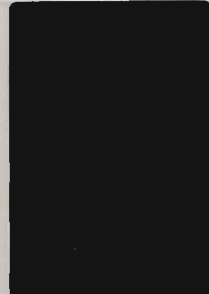
Vincent McGrath.

⑤ The Stack, Mount Lyell,
Queenstown. 1990
29 x 23 x 48



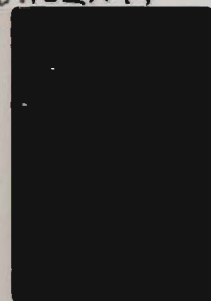
Vincent McGrath

⑥ The Stack, Mount Lyell,
Queenstown. 33 x 27 x 65
1990



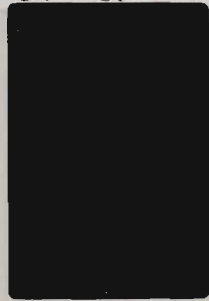
Vincent McGrath

⑦ Mount Bischoff Morning
48 x 32 x 79 1990



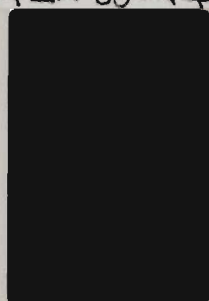
Vincent McGrath

⑧ Salvage 1989
51 x 31 x 1019



Vincent McGrath

⑨ Bischoff 1989
42 x 35 x 41



Vincent McGrath

⑩ Mount Lyell Standard 1
34 x 28 x 76 1990



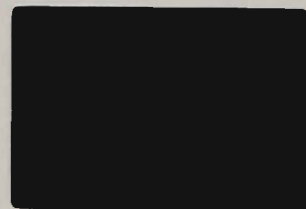
Vincent McGrath

⑪ Mount Lyell Standard 2
36 x 31 x 78 1990



Vincent McGrath

⑫ Derby Slope 1988
60 x 25 x 40



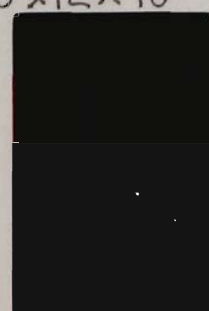
Vincent McGrath

⑬ Aberfoote Cleveland
51 x 38 x 54 1989



Vincent McGrath

⑭ Dundas and Comet
70 x 12 x 70 1990



Vincent McGrath

⑮ Gormanston Metal
53 x 10 x 53 1990



Vincent McGrath

16 Shaft-head 1
49x11x54 1990



Vincent McGrath

17 Gormonston Grownst
55x11x54 1990



Vincent McGrath

18 The Dreadnought
52x10x46 1990



Vincent McGrath

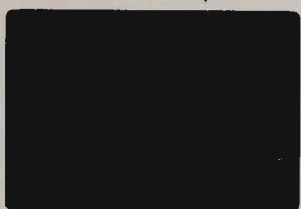
During the course of this study and research, my work has been widely

19 Tullah
49x11x58 1990



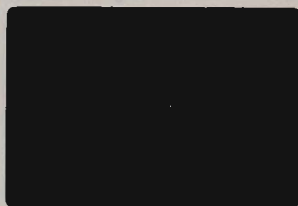
Vincent McGrath

20 Grubb Shaft
61x12x41 1990



Vincent McGrath

21 Iron Blow Reel
71x14x70 1990



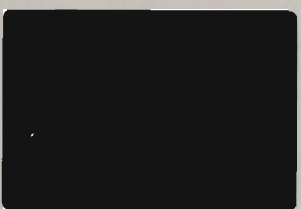
Vincent McGrath

emerging trends in international ceramics at the conference. Interaction in
22 Beaconsfield
128x16x49 1989



