

## EBB AND FLOW

### A History of Lismore Regional Gallery 1954 - 2004

by Rebecca Rushbrook

#### The 50's

In the early 1950's, a wave of affluence was sweeping through Australia's rural centres. As Lismore's prosperity increased and communications technology enabled easier organisation, groups of people began coming together with a view to creating a cultural life within the city. The local branch of the Arts Council of NSW had already brought many notable shows to the town; and Lismore quickly capitalised on its reputation as a musical centre by establishing an annual music festival. Several theatre groups also sprang up and the Arts Council is said to have been reasonably active in sponsoring art exhibitions by local artists (McAlary, 1980). As of 1953, however, the community had no arts society, let alone an art gallery.

The evolution of Lismore Regional Gallery began in 1953, with the foundation of the Lismore Arts Trust. The inspiration for the Trust came primarily from Dr William Pook, a local radiologist, who, in that year, met with Ray Granger, Lismore City Mayor, and Morgan Bryant, a District Inspector of schools, to discuss the need to begin some sort of art collection. An agreement was drawn up between the Lismore Arts Council and the Lismore City Council to form a group of trustees, consisting of at least two members from the Arts Council and two from the City Council. This group would be the Lismore Arts Trust and Ray Granger was to be its first Chairman.

Granger's son-in-law, John Stretch, later held the office of Chairman for thirteen years. In a 1989 interview with Laine Langridge, a Gallery volunteer, he recalled:

*I think the origin emanated from a fusion of ideas and the need for a development...Those three men, Morgan Bryant, Dr. Bill Pook, in particular, and Ray Granger were the main ones responsible for the birth. The idea was to have an art gallery and develop a collection and do what some of the other regional places had done. Mr Granger was always impressed by the Hinton Collection at Armidale. He wanted to see Lismore do something the same way (Langridge, 1989).*

The inaugural meeting of the Trust was held on October 12, 1953. Present were Ray Granger and Dr William Pook, who took on the role of Deputy Chairman. Mrs L.T. Warwick functioned as both the secretary and treasurer; and other members included Morgan Bryant, Mr H.P. Best, Ald. L.G. Evans, Miss M. Hewitt, Dr. T. Boyd-Law and Mr C.M. Robertson. These founding members resolved, at this meeting, to create an art gallery in Lismore and to develop a collection that would provide a cultural base for the city.

Despite the presence of the Mayor on the Trust Committee, Lismore City Council made few funds available. It did, however, agree to donate £125 towards an annual art prize. To this end, the Trust set up the First Annual City of Lismore Art Trust Purchase Exhibition. Two prizes would be offered; the £100 City of Lismore Art Prize for oil painting and the £25 Richmond River Art Prize for watercolour. The exhibition was planned for later in October, to coincide with the musical and theatrical Spring Festival.

In his interview, John Stretch described how the exhibition was organised:

*It was a lot of work...(First) you had to get out the information about the exhibition. The invitations had to be prepared and printed, posted out to known artists and (some of us went) around Sydney (and Brisbane), dropping them off at various galleries... (who would) distribute them to artists. The idea was to establish a gallery (with) an Australian content, not a reflection of this particular area (Langridge, 1989).*

The First Annual City of Lismore Art Trust Purchase Exhibition was held in a large wooden boatshed on the edge of the Wilson River; a building which was normally used by the Fire Brigade and Rowing Club. Held from October 26 to 31, 1953, it was opened by the Mayor and judged by Sydney artist, Arthur Murch, winner of the 1949 Archibald Prize. A crowd of two hundred attended the opening, where Murch awarded the £25 prize for watercolour to Jean Isherwood's *Three Boats* and the £100 prize for oil to Douglas Watson's *Square, Dieppe, France*.

Both prizes were acquisitive, becoming the nucleus around which the future Permanent Collection would be built. The fledgling Collection also included *Britain's Heritage*, an Arthur J.W. Burgess painting depicting a battle cruiser ploughing through a stormy sea. Burgess had lived in Lismore during his early life and, in 1948, had sent this painting to Mr N.C. Hewitt of Tweed Heads accompanied by a message which read:

*A lady in London, Mrs G W F McNaughton, has purchased a picture of mine. She met many Australians in England and had relations living in Australia. Further, she has a great admiration for the country, feeling that England owes much to Australia for the help, sympathy, etc., she received in past years.*

*She therefore wishes to make some permanent presentation to Australia and thought a picture an appropriate gift. She knows I am an Australian and thought that if possible this presentation might be bestowed on some town in which I have spent some of my life. (TNS, 16/3/48).*

Burgess also donated two watercolours by his father, J.O. Burgess, a former district surveyor for Lismore and Grafton. The trustees were now five works closer to their goal and the growing Collection needed to find a home.

In 1954, Lismore City Council granted the Trust the use of the lower floor of the Trench Building, in Spinks Park. The Trench Building had been built circa 1908 to house the Lismore Branch of the Government Savings Bank of NSW. On completion of its construction, *The Northern Star* had reported that:

*The new edifice in Molesworth Street...is remarkable for its solidity and the air of stability it presents is truly in keeping with the strength of its finances. It is grim, grey, solid and square-shouldered – unattractive without but beautifully ventilated, light and decorated within...The allotment on which it stands has a 66ft frontage, with a depth of 126 feet which is somewhat less than a quarter of an acre. Nevertheless, it is sufficient to provide space for a tennis court at the back and a garden at the side. The building is two-story, of brick, plaster and roughcast concrete and the grim ruggedness of the latter gives it...somewhat of a sombre appearance. Particular attention has been given in the interior to ventilation and lighting and in spite of the Bastille-like exterior appearance of the structure, the inside has been so designed that everywhere there is light and life. The whole of the woodwork inside is of dark fumed oak, which is brought into contrast with the decorative colours – which are most prominent in the rich-*

*coloured friezes and the delicate tinctures of the Wunderlich ceilings and the rich marbling of the mantles. By the time the building is completed the cost will approach £ 3000 (TNS, 1908).*

Despite its air of stability, by 1954, the Trench Building had fallen on hard times. Bought from Mrs Le Poer Trench by Lismore City Council in 1951, it had been earmarked for demolition before being made available for temporary use by the Arts Trust. The site was renovated and prepared by volunteers from the local Apex Club; and the bottom floor was used to house and exhibit the Permanent Collection, while Mr Walters, a solicitor, occupied the front offices until 1957. The top floor eventually accommodated the Richmond River Historical Society.

On Tuesday, October 26, 1954, the Lismore Art Gallery was officially opened by Hal Missingham, the Director of the Art Gallery of NSW. Missingham had familial ties to Lismore and had been a staunch supporter of the development of the Gallery. John Stretch recalled:

*This gallery owed a lot of thanks to him (for) the support and help he gave to the trustees in forming and establishing contacts with various people. He was responsible for the enthusiasm among the Trust to get going.*

*Hal's Uncle Bill, his father's eldest brother of six, was Member of Parliament (Country Party) for Lismore...and his name was on a stone on the outside of the baths for Lismore (Langridge, 1989).*

At the opening ceremony, Missingham judged and announced the winners of the Second Annual City of Lismore Art Trust Purchase Exhibition. He awarded the prize for watercolour to Hector Gilliland's *Emscote, Warwickshire* and the oil prize to Douglas Watson's *Old Morris*; thus giving Watson his second consecutive triumph in the oil section. Missingham himself also donated one of his own watercolours, *Three Mile Flat, Old Koreelah* to commemorate his role in the Gallery's opening ceremony.

The Gallery automatically acquired the prize-winning works from the Annual Exhibition, but sometimes judges would also recommend other works for inclusion in the Permanent Collection. The council's contribution to the Collection extended only to the £125 prize money and the provision of the Gallery building; so, when a desirable work became available, the community was appealed to for donations. This method of fund-raising was also relied upon to cover the many other costs involved in staging the Exhibition. Stretch recalled:

*To run the Exhibition we relied on an entrance fee. Then we had to have a 'tarpaulin muster' to make good the short fall...I think sometimes, perhaps others and myself should have been...a little bit more outspoken...that it couldn't be left to just a few. It seemed so very hard to get people to appreciate what was being done...*

*When it came time to hang the Exhibition...we used to get friends (to help)...The real support (happened) when the Exhibition (was) over... It's like having a party. Everybody enjoys it, but afterwards there's the washing up to be done...The packing had to be...done methodically and...carefully...It would take a morning to undo the paintings, but it would take about a week to get them back. They had to go back quickly because the artist might have the painting entered in another show. If word got around that it took a long time to get the paintings back then that could make it hard for the next Exhibition.*

*I must point out that one of the other ways we survived economically was by (the help) of businesses like Norman Ross, who had their pan technicons coming up from their depot...they were very good. We could send (the paintings) here and back from their Sydney depot. Another carrier between here and Brisbane did the same thing. Otherwise the artists would have to pay the freight. They had to pay the entrance fee, so to pay the freight up and back (as well) was a lot of money in those days...(and) we had to make (entry) attractive to the artists. The business houses were very good to us (Langridge, 1989).*

There was no way the Gallery could have survived without the dedication of people from the region. A small group of committed volunteers worked tirelessly to ensure that the Exhibition ran smoothly and that the Permanent Collection remained accessible to the public. Stretch spoke of the sense of responsibility felt by the Trust towards ensuring the Gallery's Collection was available for viewing:

*We were so few in numbers that it became a very arduous task to keep (the Gallery) open...we knew that our ideal was to provide not just the...art, but to have the facility to enable...people to see what belonged to them. As the name implied, (the paintings) were held in trust for the citizens of the city. For a while we had people on a roster...friends of the Trustees or members of the Trust, but they were few and far between. Some of those people... were very generous with their time. They had a great love of the arts...and I think they received their payments by the enjoyment they got from (the paintings) themselves and from seeing the people who came to enjoy (them) (Langridge, 1989).*

A further contribution made by members of the community was the donation of works to the Permanent Collection. This phenomenon worked positively to give the collection, in the words of Lismore TAFE lecturer Steven Giese, a colourful eclectic character that is unique in regional New South Wales (Dobrijevic, 2001). However, the lack of a benefactor providing a core of quality works to build around, in the way the New England and Grafton galleries were able to do, meant that the Permanent Collection was somewhat of a 'mixed bag', with no very discernable theme to relate the works to each other. A future Director of the Gallery, Irena Dobrijevic, explained,

*Donations of art works were never underestimated and soon became a very valued method of acquiring works. However, without the guidelines of an acquisition policy the collection lacked focus, resulting in a broad range of loosely related works entering the collection. Without a strong financial benefactor, the Arts Trust relied upon sporadic generosity from the community and accepted everything that was offered. Nevertheless, these early donations include many unique and wonderful treasures...(Dobrijevic, 2001).*

Among these treasures was James Coleman's *The Inlet Beach, Evans Head*; a painting which depicts an area on Evans Head's northern beaches that no longer exists since the construction of the breakwall. Coleman painted this work while staying with Dr Boyd-Law, one of the trustees. It shows a lovely bathing and fishing area with little shacks running around the edges of the dunes. Coleman donated this work to the Gallery in 1954 and, in 2004, it is valuable to the Northern Rivers Community from both an artistic and historical point of view.

Another work to join the Collection early in its existence was the Sir Erik Langker painting, *Seascape*. This work had been presented to the City of Lismore in 1949 by the Lismore Education Centenary Celebration Committee, a subsidiary of the Lismore Education Department. It had languished unappreciated in the council offices for

over half a decade, until being discovered there by John Stretch in the mid fifties and added to the Collection. Stretch recalled:

*When I first saw this painting, it was on the top of a library bookshelf in the council library...It was a little bit cock-eyed, with glass in the frame...dusty and forlorn. We were expanding and being recognised as being on the go and (we) knew this was not the right place for it. We brought it down (to the Gallery) (Langridge, 1989).*

In 1955, a Local Landscape Prize of ten guineas was introduced to the Art Trust Purchase Exhibition. This prize was conceived in order to encourage more local novice artists to exhibit and was a welcome development; allowing local artists to participate in the Annual Exhibition without feeling intimidated by the more established competitors. This year saw a controversial winner in the open oils section, with Jon Molvig's expressionist work, *The Child*, dividing the Trustees and public alike and bringing a new focus of attention to the Gallery and its Collection.

The procedure for deciding the winners involved two stages. Firstly, the judge would make their recommendation to the Arts Trust, whereupon the trustees would then officially accept or reject this recommendation. Molvig's painting was the first real test of this system and of the trustees' openness to new forms of expression within the well-established genres. Stretch recalled the discussion and dissention as being of great benefit to the Gallery:

*It was to the Lismore Gallery, at the time, what Dobell and his paintings were to the NSW Gallery... We had great dissention among the Trustees about whether it was a cartoon or what...Jon Molvig certainly produced a painting that looked a little terror...he had this yellow hair and the heat in the background. He's sitting on a chair and, if you look at the perspective, you're looking down on him and a lot of people said, 'What's wrong with his knees?' But he's actually sitting on a chair with a cubic presentation in the back, which was quite in vogue at the time...I think that it's a delightful presentation.*

*One of the things I like about it very much is the way it's framed...You have that charcoal blue of overalls on the lad and all that heat in the middle, hot a little touch on the bottom (and) on his shoes and then the hot frame inlay around the outside tying it all in... It wasn't very long after that Molvig died. He was well known at that time but, for Lismore, (he) was considered very avant-garde.*

*This was really a big step in a new direction. I can remember one of the city's great friends, Miss Marjorie Hewitt, just about had an apoplexy when it was named as the City of Lismore Art Prize. It had quite a polarizing effect that was very refreshing, because it gained interest in the Gallery. I think the trustees achieved some credibility with it really. It really was the turning point of the Gallery, in my opinion (Langridge, 1989).*

In 1956, the trustees acquired Edward Herbert Badham's oil painting, *Night*, from the Lismore Art Trust Purchase Exhibition, on the judge's recommendation. Badham was an artist renowned for his perspectives; and *Night* is a prime example of the depth he was able to achieve, even in monochromatic colour. That same year, the Trust also acquired Lillian Laycock's terracotta bust of Albert Namatjira, the first sculpture to become part of the Collection. It was followed, in 1958, by Bruce Leadbeater's *Bronze Aussie*, a plaster head study donated by Sheilagh Kaske. These two works would provide the sculptural component of the Collection for some decades. The Gallery's next sculptural acquisition would not occur until 1982, with the purchase of Anna Cohn's red, welded steel work, *Lawn Crawler*.

In 1958, the winner of the Sixth Acquisitive Lismore Art Prize for oil painting was a still life by Margaret Olley, titled *Lilies and Grapes*. Olley was born locally and this exciting addition to the Permanent Collection was achieved, like so many others, because of the Gallery's fortunate situation in an area which produced, encouraged and attracted a number of artists who went on to national or international acclaim. Also purchased from the 1958 Exhibition, was *The Mermaid*, a small painting by Arthur Murch, who had judged the first Annual Exhibition.

The Moreton Gallery in Brisbane soon began to provide the trustees with another invaluable source of paintings. Mr Wieneke, the Gallery Director, was always very generous and supportive in making quality work available to the Trust. In 1959, he was instrumental in the addition of three important works to the Collection; these being Cox's *River Sketch* by Dorathea Elizabeth Toovey, James R. Jackson's *On the Road Side* and *Capertee Mountains* by Robert Johnson. Johnson was renowned for his beautiful landscapes; many of which were bought by the government and presented to various dignitaries as state gifts. This painting of the Capertee Mountains is considered a particularly fine example of his work.

The Dorathea Toovey work, *Cox's River Sketch*, is a study that formed the basis of a larger painting depicting Cox's River and its surrounds. It was purchased at the same time as the Johnson, and holds an important position in the Permanent Collection. The third work, Jackson's *On the Road Side*, is a truly Australian scene painted by one of the nation's most renowned landscape painters.

Another significant supporter of the Gallery was the Lismore Art Club, a group that formed in 1957 and immediately began to help facilitate art in the region. One of their earliest initiatives was to organise a local painting class, which was taught by Casino artist, Theo Kielly. A number of the trustees attended this class; some with a desire to learn to paint and some with a view to increasing their art appreciation and gaining an insight into how a painter works. This class became an important base for the networking of artists and art lovers in the region. In effect, it provided the core group that kept the Gallery functioning during the 60's, a period when interest levels faltered.

### **The 60's**

During the sixties, the Gallery's association with the Arts Council declined. Then the Arts Trust began to lose members, as trustees moved away, passed away or retired. John Stretch recalled that, for a number of years, the very survival of the Arts Trust was in doubt:

*For quite some time, it did continue on an ad hoc basis as far as the meetings were concerned. They were called when it was necessary. The rest of it was done...by arrangement because most of the people on the Trust were business (people) and were involved...in one form or another around the city...a lot was achieved by informal meetings, discussions and phone calls.*

*It was rather hard to fire the next generation with the enthusiasm that (the original trustees) had. They said, 'You haven't got an art gallery. You can't call that an art gallery'...That was the case for quite some time. The people that did rally 'round during that time were the ones that stayed on and worked hard despite the fact that we didn't get the support that (we) deserved...I remember, at one stage, we had quite a few years when we didn't have an Exhibition...we just couldn't get the interest and help. It was very depressing and...you had to do everything yourself. We didn't have big committees and things like we have today. We didn't have the backing of Council...that's*

*another story. We had only one room with a few things hanging in it (in) a building that had been earmarked for demolition (Langridge, 1989).*

Despite this decline in support, the sixties saw some impressive additions made to the Permanent Collection. Although, at this point, the majority of additions to the Collection were garnered from the winners of the Annual Purchase Exhibition, the Arts Trust would occasionally acquire a work based on a judge's recommendation, or on information received from the network of commercial gallery Directors. This latter means was how the Trust came to purchase *Landscape on Womerah*, by Albert Namatjira and *Landscape*, an early watercolour by Walter Ebaterinja, in the first year of the decade.

Stretch revealed the frustrating, yet ultimately successful process through which these acquisitions were accomplished:

*Mr Wieneke, the Director of the Moreton Gallery in Brisbane, knew we were interested in acquiring a Namatjira. Unfortunately, when he sent us a Namatjira, we had to send it back because we couldn't afford it. A week after we did that, Namatjira died and the price tripled. Mr Wieneke then sent us a painting by Ebaterinja, who was Namatjira's cousin and (pupil) (Langridge, 1989).*

The Gallery was able to acquire the Namatjira womerah, soon after.

*I had a friend at Southport who had a picture framing business there and he also knew that we were interested in Namatjira...this particular womerah came from one of the (missions) at Hermannsberg...It's Albert Namatjira's own womerah. It has a delightful little typical Namatjira painting with the ghost gum and the mountains behind... (Langridge, 1989).*

The Gallery sent the womerah to Dr Rex Battersbee, an authority on Namatjira's work, for verification. Battersbee not only acknowledged the work as authentic, he identified the painting of a lizard on a rock, which is shown on the reverse side of the womerah, as Namatjira's personal totem. This further increased the value of the work to the artistic community, and the Namatjira womerah is still regarded as one of the most precious treasures of the Permanent Collection.

By 1961, the growth of the Permanent Collection was causing some logistical problems for the Annual Exhibition. The Collection now comprised thirty works and the limited exhibition space in the Gallery made it impossible to show all of these alongside the entries for the current Annual Exhibition. This problem was somewhat overcome by the opening of the new City Hall, during that year. The trustees began utilising this larger public space and most of the Annual Exhibitions were held in the City Hall during the sixties and seventies. Interest in the Exhibition waxed and waned over these years. Sometimes entry was restricted to local artists, while at other times it was 'open' and attracted participants from as far afield as Melbourne and Adelaide. The 'open' years saw entries from many prominent artists, including Jean Isherwood, Margaret Olley, Hector Gilliland, Charles Meere, Jon Molvig, Maxwell Price and Peter Powditch.

In 1962, the Gallery was able to stage *Who was Van Gogh?*, a travelling exhibition prepared and loaned to Australia by the Netherlands Government. This exhibition, described by *The Northern Star* as *one of the best to have come to Lismore* (TNS, 19/9/62), dealt extensively with the life and work of the great modern painter. It included portraits of his family; facsimiles of his handwriting and letters; sketches; and prints of some of his best-known paintings. *The Northern Star* wrote:

*The colour representations of his paintings are a classic example of the printers' art and for these alone the exhibition is well worth a visit (TNS, 19/9/62).*

The Gallery also held a number of exhibitions by local artists during the course of the sixties. These included Tasman Fehlberg; Jack Peate; Robyn Haydn; and Michael John Taylor, a future controversial Art Prize winner,

1969 saw the addition of three notable works to the Permanent Collection. These were two drawings by Lloyd Rees and a lithograph, *The Tame Bird*, by Thea Proctor, all of which came to the Gallery through a lucky series of events involving Norman Carter's great-niece, Judy Burns. Stretch recalled:

*When Judy Burns came to Lismore, she was keen to see the Gallery. It was closed at the time. I opened up the Gallery and took her through. She was impressed, but it wasn't as big and nice as the gallery she'd been used to at Mildura. We discussed ways...to improve the Gallery.*

*It was just after that time...she turned up and said 'I'm terribly sorry, I had been hoping that I could give the Gallery something that could be of some use'... her uncle, Norman Carter, (had) passed away...(and), shortly after, his daughter, Elsin Carter, (had) visited Lismore and was a guest of Mrs Burns. During a conversation, Mrs Burns asked if there were any works by her father that could be given to the Lismore Art Gallery.*

*On her return to Sydney, Elsin was unable to find any such works, but in the bottom of a drawer she came across two little sheets and a larger piece of foolscap...She offered these to Mrs Burns to forward on to the Gallery (Langridge, 1989).*

The larger piece of foolscap was the Proctor lithograph, dated 1924, and described by Steven Giese as an excellent example of Australian Post-Impressionism (Dobrijevic, 2001). Giese further analysed this particular work to add:

*'The Tame Bird' is structured with a classical sense of order using an Ingre-like line and a flattened perspective. Leisurely women and well-behaved children observe a bird. The print is gently dynamic but has a rigorous composition of an eternal long weekend, a world of polite and elegant demeanour lacking the problems of masculine presence (Dobrijevic, 2001).*

The two little sheets were two pencilled landscapes by Lloyd Rees; these being *Northward looking toward Greenwich, Woolwich and Balmain* and *Balls Head from McMahon's Point*, both dated 1935. Giese wrote of these works:

*Often described as Australian art's most enduring Impressionist, Rees' works vary from obsessively detailed sketches of landscapes and architecture to shimmering oils describing Australian and European light. The works in the collection are of the former variety; accurate, well balanced and virtuosic (Dobrijevic, 2001).*

The trustees had all three works cleaned and framed and they remain jewels of the Permanent Collection; the landscapes having been pronounced as two of Rees' best drawings. Judy Burns and Elsin Carter had certainly given the Gallery something that could be of use. Stretch was also able to acquire a landscape sketch by Sir John Longstaff soon after and all these acquisitions elevated the Permanent Collection to a new level of prestige and quality.



During the sixties, the structure of the Annual Exhibition had changed. It now offered two non-acquisitive prizes of \$100 for the best traditional and contemporary works, as well as the major acquisitive award of \$500 for the best work in any medium. The major prize had become known as the Lismore City Art Prize. In 1969, it once again became the centre of a controversy, when it was awarded to Peter Powditch for his pop-art work, *Sun Torso II*; a portrait of a woman's bikini clad torso.