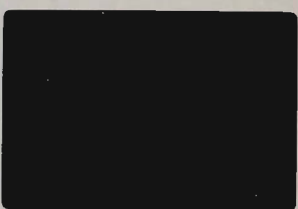
Vincent McGrath

23 Gormonston Metal 1
65x11x44 1990



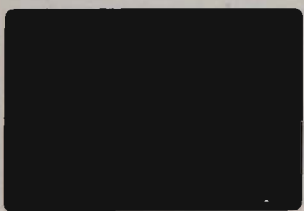
Vincent McGrath

24 E.Z. Mount Reel
74x12x30 1990



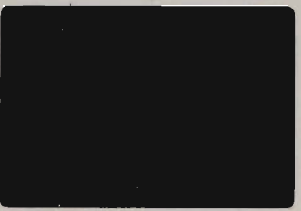
Vincent McGrath

25 Dundas Summer
71x12x71 1990



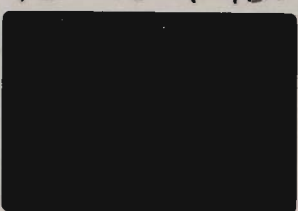
Vincent McGrath

26 Zeehan Now 1
43x8x42 1991



Vincent McGrath

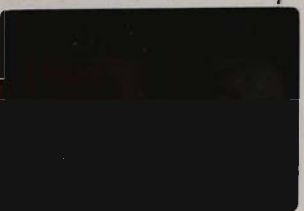
27 Zeehan Now 2
45x10x43 1991



Vincent McGrath

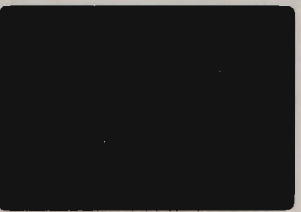
1992-93 Fresh Clay: Australia. A touring exhibition of Australian

28 Crotty 1
56x8x26 1991



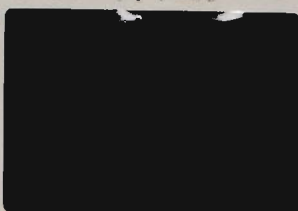
Vincent McGrath

29 Crotty 2
55x8x28 1991



Vincent McGrath

30 Crotty 3
56x9x28 1991



Vincent McGrath

APPENDIX VI

EXHIBITIONS, AWARDS AND PRESENTATIONS RELATING TO THE RESEARCH PERIOD OF ALTERED STATES

During the course of this study and research, my work has been widely exhibited throughout Australia and overseas. In 1991 I received the Honorary Diploma at the Third, World Triennial of Ceramics, Zagreb, Yugoslavia. In addition, I had work acquired by the Queensland Art Gallery and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. Throughout the period of research, two articles concerning my work were published in international art journals. In June 1992 I presented a paper discussing my recent work in relation to emerging trends in international ceramics at the conference, Interaction in Ceramics, University of Industrial Arts, Helsinki, Finland.

One-person Exhibitions

1992	University Gallery, University of Tasmania
1991	Distelfink Gallery, Melbourne, Victoria
1991	Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Burnie, Tasmania
1991	Cimitiere Street Gallery, Launceston, Tasmania
1990	Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania
1990	Devonport Regional Art Gallery, Devonport, Tasmania

Selected Group Exhibitions

International (by invitation)

1992-93	Fresh Clay: Australia, A touring exhibition of Australian contemporary ceramics to the United States and South East Asia
1991	The Third, World Triennial of Ceramics Zagreb, Yugoslavia
1989	Ikeda-Tasmania, An Exhibition of Contemporary Art Ikeda, Japan - A project of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

National

- 1991** 'The Decorated Surface', Queensland Art Gallery
Brisbane, Queensland
- 1991** 'Memories, Dreams and Reflections', Jam Factory
Gallery
Adelaide, South Australia
- 1990** 'Contemporary Ceramics', Queen Victoria Museum and
Art Gallery
Launceston, Tasmania
- 1990** 'New Ceramics', Gold Coast Regional Gallery
Southport, Queensland
- 1990** 'Ceramic Sculpture', Distelfink Gallery
Melbourne, Victoria
- 1990** 'The Bangle', Cimitiere Street Gallery
Launceston, Tasmania
- 1989** 'Index', Darling Harbour Centre
Sydney, New South Wales
- 1989** 'Optimum', RMIT Gallery, Royal Melbourne Institute of
Technology
Melbourne, Victoria
- 1989** 'Dis-integration', Tucker Regional Gallery
Townsville, Queensland - a national touring exhibition

International Awards

- 1991** Honorary Diploma, for Mine Site Three, The Third, World
Triennial of Ceramics, Zagreb, Yugoslavia
- 1990** Queen Elizabeth II, Arts Council of New Zealand,
Fellowship

International Conference Paper

- 1992** McGrath, Vincent, 'Extending the Boundaries',
Interaction in Ceramics, University of Industrial Arts and Arabia
Factory, Helsinki

Referred Articles in National & International Journals

Davies, Terry, 'Dioramic Tableaux', *Craft-Arts International*, 19, July/Sept, 1990, Sydney, pp 70-74.

King, Glenda, 'Time Prints', *Ceramics, Art and Perception*, Sydney, 1, 1990, pp 30-33.

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