Powditch was beginning to acquire an international reputation by this time, particularly because of his large mural in the International Air Terminal at Mascot, but many of the more conservative members of the Lismore community did not warm to the ultra-modern design of *Sun Torso II*, particularly the effect of arms and legs going in unnatural directions. Marelle Peters wrote in *The Northern Star* that year:

*"Sun Torso II's" selection as the \$500 main prize winner in the 1969 Lismore Art Prize contest certainly stunned most of the 200 persons at the opening ceremony in the City Hall.*

*I was among the stunned and hurriedly grabbed a sherry before going back for another look.*

*Catching a glimpse of compressed breasts and swirling paint around the navel earlier, I had dismissed "Sun Torso II" as too commercial. Cut out hardboard sections give a three dimensional effect...*

*Comments last night on "Sun Torso II" ranged from "It's nice to rub your hands over" (One wonders why people were allowed to run their hands over one of the works)...to "Oh dear!...I hate it"...*

*A church leader was liberal. "She certainly hasn't got a spare tyre. I must watch the girls on the beach to see if their arms go like that."*

*Some artists hedged, others were admiring. One trust member vowed to leave town (TNS, 30/9/69).*

John Stretch, who was Chairman of the Arts Trust at this time, also recalled the turmoil:

*We had two great controversies, one was the Molvig and the other was the Powditch...It was a stunned audience at the City Hall that particular night. I've often wondered about it. I think that (it was because) it was a new medium; you'll see that it has cut-outs in masonite.*

*I remember...at the opening... Dr A.J. Opie said, 'John, I've had to examine many bodies in my lifetime as a doctor, but never have I seen one with muscles going in the wrong direction and the bones in the wrong place.'*

*The painting was quite original...we got a lot of flack (but) again we found there were a lot of people who rallied to it. I felt, as the rest of the trustees did, (that this painting was) something really outstanding.*

*We really got what we were looking for – recognition (Langridge, 1989).*

The judge of the 1969 prize was Mr Daniel Thomas, Curator of the Art Gallery of NSW. His comments on the controversial winner were also reported by *The Northern Star*:

*Mr Thomas said he was quite sure the artist loved nudes and resisted the way people had to wear clothes. He had made the bikini "nasty and constricting".*

*"I enjoy the way the flesh is painted with a bristly brush. It gives the feeling the flesh is being caressed".*

*In contrast, the smoothly painted blue sky behind the figure was impersonal, he said...*

*Mr Thomas said "Sun Torso II" was extreme "but all great and good art is extreme". With its innermost clarity and separation of form it reminded (him) of Poussin's work, he said (TNS, 30/9/69).*

While in Lismore, Thomas examined the Permanent Collection, pronouncing *Lilies and Grapes* as one of the best Margaret Olley paintings he had seen (TNS, 6/10/69) and the Rees and Proctor works as absolutely outstanding (TNS, 6/10/69). He also encouraged the council to provide a more suitable building for the Gallery, speaking of the advantages to Lismore of a combined art gallery/library/museum complex. This was an idea that predated the existence of the Gallery. In 1939, the Council had commissioned J.A.V. Nisbet to design a public library and cultural centre for Lismore. The architectural outline for this centre is now part of the Permanent Collection, having been donated by the Council in 1999.

The need for a new building had been obvious ever since the trustees assumed their (temporary) tenure. The Trench Building's proximity to the Wilson River meant that it was constantly subject to flooding, necessitating extreme vigilance on behalf of the trustees in order to avoid damage to the Collection. Stretch related:

*We had a set of rules and procedures that we adopted. We didn't lose any paintings, but unfortunately we did suffer some deterioration...thank goodness it's been able to be corrected because of the facilities... at the Art Gallery of NSW and the Travelling Curator program. The dampness of the building afterwards - the timber floors and eighteen inches under the floor would be water and...would have to dry out. The humidity of the building was...a real problem. That was one of the reasons why some of the paintings were farmed out to some of the other public buildings, in foyers and executive offices. At least they were hung, we knew where they were and they were seen...(Langridge, 1989).*

By 1969, the Collection was also noticeably outgrowing its space and could no longer be hung in its entirety.

Mayor W.G. Blair found Thomas' suggestion of a cultural complex as being of considerable interest and value (TNS, 6/10/69.) While officially opening the Annual Exhibition, he is reported to have said:

*I hope Lismore will have at least an art gallery-regional library within two years (TNS, 6/10/69).*

Unfortunately, this hope was not realised. In 1970, the council progressed as far as interviewing architects with a view to the construction of such a facility; only to see the project fall apart in the planning stages. No new solution was attempted and the fate of the Gallery would remain under discussion by Council for many years to come. In the meantime, however, the Collection continued to grow and the Gallery remained in the Trench Building.

## The 70's

The winner of the 1970 City of Lismore Art Prize was Michael John Taylor's *Weekender*; an abstract work in which two naked figures, eyes covered, lie sprawled beneath thought bubbles, a light globe and passages of music. *Weekender* was Taylor's second work to join the Collection. The first, his figurative oil painting, *Mother and Child*, had been purchased from the 1968 Exhibition. Two more of his works would be added in future years; his oil painting, *Beach*, which won the 1976 Prize; and the beautiful lithograph, *A little Dance on the Edge of Night*, which was donated by the artist in 1996.

The judge who selected *Weekender* was the former Director of the Moreton Gallery, Mr J Wieneke. Wieneke, by 1970, had become the Director of the Queensland Art Gallery. After judging the prize, he spoke to *The Northern Star*:

*Mr Wieneke said Mr Taylor's painting would add exceptional quality to the city's collection. He had not met the artist, but had watched his career with interest. He was a sensitive and sincere painter. "Week Ender"(sic) was akin to a piece of music.*

*It was Michael Taylor's reaction to an everyday occurrence for young people, painted with restraint. The identity of the models was shielded. The colour was exquisite, the "spotting" of dark passages well done, and it was beautifully drawn and painted, Mr Wieneke said (TNS, 17/11/70).*

Many members of the viewing public were not in agreement with Mr Wieneke's decision. *The Northern Star* reported that few questioned said they understood it and that there were:

*suggestions that it was obscene, pornographic...vulgar...and a waste of ratepayers money(TNS, 23/11/70).*

This was not the first of Taylor's works to prove controversial. *The Northern Star* reported:

*Controversy has followed Michael Taylor since he came to Australia. His most sensational painting, "Overnight Sleeper", is in gaol – in safe custody at a police station, awaiting a court case. It was damaged after winning the rich Gold Coast art prize.*

*This nude painting was the forerunner of others which established his reputation in Australia. It also caused a furore of criticism. Critics included the Mayor of the Gold Coast, Ald. Bruce Small, who refused to have it hanging in his office (TNS, 17/11/70).*

The winner of 1970's 'traditional' prize, John Roy Eldershaw's *Ravenswood Pub*, was a great favourite with the Exhibition audience. Many of *Weekender*'s detractors felt that this was the work that should have won the \$500 Acquisitive Prize. In response, Stretch suggested that the community band together to buy the Eldershaw work. *The Northern Star* supported this suggestion, publishing an article that read:

*Already Lismore businessmen have promised \$100 towards the cost of buying for the projected city gallery the traditional prizewinner at the current art exhibition. The painting is John Eldershaw's "Ravenswood", valued at \$500...*

*Lismore Art Trust chairman, Mr John Stretch, said the exhibition had created tremendous interest. While many appreciated the workmanship and talent of*

the main \$500 prizewinner, Mr. Michael Taylor, quite a few had said they would like to see John Eldershaw's painting in the gallery, he said...

The exhibition judge, Mr J. Wieneke, said the traditional winner had captured the atmosphere of the North Queensland centre and from the academic point of view it was technically brilliant.

Many art students had been looking at this painting with more than usual intent.

It was felt this painting could be a definite acquisition to the city's gallery, Mr Stretch said. Unfortunately the trust's budget precluded it from running the exhibition, giving prize money and buying more paintings, Mr Stretch said. He hopes a further \$400 will be donated so that "Ravenswood" can stay in Lismore. Subscribers' names will be listed with the painting...(TNS, 20/11/70).

In a letter to the editor of *The Northern Star*, in which he referred to Taylor's work as a daub...for youngsters to snigger at, and the community to scorn, Lismore artist, David Harrison, responded to the above article:

*I would like to commend the Lismore Art Trust chairman, Mr. John Stretch, for his proposal that Lismore should endeavour to retain the traditional prize winning painting "Ravenswood" by John Eldershaw for the projected Lismore City Art Gallery. I undertake to contribute \$20 towards its purchase.*

*Why the judge passed over this delightful work is quite beyond comprehension. While it is conceded that the sketched fragments in the agglomeration of the contemporary work that won the open are admirably drawn, they do not make a painting in the accepted sense of the word.*

*If care is not taken in the choice of judges in future, we will find our art gallery cluttered with phantasmagoria such as the two winning contemporary pieces. I am quite certain most of the townspeople would prefer to see hung landscapes or still life studies that show more ability in reproduction and design than those featuring female bottoms...(TNS, 26/11/70).*

Whether or not this final statement is accurate, the Gallery was able to negotiate a time-payment plan with Eldershaw and thus acquired Ravenswood Pub. The painting depicts a view of the hotel from across the rear gully, including images of smelters, other buildings and indigenous goats, and is well representative of Eldershaw's fine outback paintings.

Eldershaw would regularly travel through Lismore on his way north to Queensland, often to the diggings at the Ravenswood area, where he would fish and paint. Stretch remembered his visits to Lismore and the Gallery with fondness:

*We met John Eldershaw in Lismore. He came through and had his caravan down in Dawson Street. He'd contact us and we'd go down. He was a wonderful man to talk to; He loved the bush and loved painting it, particularly the old diggings because, he said, there (was) always a wealth of atmosphere that lingers around these places...*

*He went up on this trip not so long before he died - he must have died about three or four years after (painting Ravenswood Pub). He had a friend, an amateur painter, who used to accompany him...They'd do a bit of fishing as well...When he stopped in Lismore...I remember organising, with May Rayward,*

a meeting in (the Gallery) and he came down and brought down all his work, canvasses and sketches. He just casually went through them, held them up and discussed them and said, 'This was of so-and-so and I wanted to get this effect' (or) 'I never get tired of doing this one'. At the same time he'd be answering questions from the members of the group who were ninety per cent amateur artists and, in his very quiet and kindly manner, he sort of gave a lot of people inspiration and hope and they felt that being an artist didn't mean you had to be a high flier. Here, indeed, was this humble man casually bringing these lovely little drawings out, some completed and others almost. He'd say, 'I just can't get that one sorted out, I'll just put it away for another day when I feel that I can capture the spirit again'.

As a matter of fact, when we bought (Ravenswood Pub), we had to do a time payment with him. It was purchased outside the Art Prize time. I don't think we paid any more than a couple of hundred dollars for it and today it's worth over eight and a half thousand dollars' (Langridge, 1989).

In 1971, the Art Prize brought a controversy of a different nature, when the judge, Dennis Colsey, deemed the standard of entries so poor that he refused to announce a winner. *The Northern Star* reported:

*No major \$500 award was made last night for the City of Lismore art prize.*

*The judge, Mr Dennis Colsey, from the Art Gallery of N.S.W., did not think any painting exhibited was worth \$500.*

*He suggested the only way to get the type of painting Lismore ought to have in its permanent collection was to offer a \$1000 prize.*

*By adding this year's non-awarded \$500 to next year's \$500, a much better standard should be reached, he said.*

*It might be better to have the contest every second year if the city could not afford the \$1000 annual prize, he said.*

*Mr Colsey said this was the first time he had refused to award a major prize although he had not awarded lesser prizes at other exhibitions.*

*Chairman of Lismore Art Trust, which arranged the exhibition, Mr John Stretch, said the exhibition produced a surprise every year.*

*However, the city must respect Mr. Colsey's judgement – he was an Australian authority (TNS, 16/11/71).*

This debacle drew attention to the problems that were becoming associated with the acquisitive nature of the prize. The Council still donated the same amount (\$250 under the decimal system) and various sponsors contributed another \$450. The value of the works, however, was often greater than the \$500 Acquisitive prize; and well-known artists became reluctant to enter, as they could sell their work for larger amounts or compete for more enticing prize money.

Rather than restrict the Acquisitive Art Prize to a biannual event, the trustees decided to change it to a non-acquisitive award. To indicate this alteration, the name was changed to The City of Lismore Art Prize Exhibition. It was still the aim of the trustees to add exhibition winners and special paintings to the Permanent Collection, but they now had to raise the extra funds to do so. As a result, the Trust often had to suffer the

painful experience of losing works to other galleries when financial restrictions made acquiring new works an impossibility, or a difficult decision. Stretch recalled:

*There were some stories. (One) year, Jon Molvig won with 'The Acid Boy'... he also won the Prize the following year (with) a very large painting called 'City Lights'...quite a vibrant thing. The Trustees said: 'We don't want another Jon Molvig!' In hindsight you could cry, because I understand that particular painting is one of the joys of the Newcastle Art Gallery (Langridge, 1989).*

In 1973, the Northern Rivers began to experience a transformation, one that brought new levels of professionalism and skill to the artistic community. Nimbin's trail-blazing Aquarius Festival was largely responsible for this, providing a focus on the creativity of the region and drawing large numbers of artists to the area. In the same year, the three-year-old Northern Rivers College of Advanced Education (known in 2004 as Southern Cross University) became a multi-disciplinary college, establishing an art school and bringing a number of academic opportunities to the area. Many creative-minded people relocated to the Northern Rivers at this time and began to set up workshops and studios. Jan Renkin, a future Director of the Gallery, recalled:

*The Aquarius Festival definitely brought a big change to this whole area...A lot of people stayed after that and a lot of those people were very creative people...It was the beginning of a huge wave, a huge influx of alternative types of people. I mean, I was one of them... (Whitehead, 1994).*

This huge wave of artists included many educated and professional practitioners. These people brought with them a demand for better facilities and opportunities for artists in the region. They also reinforced a passionate and dedicated artistic consciousness within the community, a consciousness that continues to define the Northern Rivers culture to this day.

Bet and Michael Taylor founded the Channon Pottery in 1973, forming what would be the basis of a committed group of talented ceramicists. By 1976, Dennis and Malina Monks had also joined the flood of artists to the region, moving from South Australia to Terania Creek where they established a ceramics studio. Terania Creek was already home to Kerry Selwood and Tony Nankervis, who were both focussing on wood fired ceramics; and all these artists would eventually contribute many fine pieces to the collection.

In 1975, the Richmond River Historical Society moved into a separate building on Molesworth Street and the council allowed the Gallery to encompass the entire Trench Building. With financial assistance from Council and a grant made available through the RED scheme, a team of volunteers made the necessary renovations to the building; repairing the chipped plaster walls and installing the latest mercury lighting, which would allow the Collection to be seen to its best advantage. This expansion provided a temporary solution to the Gallery's need for more space, but the flood-prone nature of the Trench Building remained a continuous threat to the Collection. At the 1976 opening of the new extension, Mayor W.G. Blair promised that funds were being sought for the second stage of the Lismore library, in order to relocate the Gallery to the air-conditioned and more suitably situated building.

In 1976, John Stretch and Ken McAlary approached Lismore City Council with a request that it take over the management of the Gallery. The Permanent Collection at this time numbered sixty-two works and had become so valuable that the trustees felt it was unwise for them to maintain sole responsibility for its care. Council responded positively to the trustees' request and the Lismore Arts Trust subsequently became a sub-committee of Lismore City Council, under Section 527 of the 1919

Local Government Act. This meant that the Gallery was no longer a Trust in itself, but had become a part of Council, an alteration which immediately opened doors for grant applications and other funding.

### **The 80's**

Little seems to have happened between 1976 and 1981. In 1981, however, a successful grant application enabled the appointment of Lismore Regional Gallery's first Director, Jan Renkin (later known as Jan Rae). Renkin was a commercial artist, who had worked in graphic and theatre design, as well as ceramics workshop development and studio painting. She put in *the first professional spadework* (Stretch) for the Gallery, rationalising its acquisition policies and mounting a number of significant exhibitions by the district's female artists. Her arrival also heralded the birth of an active ceramics acquisition policy.

Renkin had been part of the influx of artists to relocate to the region in the seventies and had long been frustrated by the lack of facilities available in the Lismore area. In a 1994 interview with Aíne Whitehead, Gallery archivist and researcher, she remembered her impressions of the Gallery:

*The Gallery didn't really exist as such. It was a closed up very dark space that opened up, I think, maybe once a week. There was a woman working here for 15 hours a week called Helen Booth who catalogued the Permanent Collection...(That was) all that ever happened here...They didn't have exhibitions here, ever....They used to have...the Art Prize every year (but) that wasn't even held here in the Gallery but held down at the City Hall...The Arts Trust...were really the mainstay of this place. They had applied to the Premier's Department to get funding for this woman to be here...it wasn't for very long...(Other than that), nobody had any association with this Gallery, it was just non-existent really. It was always closed...It was a very dark, depressing place...*

*I was very interested in the potential of the Gallery... because, at that time, I'd been living in the area for eight years or so as a practitioner and I knew most of the artists in the area...a lot of them were living out at The Channon, at Terania Creek Road... I was a potter too, in the very beginning, so I knew Tony Nankervis, Kerry Selwood, people like that...There was a sort of artists' fraternity and it was very frustrating for all the artists here because there was nowhere...to exhibit locally. Joan James, who was a member of the Arts Trust, had a little craft shop; that was the only place in Lismore and there was no exhibition space. Byron Bay wasn't happening in those days, there was nothing there...just a place producing meat and dairy products. It wasn't on the map at all...*

*My chief aim in the beginning was to open the Gallery up; to get it known and to get local artists to exhibit here and just to open it up to all members of the community...It was such a dim, dark, hidden place that very few people were even aware of. People didn't know it existed and I found myself constantly having to explain to people where it was – people who'd lived in Lismore for years and didn't even know! So I just went on the path of promoting the place. Opening it up. Putting the Permanent Collection away and having temporary exhibitions...People were just coming out of the woodwork, including the woodworkers! The quilters, the Lismore Art Club, the old ladies who dabbled. I was trying to break down elitist barriers and get people here, get the place known. The local painters, the younger people. (Whitehead, 1994).*

The twenty-ninth Annual City of Lismore Art Exhibition was staged in 1982 and was the last to be held for some years. In its place, Renkin implemented an intense exhibition

program with a high turnover of temporary exhibits. This was a format that would continue into the next century; allowing for a changing variety of local and touring exhibitions to be presented all year round. It attracted a fresh public interest in the Gallery and was possibly the outstanding legacy of Renkin's stewardship. Renkin recalled;

*We had enormous amounts of people flowing through all the time, huge numbers. It was a really popular place. I put a lot of work into that. We used to show films every Saturday, we had poetry readings, we had music recitals...The schedule was very tight, three week exhibitions, quick changeover...Every exhibition had a big party opening, often they went on into the night, big social events. We only really hung the Permanent Collection about twice a year (Rae, 1994).*

From this point onwards, the focus of the Gallery became much more expansive, as Renkin worked to create an environment which recognised established and professional artists, while still allowing space for the more amateur craftspeople. She also established a co-operative relationship with the CAE's art school, drawing on the experience of its professional staff and the fresh ideas of the student body.

*That was really another important part of my work here...to tie the (Gallery and College) together...It seemed to me that the School of Arts at the CAE was trying to do a similar thing to me, so we worked hand in hand quite often...We did exhibitions like 'The Environmental Textures'...that went to the Queensland Art Gallery. I think that was one of the first times that a regional exhibition travelled to a major art gallery (Rae, 1994).*

A further achievement of Renkin's directorship was the diversification of the Permanent Collection. Until this time, the Collection had consisted almost entirely of paintings. Renkin, recognising the need for it to become representative of other kinds of media, enacted a more expansive collection policy, one which included ceramics and sculpture. This new policy enabled the Gallery to take advantage of the strong contingent of potters, who had based themselves around the region.

In 1981, with the assistance of the Craft Board of The Australia Council, the Gallery acquired Derek Smith's ceramic work, *Horizon Form*. Also in 1981, Milton Moon donated two of his works, the stoneware *Platter* and *Vase*. These works constituted the beginnings of a ceramics collection; and when the Gallery received a bequest from The Lismore Ceramics Group, Renkin decided to capitalise on these events by holding the 1982 Ceramic Purchase Exhibition. Bill Samuels agreed to function as the consultant and Moon kindly consenting to be the patron, writing;

*In accepting the role of patron for this year's Ceramic Purchase Exhibition, I am glad of the opportunity to ask all ceramicists for their support, believing as I do, in the importance of public ceramic collections as being an increasingly valuable part of art education (and) our culture generally (Moon, 1982).*

The Ceramics Purchase Exhibition enabled the Gallery to make a number of important acquisitions; including Dennis Monks' *Kookaburra Jug*; Joanna Reeves' *Raku Woman Pot 11*; and Michelle Ashton's ceramic and emu feather work, *Spirit of the Cassowary*.

Around this time, a small group of local art lovers formed the Friends of the Gallery. This collective performed many key functions such as the staffing of reception and the orchestration of exhibition openings. They also ran the highly successful *Spring Arts Ball*, which raised a substantial amount of funds for the Gallery's benefit.



The Friends of the Gallery embraced the new acquisitions policy, obtaining a further grant from the Craft Board of the Australia Council for the purpose of obtaining more ceramics for the Collection. In 1983, these acquisitions included Dennis Monks' *Platter*; Rick Ball's *Landscape No.1* and *Landscape No.2*; Sandra Black's *Carved Bone China*; Ian McKay's *White Lidded Jar* and *Fluted Bowl, Celadon*; and Bill Samuels' *Boxed Group, Shino Glazed Cups*. In 1984, the Gallery went on to add Tony Nankervis' *Storage Jar IV* and *Storage Jar V*; and Kerry Selwood's *Handled Pot with Lid – (Thin)* and *Handled Pot with Lid – (Fat)* to the Collection.

These acquisitions took the Collection in new directions of media and theme. The wood fired ceramics by Monks, Nankervis and Selwood were of particular interest; reflecting not only the influence of Japanese and West Coast American styles, but also a strong relationship to the rainforests of the Lismore region. These works convey a natural aesthetic that was becoming characteristic of artists from the area. Nankervis' storage jars have lids that resemble forest fungi, while Kerry Selwood's tall pots echo the shape and texture of the rainforest buttresses and were made from local clay and slips and fired in a kiln fuelled by local timber. Monks' Kookaburra shaped jug complements the forms of these works. To quote Giese:

*The cultural environment of the area surrounding Nimbin and The Channon was becoming earth centred and proactive. In aesthetic terms, the more intimately art was aligned with natural elements, the better (Dobrijevic, 2001).*

While bringing the natural environment into its Collection, the Gallery was also searching for a way to bring its Collection out into the natural environment. In 1982, the City Council began a project for the beautification of Spinks Park; and Renkin initiated an artist-in-residence program, with the specific intention of creating sculptural works to contribute to the project. The programme was approved and the residency was awarded to Clive Murray-White, a Melbourne-based artist.

Murray-White viewed the community as his client and wanted his works to reflect the public aesthetic. To this end, he initiated a series of public meetings; with a view to generating ideas and involving the community in the creative process. During his residency he worked both on site and in his local dwelling; holding an exhibition at the end of his tenancy and creating four sculptures, which were installed in Spinks Park. These works were *Kookaburra*, *Clever Fella*, and *Mosaic Seat 1 & 2*, two mosaic seats of donated household crockery laid in concrete.

Despite the public involvement in their creation, the sculptures created a response in the community reminiscent of the Molvig and Powditch controversies. Particularly criticised was *Clever Fella*, which presided over the Spinks Park fountain. Renkin recalled;

*When it was installed, there was a lot of controversy about the actual sculpture. All his work was quite rough, just heavy, metal tubing; welded, not finished; just allowing the rust to take place...That piece in the fountain was designed to move in the wind and it had water coming through it. It was quite an interesting piece, but, as with any public sculpture, there's diverse opinions...Council moved it and would never actually tell us what had happened to it... (Rae, 1994).*

*Clever Fella* was removed later in the decade. The mosaic seats remained until the construction of the levee bank began in 2003 and *Kookaburra* is still in Spinks Park as of 2004.

Despite its enlivened profile, the Gallery was still desperate for funding. The Australia Council and the Regional Galleries Association were generous with funds for exhibitions and projects, but the Gallery's most pressing problem was its inappropriate location and lack of facilities. The Council provided only a small annual amount of funding and Renkin recalled:

*It was a case of drawing in help along the way, wherever possible...They (the Council) provided some money every year (and) we'd try to boost (it)...The Regional Galleries...used to look at poor Lismore and think, 'My God. How are we going to help them?' It was really a pathetic little Gallery compared to a lot of the other galleries in the state. They would always try and match whatever the Council gave us, but...the council, really, it probably hasn't changed so much. They were not interested at all in the Art Gallery. They were much more interested in roads and sewerage. Every little thing we wanted we had to fight for (Rae, 1994).*

Meanwhile, the Collection continued to be faced with a number of environmental hazards. Aside from the continual dangers posed by flooding, the day-to-day humidity within the building was such that a number of works were beginning to deteriorate (These works were later restored through the assistance of the Art Gallery of NSW's Travelling Curator Program). Renkin installed an air conditioning system, which somewhat neutralised the humidity problem, however, the other environmental problems were less easy to neutralise. The lack of space with which to house the Collection was creating an increasing difficulty and Renkin's response was to become much more selective about acquisitions.

*What was happening was that we just didn't have the space and, because there was so much activity happening in the Gallery, it just seemed crazy to keep on acquiring with nowhere to keep (the work). The atmosphere was really bad for the paintings...It's a shame to see them not cared for (Rae, 1994).*

In 1984, the Arts Trust organised an informal evening for Council members, in an effort to alert them to the state of the Permanent Collection. This event was to be held at the Gallery, where the recently appraised Collection was on display, and the trustees had invited the valuer, Randall Reed, to be present. Also invited, was Catherine Lillico, the Conservator of the Regional Galleries Association, who, it was intended, would underline the Collection's deterioration to the council and advise them on what needed to be done to rectify the situation.

The evening, however, never went ahead. In a letter to Alderman Crowther, Trust Chairman, Doug McKie wrote:

*Reference is made to the invitation from the Lismore Art Trust Committee to the Aldermen to attend an informal evening at the Lismore Regional Art Gallery to meet with members of the Committee.*

*Unfortunately it became necessary to cancel the evening, due to the fact that only two Aldermen accepted the invitation to attend.*

McKie went on to say:

*The Art Trust is very disappointed in the response from Aldermen to our invitation...Council Aldermen are reminded of our responsibilities in maintaining the condition of the Permanent Collection for the community...There appears to be a lack of appreciation by Aldermen that here we have one of the major Tourist Attractions of the City...it requires much further development for this*

*purpose alone...Its major value must be its contribution and place in providing cultural values to the people. This value may be difficult for the understanding of some Aldermen...Suffice to say at this stage that this Section 527 Committee is extremely disappointed in the response and apparent lack of interest of the Aldermen of this city (McKie, 1984).*

No response to this letter can be found in the Gallery's archives.

Renkin resigned in November 1985. Although she was only, officially, a part-time employee, and paid as such, the demands of the Gallery required her to work full-time and left little space for her own artistic pursuits. She went on to establish herself as a professional artist, exhibiting both nationally and internationally, as well as continuing her work in scenic design and branching out into project co-ordination and education. In 1993 she was employed as Aboriginal Special Projects Lecturer at Ballina TAFE and in 1999 taught Colour Theory and Drawing at the Lismore TAFE Campus. In the new millennium she has continued to be based locally, but has travelled all over Australasia creating murals and installations, including works for the Sultan of Brunei and the Crown Casino in Melbourne.

In December 1985, the Gallery, now known as Lismore Regional Art Gallery, hired its second Director, Richard Maude. Maude had previously been involved in the establishment of several alternate galleries, as well as a commercial gallery in Germany. He had also managed a number of small businesses, one being a Café Gallery, and had worked in community information, volunteer programmes and youth programmes. This breadth of experience gave him the versatility necessary for the hands-on aspect of running a regional gallery.

Maude also brought with him a large network of useful contacts. He had gone to college with many of the Directors of other NSW Regional Galleries and was elected to the Board of Directors of the Regional Galleries Association in 1986. As a result, he was able to draw a nation-wide focus on the unique arts community of the region and to establish, for the Gallery, a solid reputation as the hub of a thriving provincial culture; one which he felt in many ways is at the cutting edge of contemporary arts practice (Maude, 1994).

Aine Whitehead also interviewed Maude in 1994. In this interview, he spoke of the first impressions he received on arriving at the Gallery in January 1985:

*I picked up the keys from the town clerk, who I think was Byron Stevens at that time, from the Municipal chambers down the road here in Molesworth St. They gave me the key and more or less said go and direct the Gallery. I came and opened the door and stood there and thought what do I do now? And then the alarm went off, nobody had told me about the alarm and I certainly didn't have a key on my key ring, and that was pretty frightening, so I followed the wires from the alarm speaker and turned it off and waited for the police, but they didn't come. I got a fairly strong impression about the state of the Gallery. Firstly the security was ignored. Jan Rae (Renkin), my predecessor, had put the system in, but obviously nobody had responded to it, it wasn't monitored in any way by the police or anybody else.*

*There was seagrass matting on the floor, which was good at trapping dust, and one of the things this old building didn't need was more dust! In the first flood, which happened about a month after I arrived, I didn't know what to do, in fact I didn't even know Lismore flooded! I wasn't told this, there was no emergency plan...the first thing I did was get rid of the seagrass matting, under the*

*pretence that it got wet and soggy...the Gallery was actually in very poor condition...(Whitehead, 1994).*

Maude spent his first month familiarising himself with the format Renkin had established:

*The exhibition programme had been set for 8-12 months...and had been structured in such a way by Jan Renkin that I got to meet a lot of artists. So the first few weeks I got around meeting artists and going through the records and the records showed that a hell of a lot had happened under Jan's directorship. God knows what it had been like before that, it must have been a total mess. She got an exhibitions policy together, she built a budget. She'd structured the beginnings of a professional operation ... (Whitehead, 1994).*

Maude consolidated Renkin's work, promoting a higher profile for the gallery, in both Council and the local media. He mounted a number of impressive exhibitions and was, in the words of the current Director, Bronwyn Lamer, a wonderful curator. He was also instrumental in the inclusion of the Lismore Art Gallery into the Regional Galleries System. However, Maude found the administrative structure of the Gallery difficult to work with. The Arts Trust, while now officially functioning only in an advisory capacity, found it difficult to relinquish their control to the Director's vision. Maude explained:

*I don't think (Renkin) was taken very seriously by Council and I think she was pushed around by the Trust, too...The Trust had done a great job over the years, but I think (during) the ten years or so before I arrived it was in pretty bad shape. It was a club. I found it very hard to get things done. I got locked in battles with the Trust over so many things in that first year. It started with the seagrass matting; it went on to the conduct of meetings. Little things...*

*I found it very difficult because I couldn't make artistic decisions or management decisions without going to them first...That was an increasing point of difficulty between us (Whitehead, 1994).*

Many regional galleries were facing this difficulty at that time. Most of them had been established and maintained by a dedicated group of volunteers, who felt protective towards their charge. The trustees' hard work over the years had resulted in a collection that merited a paid administrator. Once the Director began to direct, however, they often found it difficult to relinquish control; a situation that led to frustrations on both sides.

Maude took his concerns to the Town Clerk who relayed them to the council.

*In frustration, I put it to the Town Clerk that I couldn't work under those conditions...he was sympathetic, I think he understood that it was time to change...Late 1986 or late 1987, I made a confidential recommendation (and) he took it to a council meeting.*

*There was a new council elected and, on the election of a new council, all those positions on committee were scrapped and started again. (The problem was that) year in and year out...the same people had been renominating. The nominations were put up to the Trust and they simply re-recommended themselves for appointment, which meant there wasn't a lot of change (Whitehead, 1994).*

Maude's appeal to Council, however, led to a complete restructuring of the Trust.

*There were new elections. Positions were scrapped and, rather than the same people be reappointed, I made recommendations...A number of people reapplied, but John Stretch was the only one reappointed from that group...a whole new Trust started and things moved a lot easier for some time (Whitehead, 1994).*

Throughout this process, the Regional Galleries Association supported Maude.

*Especially in those early years, they helped me, personally, a lot. Particularly Michael Goss. He was really keen on strengthening the network and opening up the possibilities. He was familiar with the difficulties faced by most directors in dealing with their committees and, ultimately...Council, (of) being in that difficult position of dealing with council procedure and with the general community as supposedly represented by the Committee...As Executive Director of the RGA, he was pretty instrumental in providing a lot of support to a lot of regional directors at that time...he helped to create a profile for Lismore and (to) throw me in the deep end, professionally...With a resignation on the board of RGA, he suggested I be invited to replace that person...I went on to serve five or six years in a row and served one year as Company Secretary, which gave me access to the networks and funding bodies, created (a) profile for myself and for what I wanted to do in Lismore and strengthened Lismore Gallery's position generally. Because of that, we were successful in a whole series of grant applications...We were able to work those networks with some sort of credibility and gain extra funding on a number of occasions (Whitehead, 1994).*

Recognising the strength of the local artistic community, and facing the financial impossibility of acquiring works by more established artists, Maude concentrated on the creativity of the region. He added a significant number of local works to the Collection, with the aid of a Contemporary Art Acquisitions Grant from the Regional Galleries Association, and focussed on creating a dynamic exhibition program of regional art.

*It was basically a region-based focus, which hadn't really been done before...In fact, some of the conflict I had with the Trust...at that time was about who should be collected...I believed we should have been collecting local stuff whether people were famous or not and the general feeling was (that) they shouldn't be collected until they had proven themselves. The implication being that if they weren't recognised by other institutions first then we shouldn't recognise them. My point at the time was that the fact of us collecting something gave a boost to that person's reputation that lent some authority to their work...*

*There wasn't a choice (about the exhibition programme), because there just wasn't the budget, we had to work with local artists. It was clear to me very quickly that, given that this was a country town, it had an enormous population of active artists; very professionally inclined artists, people who were of that age of becoming mature artists, mid career artists, people in their early to late 30s who had dedicated their lives to the practice for 10 or 20 years. They weren't about to stop overnight, there was a commitment to reach out and become part of contemporary Australian culture. I saw the Gallery's role as being important in that process...I saw a contemporary programme as being quite important (Whitehead, 1994).*

The first of Maude's contemporary acquisitions were *Submarine Surfacing*, by Ian Howard, and *Untitled* by Richard Kinder; both purchased in 1988 with the aid of a grant from the Visual Arts Board. Maude later spoke of these acquisitions, saying:

*I was interested in (Kinder's) process of making a work. The artist has a collage-type approach, collecting bits of info, little doodles, drawings off the studio floor and using them in the actual art-work. He was living in Brisbane and often came down to this area to visit friends. I thought it was a good opportunity to make available to artists in this region the art-work of a contemporary artist who is pushing and extending the boundaries of the art-making process.*

*(Howard is) also quite well known in this area, he used to teach at Casino High. He's also quite well-known and respected internationally. His work is interesting because he's one of the few artists in the country whose work deals with the subject of militarisation. Having the work of both these artists in the collection provides local artists access to a challenging and contemporary art practice (Maude, 1993).*

The eighties were a period of growth and change for the Gallery and the region at large. In 1985, the Northern Rivers College of Advanced Education began offering a degree in visual arts; a development that somewhat worked to legitimise art as a professional pursuit in the minds of the community. The new course drew many younger artists to the region and was instrumental in promoting new philosophies and techniques. Steven Giese wrote of this development:

*Post-modern approaches to art-making that embraced contemporary art theory and expressionism were significantly new tendencies in the Lismore region and provided a colourful springboard for many graduates. Despite sometimes overcompensating for its regional locality by excessive engagement with the 'contemporary', SCU has produced many outstanding artists, some of whom are in the gallery's permanent collection (Dobrijevic, 2001).*

The staff of the new Art Department also produced some fresh and exciting new work. Department Head, Mostyn Bramley-Moore, along with fellow staff members, Les Dorahy and John Smith, became the core of the new department. These three were extremely pro-active in the mid to late eighties, initiating exhibitions in well-established Sydney and Brisbane galleries. Their works were collected by Lismore Regional Gallery and have been joined by those of many other SCU lecturers over the years.

Steven Giese discussed one of the more prominent works, Bramley-Moore's *At Arkaboo Rock, Flinders Ranges*, which was painted in 1984 and purchased by the Gallery in 1989:

*In the tradition of Matisse, the painting is a self-portrait of the artist. Inspired by a college art excursion to the Flinders Ranges in South Australia, the painting is sparse, barely worked with an almost lazy dialogue between meandering line and areas of flat colour. The face and the landscape merge, with a similar anthropomorphic interpretation to that used by Shay Docking and Brett Whiteley. The most tangible reference to the landscape are a few ragged clouds scumbled above a briefly described horizon line. In terms of traditional landscape and portraiture in Australia, this work is cheeky if not iconoclastic. The presence of this painting in the collection represents a change of values away from representation towards self-expression and a connection to international rather than to provincial visual languages (Dobrijevic, 2001).*

In 1988, a stellar opportunity came to further advance the local artistic community, with an invitation to participate in the *Landmarks* exhibition and to produce the accompanying *Landmarks* catalogue. *Landmarks* was a project funded by the NSW Bicentennial Council and co-ordinated by the Regional Galleries Association. It involved a collaboration between twenty five regional galleries across NSW, in which each Gallery was to hold a survey show of contemporary art in their region. The series of exhibitions were planned to open on the same night; and all the galleries were to create an accompanying catalogue, produced along a standard format, but with their own particular design characteristics and focus. These catalogues were to be formed into a boxed set, representing contemporary art across the state. Maude recalled:

*The State Exhibitions co-ordinator...Peter Timms...did a fairly good job; some of those galleries were unbelievably under resourced (and) some were extremely new. The professional experience of Directors and Curators was really varied, so he tried to bring a lot of that together (Whitehead, 1994).*

This venture was taken on by the Gallery through the influence of the Regional Galleries Association and Michael Goss. Maude opined that Goss instigated the project as part of his mission to place the control of regional galleries more firmly in the hands of their professional staff.

*There were...projects like Landmarks where we were able to plug into a much larger project. We were offered a resource outside our regular resources, thereby strengthening the position of the Director because it was really given to the Director...rather than given to the Trust. The Contemporary Art Acquisitions Grant was similarly given...it was only given for the purpose of some new initiative within the collection. So it was given to the Director to say 'I want that for that and let's go ahead and do it'...I think it was a deliberate strategy, to take control out of...management committees and (give) it to the professional staff. He (Goss) did a lot of professional staff building (Whitehead, 1994).*

The *Landmarks* project was an ambitious endeavour and Maude needed more volunteers than he had at his disposal in order to make it work. To this end, he obtained a grant with which to reinstate the almost defunct Friends of the Gallery. This venture took on a life of its own and resulted in the formation AROSpace (Artists' Representative Office Space). Maude explained:

*A lot of young people (got) involved and re-energized the Friends of the Gallery to become more of an artists' society...We rented a space in North Lismore, a beautiful space, one of the best warehouse spaces I've seen. We prepared it, painted the floor, built panels and called it AROSpace...The idea was to initiate an artists' space with the opening of (the Landmarks) exhibition...*

*The idea was to have workshops and to initiate a number of art form based groups...I think we started a fibre group, a photographic group...an artist happening place...It was a beautiful open exhibition space, we put in lights, did the whole thing (Whitehead, 1994).*

The *Landmarks* exhibition was held in AROSpace on July 8 1988. The *Northern Star* reported in the previous day's edition:

*Using financial assistance from the Friends of the Gallery, a one-year renewable lease has been taken out on the old timber building in Bridge Street to provide a new showcase facility for local artists.*

To be known as the Artists' Representative Office – or ARO for short – the new premises will be used for the first time this week to stage the regional gallery's Landmarks art exhibition...

Almost 40 local artists will be represented at the six-week exhibition, which will present a whole range of arts and craft, from traditional art work to contemporary painting and sculpture...

Mr Maude said the impetus to expand into new premises had come from the lack of suitable space at the existing art gallery in Spinks Park for showing certain types of exhibitions and art work...

"In the past the regional gallery has provided showcase facilities for the district's large population of artists and craftspeople, often to the detriment of our other responsibilities as an art museum," he said...

"For instance, we have not been able to concentrate on expanding our art collection, or on providing a better environment for the collection we have."

Mr Maude said the art gallery should have works of national and regional significance on permanent exhibition.

"We have attempted to fulfil this requirement to the best of our ability, but have fallen far behind other regional galleries," he said.

To relieve the pressure for space on the existing gallery, it was decided to lease new premises to showcase facilities for local artists.

The gallery hopes the ARO project will become self-sufficient in about a year, deriving most of its income from exhibitions and studio fees paid by artists-in-residence (TNS, 7/6/88).

The series of exhibitions were a resounding success; and although the boxed set was never compiled, The Lismore Regional Art Gallery produced a publication which well represented the diverse character of contemporary art in the region and which, for many years, remained the area's most impressive catalogue of local work. Maude remembered:

A lot of things came out of it (Landmarks). It was an important effort and the book was distributed nationally...Because of that, Lismore got a reputation as a country place...that had a contemporary artistic population...

Another side to the project...was for the local artists to feel like they were a community, to get together and find a focus. A lot of the practice of a lot of the artists was a little provincial...Whilst they had a desire...they just didn't have the resources. A lot of people weren't really versed, apart from a few art magazines, in what was going on in Australia, what the state of discourse was in contemporary cultural practice. I felt that a number were stuck in their own practice. (For) Landmarks, I specifically asked people to make a leap in their own practice...It was an opportunity...to do something extraordinary outside of their regular practice. A number of people took up that challenge and...benefited from it. That was the focus of the whole project (Whitehead, 1994).

AROSpace went on to host an exhibition by students from the Northern Rivers College, as well as 20x20, a Craft Council touring show, and Skirting Board, an



opportunity for female artists to present slide shows and discussions of their work. The cost of renting the building, however, posed a constant difficulty and the venture began to falter. A fundraising auction of paintings, which included a palette and some studio artefacts formerly belonging to Lloyd Rees, raised \$3000 towards the rent of the building, but this only delayed the outcome. Eventually AROspace was forced to close. Maude related:

*It sort of happened for a number of months, until it was a really hot summer and you could hardly live in there; it was awful. It was based on a lot of good will from the uni and at the end of the year too many students left and we couldn't keep up the rent. (We) probably still owe rent on the place! ...*

*The Gallery's role was to initiate it and...it was up to the arts community to take it up. I think it was premature, if it had happened several years later it would have worked (Whitehead, 1994).*

Another Bicentennial event was the initiation of the Totem Forest project. This was a sculptural project sited in Victoria Park, between the Heritage Centre and the river, and was made possible when the Gallery became one of 27 applicants, selected from 450, to obtain a grant from the NSW Bicentennial Council. Lismore artist, Les Dorahy, was commissioned to co-ordinate the project and, together with other local artists, Mick Ward, Marko Koludrovic, Dennis Monks and Tony Nankervis, set about producing a forest of totems that would complement the riverside parklands.

Nankervis constructed a series of five concrete-filled, ceramic gravestones, ranging in height from one to two metres and intended to represent the death of Aboriginal people and culture under European occupation. The cluster of totemic forms were covered with white slips and then painted with black lines and circles in an indigenous aesthetic, with a view to creating a constant public reminder of the 'real' Australian history. The other works ranged from the serious and political to the whimsical and zany. Ward created crazily decorated totems, which continue to delight the child-like eye, while Koludrovic constructed a circular tank with a tree growing upwards through its centre.

This project created another welter of controversy for the Gallery when it was enacted. Many in the community felt that the works were too gender-biased and phallic and the lack of involvement by female artists was strongly criticised. Nevertheless, these sculptures worked to project a strong public art presence in Lismore and remained in good condition, continuing to stand in Heritage Park until 2003, when most were temporarily stored for relocation after the construction of the levee bank. The maquettes of the sculptures are held in the Gallery.

The Trench Building had now been housing the Gallery for three decades. In 1987, the editor of *Art Monthly*, Richard McMillan, along with the former Director of the Visual Arts Board, Ross Wolfe, came to Lismore to inspect some of the facilities available to local artists. *The Northern Star* spoke to both men at this time and reported:

*The Lismore Art Gallery is possibly the most underdeveloped in N.S.W., according to the editor of Art Monthly, Mr Richard McMillan.*

*"When one considers the enormous economic and tourist potential for this region, it seems extraordinary that the link between cultural facilities and growth has not been examined," Mr McMillan said...*

*Mr Wolfe said the gallery was a 'dinosaur'.*

*"What is needed in Lismore is a major visual arts complex, such as the one proposed by the Lismore Regional Gallery director, Richard Maude," Mr Wolfe said."*

*Recent developments in Australia will ensure that the regional committees, such as Lismore, can avail themselves to the best touring exhibitions that have previously only been available to people in Sydney or Melbourne," Mr Wolfe said.*

*But unless the venue is of a sufficient professional standard, exhibition organisers will not be prepared to lend works of value.*

*The standard of the Lismore gallery would not be appropriate for the touring exhibitions."*

The article went on to say:

*Even though they were not impressed by the facility standards, they were quick to say the area had a large number of artists of real calibre.*

*"We have been very impressed by the work we have seen," Mr McMillan said (TNS, 8/10/87).*

Both these men became Friends of the Gallery and worked to raise funds for its improvement.

Maude continued to campaign for a new building. He recalled:

*My preference was for a new building because in the first year I was here we had two floods...a couple of weeks apart. The first one lapped at the step up to the Gallery floor. It came into the foyer but that didn't make a difference because the humidity was 100% inside the Gallery anyway! It was a disaster for everything turning mouldy etc. The second flood entered the building by about 20cm and it was just ridiculous. I couldn't believe that they'd put up with this for God knows how many years. I was shocked; I thought there was no point in staying in this building exposed to that kind of severity, which was uncontrollable (Whitehead, 1994).*

Flooding in the late eighties threw further emphasis on the unsuitability of the Trench Building's location. In 1988 *The Northern Star* reported:

*The Lismore Gallery has flooded regularly but escaped last year's floods by 25cm.*

*Waders were needed twice last year and one woman heading for the lavatory fell through the floor before she reached the door (TNS, 14/6/88).*

In 1989 the waters reached even higher during a sudden river rise. Maude was out of town and volunteers, including council workers, laboured frantically to lift the works to safety. Some works were water damaged, however, particularly a set of 12 etchings that were overlooked in a storeroom. This damage generated a substantial restoration bill and tempers ran high. In a *The Northern Star* article, Russell Eldridge reported:

*Standing in the dank, musty rooms, where valuable paintings were shoved unceremoniously on to shelves, Mr Maude vented his frustration.*

*"If this region is serious about taking charge of such a collection, then it should look after it," he said.*

*"The council should ensure that this never happens again.*

*"The gallery building is hopeless. It's close to the river and totally unsuitable.*

*"This community has a high profile in Australia as an artists' community. And yet there are no facilities for them. No wonder so many leave." (TNS, 1989).*

This flooding drew attention to the plight of the Collection but still no new home was proffered. *The Northern Star* interviewed the mayor over the event and wrote:

*The Mayor of Lismore, Ald Harold Fredericks, said that the art collection would be relocated as soon as new council chambers were built.*

*He said it was important that this happened 'in the next year or two'.*

*The council has resolved to use the present council chambers as a future art gallery (TNS, 17/4/89).*

As with previous Council statements on this matter, however, there was little to no follow through and the Gallery continued to struggle largely unsupported. Not only did it need a new building, it desperately needed extra staff. The council was responsible, according to the Trust's constitution, for providing a secretary to the Trust, yet Maude was functioning as both secretary and Director. This situation proved exceedingly difficult, particularly as he was initially employed only on a part-time basis. In 1994, Maude described the situation to Aine Whitehead:

*I remained secretary as I do today. It was difficult. You've got to remember that I was still part time. I was only paid for three days a week. It wasn't until 1987 that I managed to get my hours increased, but the pay was still incredibly low...way below my colleagues.*

*I used to do most of my own letters... if I needed anything typed urgently I could get the Town Clerk's secretary to type stuff for me, which I had to do because there was only an old clapper of a typewriter that must have been donated to the Gallery in the forties or something (Whitehead, 1994).*

By the early nineties, the Gallery was able to employ some extra staff. A casual technician was made available to assist with the trickier mounting and dismounting and a Director's Assistant, Leonie Hayes, was employed to support Richard Maude. The Gallery also acquired a computer.

### **The 90's**

In 1991, the Gallery staged Pam Johnston's photographic exhibition, *A Journey into Bundjalung Country*. Pam Johnston, a well-known Aboriginal artist, launched this exhibition in conjunction with the book of the same name by her adoptive mother, writer, Ruby Langford. In 1990, Johnston had accompanied Langford on a journey to her home of Box Ridge, Coraki, and from this arose the collection of black and white photographs of the Bundjalung people.

In a *The Northern Star* article covering the approaching exhibition, Langford was quoted as saying,

*As far as I know there is not one bit of Bundjalung art displayed in Bundjalung country.*

The article went on to add:

*But that will change.*

*Tomorrow night a photographic exhibition, 'A Journey into Bundjalung Country', will be launched by the Rev Peter Walker, himself a Bundjalung man.*

*Bundjalung tribal lands extend from the Clarence River, near Grafton, north to Ipswich and Beaudesert, and west to the Great Dividing Range, said Ruby.*

*Bundjalung is the most common Aboriginal language used by Kooris on the east coast, including Sydney. Between 20 and 30 of the original 70 clan dialects survive. But, aside from mission photos taken forever ago, there is no pictorial or written record of the Bundjalung people.*

*"The photographs are like a family album," said Pam Johnston, the photographer behind the exhibition.*

*'As well as a history of the Bundjalung we wanted to show a few other things, like just a few miles out of town old ladies are living in hovels (TNS, 4/7/91).*

The *Lismore Echo* covered the opening night of the exhibition, reporting:

*Speaking at the official opening of the exhibition, Pam Johnston said that this is Bundjalung country, and that we must all be conscious of that, and take care to honour the land, its people, and their heritage. Her short speech was positive and vibrant with affection for her adopted Aboriginal family; when she had finished speaking the room was full of dozens of broadly smiling faces, black and white. A deep sense of unity was present in the space, while on the walls were an array of wonderful Aboriginal faces, young and old, sad and humorous, passive and active.*

*Leaving the exhibition, we overheard an Aboriginal woman say to her friend: "How about that, we got our people into the Art Gallery!" (LE, 12/7/91).*

*A Journey into Bundjalung Country* was stored in total at the Gallery and toured from there. It remains the property of Pam Johnston and is held in trust for the Bundjalung people.

The Permanent Collection by now contained a significant number of photographic works. In 1992, this led to the curation of the Gallery's first photographic touring show, *Some Children of the Dream: Tales from the Age of Aquarius*. Combining works by seven photographers, the exhibition documented the procession of festivals, protests and happenings that began with the 1973 Aquarius Festival and continued, in 1992, with the staging of Nimbin's *Beyond Beef Week*. These images combined to create one of the most idiosyncratic touring shows to be presented by the Gallery and delivered a dramatic presentation of local values, concerns and dramatics. The *Northern Star* reported:

*It's about flower power, love, spirituality, nudity, pot, freedom and the overwhelming optimism that the people of the Aquarius Festival harboured for changing the world.*

*The exhibition also delves into the emerging alternate philosophy that many who settled on the North Coast after the festival embraced and encouraged. The Terania Creek protest is one among many photos illustrating the proactive community that the North Coast has come to cherish (TNS, 11/1/02).*

Some *Children of the Dream...* was shown for the first time at the Lismore Regional Art Gallery, before embarking to tour other Australian galleries. It would travel several times in future years, including a tour of India, and the Lismore Gallery would show selected works in 2003, to complement the Aquarius Festival's thirtieth anniversary.

Following the high-profile success of the *Landmarks* exhibition, the Gallery was awarded an assistance grant from the Visual Arts/Craft Board of the Australia Council. This grant was for the purpose of staging a follow up project, 1990's *Landmarks-... #2*. *Landmarks #2* was to be on a much smaller scale, due to funding limitations; however, when the Regional Galleries Association also made a contribution, the project was expanded into a co-operative involvement with the Grafton and Murwillumbah Regional Galleries.

The Gallery's major need, however, was beyond its fundraising capabilities. In 1991, *The Northern Star* reported that:

*The Lismore City Council will immediately investigate the feasibility of housing the Richmond-Tweed Regional Library and Lismore Regional Art Gallery in the City Hall.*

*This investigation will include seeking a valuation of the existing library site in Carrington Street and may take council staff up to a year to complete (TNS, 22/2/91).*

That was in February. By June, a different solution began being discussed, when the Northern Rivers Conservatorium came forward with a plan involving the old Lismore High School campus on Keen Street. The Conservatorium had been based in this location for several years, remaining behind as an independent organisation when the affiliated Northern Rivers CAE moved to the current Southern Cross University Campus. The Conservatorium's tenure was almost completed and its Director, Merrill Maunder, was concerned that the Department of Education would find something else to do with the large site. She suggested approaching the Ministries for Art and for Education with a proposal regarding a combined arts facility. The *Lismore Echo* reported:

*If the proposal becomes reality, the Keen Street buildings would accommodate the gallery, the existing Conservatorium, and some functions of the North Coast Theatre Company including workshops, offices and rehearsal rooms in the short term, with a view to adding a performance space later (Lismore Echo, 14/6/91).*

If the proposal was to become reality, however, history suggested that it wouldn't happen overnight and meanwhile, in the same issue, the *Echo* ran the headline 'Disgusting' Gallery Seeks New Home (LE, 14/6/91). In this article it reported on the results of an informal survey conducted on behalf of the Friends of the Gallery:

*All but one of the 44 respondents to the survey agreed there was a need for improvement in public arts services in Lismore, and nearly all described the*

current Gallery accommodation in a variety of pejorative terms which included 'absolutely disgusting', 'dank, dingy, dark', 'shithouse' and 'counter productive to a public gallery's responsibilities'.

It is thought possible that the one respondent who described the Gallery as 'nice and intimate' was probably one of the 9 per cent who had never been there (LE, 14/6/91).

Maude also spoke of the challenges faced by the Gallery due to its unattractive appearance:

One of the things I recognised when I first arrived was the poor state of the building, how people found it difficult to find and enter. That was a psychological thing as much as a physical thing. It had a tiny door, which wasn't very enticing. It was pokey and, unless you were really used to...encountering cultural objects or productions or processes, you just wouldn't have come in. Whilst Jan (Renkin) had obviously made leaps and bounds in attracting people to the Gallery, it was obviously not going to increase unless something happened to the physical quality and structure of the building itself. One of my first objectives was...that we would have a new building or renovate this one (Whitehead, 1994).

In 1992, Maude obtained enough funding to instigate the renovation and reconstruction of the Trench Building. In an inclusion to the cultural heritage documentation for the 1994 Tidy Towns Competition he outlined the process:

Renovations to the L.R.A.G. were underway not long after their successful submission for assistance was announced in late 1992. A grant of \$337,000 was made available, via the Federal Govt.'s Local Capital Works Program, to Lismore City Council.

The Friends of the Lismore Gallery contributed \$15,000 of a grant from the NSW Department of Planning's Area Assistance Scheme, the NSW Ministry for the Arts another \$10,000 under their Capital Works Program, & Council contributed the remainder of the \$390,000 project.

With these funds the Gallery was able to renovate and extend the old building so that it could be more appropriately used as a community based art museum & contemporary exhibition galleries.

The extensions to the building enabled construction of improved public spaces such as the enclosure of an entrance foyer, public toilets, a meeting room & a café-restaurant area which is designed to generate income to the Gallery for public programs and new artistic project initiatives.

Design of the renovations and extensions was carefully considered to maintain the heritage integrity of the original building while making it suitable for current usage.

The Gallery holds the city's collection of art & craft works now in its 41<sup>st</sup> year. It is a valuable collection of material cultural heritage valued at almost \$500,000.

For the first time in its 40-year life, this collection can now retire, when not on exhibition, in a climate controlled store room away from the influences of dust, humidity & temperature fluctuations that caused so much damage in the past (Maude, 1994).

In 1993, with the renovations complete, the Gallery was able to take possession of the entire Trench Building. Two smaller galleries had been created upstairs, as well as a library, a room to store the collection, office space and a kitchen. Downstairs, the Gallery was able to utilise all the floor space for larger exhibitions and to create a workshop area in the rear of the building. The small café-restaurant adjoining the main building was also completed and began to generate income for the gallery.

Richard Maude resigned in 1995 and Irena Hatfield was appointed Gallery Director. Irena later reverted to her maiden name of Dobrijevic and, for purposes of clarity, is referred to consistently as Dobrijevic throughout this history.

Dobrijevic's high profile generated a large amount of publicity for the Gallery. She was responsible for many key developments, including the on-line publication of both the Gallery's Permanent Collection and its Exhibition Program. Under her leadership, the Gallery began to attract a number of the premier touring exhibitions, such as the Archibald Prize, the Blake Prize for Religious Art and the Moët & Chandon Contemporary Art Prize. During Dobrijevic's time in office, the Gallery also won a number of awards, including both the North Coast Tourism Awards and the prestigious NSW Tourism Awards.

This was a flourishing time for the Gallery. The exhibition program was reaching new levels of prestige, with 1996 seeing a selection of works from the Archibald, Wynne and Suliman Art Prizes on display. Maude's renovations had created a much more inviting and user-friendly atmosphere and the Gallery recorded its highest ever numbers of visitors. In the second half of the decade, the Gallery employed an Education and Public Programs Officer, Marie Nelson. Nelson, along with her other duties, attended a training course for gallery guides and began offering guided tours for groups of up to fifteen people. This development was very popular and led to many school and seniors groups beginning to take regular Gallery tours, significantly increasing the audience for particularly educational or high profile exhibitions.

1996 also saw a further facelift for the Gallery premises, facilitated by a 50% funding grant from the Ministry for the Arts. The ceilings of the exhibition spaces were white washed and the floors sanded and sealed. The offices and stairway were carpeted, making the stairs much less slippery and thus safer, and smoke detectors were installed throughout the building.

This rejuvenation also extended into the surrounding environment of the Gallery, with the installation of Connie Munro's bronze sculpture, *Burrapur Meru* (Tomorrow's pathway). The purchase of this sculpture was made possible by a five thousand dollar donation by philanthropist, Philip Davenport. It was installed near the Spinks Park fountain, which was temporarily removed in 2003, when the council began work on the construction of the levee bank. *Burrapur Meru*, however, remains in the park as of 2004.

While all these changes contributed to the transformation of the Gallery into a more congenial, safer and professional workspace, the Gallery was still desperate for larger premises, in order to accommodate bigger travelling exhibitions and an ever-expanding collection. Grants to patch up the old building were relatively easy to attain, however the Gallery's real need was for a new building; and it was increasingly frustrating to enact costly renovations on a site that would never be satisfactory.

Meanwhile, media coverage of Gallery events was becoming more comprehensive and helpful. By 1997, Gallery volunteer Danielle Slattery was co-ordinating a regular

visual arts guide on 2NCR FM and NBN news was featuring Gallery exhibitions on their local news programs. Linc TV, the local community station, had produced a promotional eight-minute video, which was used to educate people about the Gallery through the Gallery's outreach program; and the Permanent Collection was professionally photographed which made possible the reproduction of works for promotional and educational purposes. All of this, combined with the Gallery's link to the Lismore City Council Homepage, raised the Gallery's profile to a new level. In 1997, the average number of hits the website received monthly was thirteen thousand.

The Gallery embarked on a short-lived merchandising venture in 1997, with the setting up of a small gift shop in its foyer. Ceramics, glassware, prints and various articles relating to the current exhibitions were available for purchase; and this enterprise provided local artists with an extra opportunity to showcase as well as sell their work. The little shop soon gained a reputation as an exclusive source of unique gifts and quality locally made product, however, the small Gallery staff was unable to maintain the paperwork and record control necessary for selling goods on consignment and the administrative costs cancelled any significant profit. A further impediment was the space itself; the Gallery foyer was exposed to direct sunlight and thus the stock was limited to goods that weren't heat affected. The shop remained functional throughout the rest of the 1990s, but early in the next century it was given up as impossible to run with such limited space and staff.

While this venture faltered, however, the exhibition program was going from strength to strength. In July 1997, the Gallery presented *Under the Bridge and Over the Tunnel*, an exhibition of selected works from the Howard Hinton Collection. This exhibition showcased Australian Impressionist paintings by Arthur Streeton, Sydney Long and Lionel Lindsay, along with a number of other premier Australian artists. Late 1997 saw the Gallery host the prestigious *Moet and Chandon NSW Tour*.

Among the highlights of the 1998 program was *Too Dark for the Light Horse*, a touring show from the Australian War Memorial. This was a collection of black and white photography, which documented the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Servicemen and women. Another significant exhibition was *Mnmon yad Kalam* (My Place is Kalam), a collection of contemporary drawings by Wkeng Aseng, a Papua New Guinean artist who had relocated to Mummulgum. This latter event was particularly exciting for the Gallery and its community, as the PNG Minister for Education, Professor John Waiko, travelled to Australia to open the exhibition.

In 1998, the Gallery was also able to upgrade its computer systems. Four workstations were installed and networked and the package included the provision of a colour printer and scanner. Unfortunately, the networking has been consistently subject to glitches, which often require a lengthy wait for a technician from the council's IT Department. Nevertheless, this upgrade enhanced the Gallery's ability to produce quality desktop publications; and heralded a new level of professionalism for invitations, catalogues, brochures, information kits and all Gallery in-house printing.

A further initiative of the late nineties was the *Magellan Street Public Art Project*. This project was part of Lismore City Council's *Magellan Street Project*, which focused on the beautification of Magellan Street and the construction of the Transit Centre. The public art project was funded by the *Ministry for the Arts* and the *Regional Galleries Association*; and involved the construction of a twenty-six metre mosaic river. Two hundred and twenty members of the community participated in this event, attending workshops to create the tiles that now form Magellan Street's river ground mosaic.



Towards the end of the nineties, the Gallery's contribution to the community finally began to be acknowledged and rewarded. In 1998, the Arts Council of NSW, in recognition of Lismore's support and encouragement of arts and cultural development, presented the Dorothy Helmrich Award to Lismore City Council. Following this, the Gallery received the 1999 North Coast Tourism Award for excellence in Heritage and Cultural Touring and continued on to win the 1999 NSW Tourism Award in the same category.

More awards were to follow, with 1999 also seeing some public recognition of the vital contribution made by the Gallery's volunteers. Volunteer support continued to be a crucial component of the day-to-day functioning of the Gallery; and the *Work for the Dole* program enabled a continual infusion of new blood. In 1999, with the assistance of a small grant, a team of volunteers, led by Judy Lovett of the council's IT Department, established the Gallery's Permanent Collection online. This significant achievement led to a Highly Commended in the National Australia Bank's Community Link Awards, along with a \$500 donation towards the Gallery. The volunteers elected to use the prize money to purchase a pair of sculptural ceramic vessels, *Support I* and *Support II* by local artist Liz Stops.

1999 also saw the re-establishment of the Lismore City Art Prize. The reinvigorated prize was themed *Portrait of a Local Identity* and was made open to any artist in any medium, thus taking on the form familiar to modern entrants. Two prizes of \$1000 were offered; these being the Council sponsored Lismore City Art Prize and *The Northern Rivers Echo* People's Choice Award.

During the late nineties, an important shift began in the Collection, with the acquisition of a number of works by Aboriginal artists. Possibly the most important of these were Albert Digby Moran's *Goanna Headland*, purchased in 1997, and the 1998 acquisition, *One Country One View* by Bronwyn Bancroft. Until this point, Aboriginal artists had been largely under represented within the Collection, the only holdings being Pam Johnston's *A Journey into Bundjalung Country* and the Namatjira and Ebaterinja works. The new additions played an important role in balancing the cultural representation of the Gallery's holdings and this was the beginning of a trend that would carry into the next century, creating a strong indigenous aspect in the 2004 Collection.

### **The 2000's**

In 2000, the Gallery commissioned the Boomalli Artist Co-op to create a touring exhibition by urban Aboriginal artists. In response, Boomalli's Jody Chester curated *My Culture*, an educational exhibition that included interactive guided tours and an information package. *My Culture* toured the North Coast's outlying Aboriginal communities and was accompanied by Education and Public Program's Officer, Marie Nelson, who travelled to each venue, holding educational presentations and workshops.

The show toured Cabbage Tree Island, Maclean, Woodenbong, Bonalbo, Kyogle and Lismore, becoming, in the words of Dobrijevic later that year, *the most successful outreach program that has been hosted by the Lismore Regional Art Gallery* (AR, 99-00). It resulted in a review of the Gallery's Acquisition Policy to facilitate the inclusion of Aboriginal art from other areas around Australia; and in 2001, Dobrijevic herself donated two burial poles and a totem pole by indigenous Arnhem Land artists to the Collection.

2000 continued with a strong and exciting exhibition program, as three years of hard work came to fruition with the showing of *Moment in Time: Brett Whiteley's Byron Bay Series*, sponsored by Thursday Plantation. This exhibition also became the focus of the

Gallery's annual Banquet Dinner and Art Auction, an initiative begun by Dobrijevic early in her tenure. For 2000's event, artists were challenged to create fun and innovative tributes to Whiteley. Wendy Whiteley was guest speaker for the event, joining in the spirit of the evening to purchase Ian Pearson's *Schizophrenic Portrait of Brett Whiteley as (Bob) Dylan Freak*, and the auction raised over six thousand dollars towards the acquisition of artworks for the Collection.

The problem was there was no room to store any more acquisitions. By now the need for more Gallery space was becoming excruciating. The Permanent Collection was housed in a small, cramped room, where access to individual works was often difficult for staff and sometimes downright dangerous. It was only available to the public when the Gallery curated small exhibitions of its contents. As far back as 1998, Dobrijevic had written in the Annual Report:

*Because the PC storage area is exceptionally small, the gallery's acquisitions are limited to works that will fit into this space. Storage is becoming increasingly more difficult to manipulate as this area becomes more cramped with works which then impacts upon future acquisitions (AR, 97-98).*

By 2002, the limitation placed on acquisitions had made future expansion of the Collection a doubtful prospect.

The building's small area was also creating other problems. The necessary location of the two small galleries upstairs meant that many members of the public had difficulty accessing exhibitions due to difficulties negotiating the Gallery staircase. The small amount of office space meant that staff often had difficulty finding a free computer or a quiet space to work and visitors to the upstairs galleries often wandered into the office space, creating a number of privacy and security issues.

The council was once again motivated to attempt some action. It examined the purchase of a large building located at the northern end of Carrington Street, but this was ruled out due to problems with flooding and parking. The Council then focused, once again, on the old Lismore High School buildings and the Harold Fredricks car park. This site was deemed more suitable and an offer was made to the NSW Department of Education and Training for this site, with a view to creating the long-discussed cultural precinct.

John Jeboult, chairperson of the Lismore Arts Trust, which was by then known as the Lismore Regional Gallery Art Advisory Panel, explained the plan in his 2000 report:

*The vision is for a centrally located cluster of community amenities that may include among others the Public Library, Neighbourhood Centre, rehearsal space for NORPA, a museum and an Aboriginal dance centre. The Art Advisory Panel will be closely involved with a view to improving its exhibition space, car parking and access facilities. The close proximity of several important community services will undoubtedly benefit the public and the services themselves, while injecting new life into the CBD (AR, 99-00).*

In February 2001, the unsuitability of the Gallery building was again underlined when the Wilson River rose 10.4 metres and the region was declared a natural disaster area. Businesses had only an hour to get their stock out before the main block of the Central Business District was inundated with water. More than four hundred SES crews responded to thousands of calls for assistance.

The Gallery was hosting an exhibition opening when the flood warning was raised. Visitors pitched in to help the Gallery volunteers move everything to the upper level

and, thankfully, no works were damaged. A few weeks later, flood warnings were raised again, this time when the Gallery was preparing to host the prestigious Blake Prize for Religious Art. In March, the *Northern Rivers Echo* included a snippet which read:

*Beware the Ides of March...for it's today. And rather than keeping an eye on the weather, simply consult the Lismore Regional Art Gallery's exhibition openings for an idea of the next flood. Last month, as a few hardy souls gathered to mark the occasion, they soon joined the many volunteers packing up for the impending flood. The next show, the Blake Prize for Religious Art, opened last Thursday, as Lismore was threatened by floodwaters once again. The next show opens April 5. You have been warned (NRE, 15/3/01).*

Despite the flood warnings, the Blake Prize was an extraordinarily successful exhibition. The 2001 Prize had attracted four hundred submissions and a selection of these was exhibited in the Gallery throughout March of that year. This was the first time the Blake Prize had been shown in Lismore, and it was of particular interest in 2001, as the overall winner was nineteen-year-old Frances Belle Parker, a former student of MacLean High School. Parker's winning entry, *The Journey*, was a painting done in the Tingara form, which depicted a rainbow serpent with a crucifix on the tip of its tongue. She intended it to represent the amalgamation of her own Aboriginal and Christian heritage, while transforming her personal journey into an expression of national identity.

2001 also saw the display of *Mentals III*, an eclectic and vibrant display of paintings and designs by the 'Mental as Anything' band members. This exhibition, from the Wollongong City Gallery, included band posters and memorabilia and was extremely popular with the public; particularly Reg Mombassa's Mambo designs which provided the most familiar and iconic images. *The Northern Star* reported:

*The art of the Mentals features in a brilliant and amusing new show that opens tonight at Lismore Regional Art Gallery. Inspired by the literally thousands of places and people the band has encountered over the last two decades, Mentals III, shows five renaissance men with a talent for art as well as good rock. While on tour...they'd often go back to their hotel rooms and paint and draw...*

*Heading the show is Peter O'Doherty, aka Reg Mombassa, whose designs for Mambo surf wear became Australian icons. Reg's surreal and bewitching giant characters also formed part of the colourful Olympic closing ceremony...*

*Wayne Delisle, aka David 'Bird' Twohill, takes band paraphernalia as his subject. Reg Mombassa is inspired by clowns, flowers, farm machinery and the wind. Greedy Smith says his inspirations come from British war comics, the TV series Combat and Hogan's Heroes, Barbara Cartland, semiotic theory and bad Australian rock journalism...*

*Singer Martin Plaza prefers still life with everyday objects.*

*The result is fun and fantastic (TNS, 23/6/01).*

A number of entertaining community competitions were staged during this exhibition and the entire event created a festival like atmosphere. This exhibition heralded a new tongue-in-cheek approach by the Gallery and was the first of a number of fun and joyful shows.

One of the final achievements of Dobrijevič's directorship was the publication of the Permanent Collection Catalogue. This catalogue contains photographs and descriptions of all the works in the Collection, along with articles by Dobrijevič and Giese. Funded equally by the Gallery, its corporate patrons and Lismore City Council, the catalogue was available for purchase and was distributed to major galleries and libraries. It was dedicated to the late Shelagh Kaske, a long-time volunteer and supporter of the gallery. The Permanent Collection was also published on the Gallery website at this time, and thus became accessible to the public in its entirety – something that had not been possible for decades due to the growth of the collection and the limited capacity of the Gallery.

When Dobrijevič retired in late 2001, the Gallery saw the appointment of its present director, Bronwyn Larnier. Larnier, a multi-skilled curator, writer, artist and lecturer, had previously been involved in the operations of the Gold Coast City Art Gallery, The Broadbeach Gallery and Stanthorpe Regional Art Gallery. She took up her position at Lismore Regional Art Gallery after lecturing, for six years, at the University of Southern Queensland.

In her first week of office, Larnier was interviewed by *The Northern Rivers Echo*, who reported:

*In her first week as the Lismore Regional Art Gallery's new director, Bronwyn Larnier is already making a pretty big impression.*

*The talented writer, artist and lecturer will announce a number of new initiatives for the gallery at the launch of the FastArt exhibition tonight, including an Art Careers Expo to give both students and parents information on art based career options.*

*"Parents are often concerned about their children's career path and this will give parents and children the opportunity to look at alternatives and options in the art world," Bronwyn said.*

*Other initiatives include a folio workshop so young artists can get feedback on their folios and improve them. For established artists there's a Personal Professional Development. Bronwyn visits a local artist each week, to offer a critique and help them develop. She also plans to improve the Gallery's website*

*"I'm very excited about my new position and I'm looking forward to the challenge, Bronwyn said.*

*"There's a real potential, due largely to the high number of artists in the area, to make this one of the most creative regions in Australia."(NRE, 7/3/02).*

Bronwyn took over the role of Director of the Gallery in late February 2002. She brought with her a new vision for redefining the Gallery, spearheading a number of initiatives, including a reinvigoration and specialisation of the volunteer program, a review of corporate sponsorship, the launch of a children's art club and the establishment of one of the Gallery's most dynamic events to date, the annual Winsome Hotel Australia Day Art Fair. Larnier also focussed on raising the profile of the Lismore City Art Prize.

The Art Prize was transforming with the times. No longer limited to paintings, the submitted works included sculpture and computer mediated images. In 2002, the prize was subtitled *Living Regional Treasures*; and was open to any artist, for a work which paid tribute to a local person and their contribution to the community. The

following year, this theme was extended to include any 'living regional treasure', thus opening the doors to work other than portraiture.

The Gallery was host to a number of different touring shows during 2002. Definitely the quirkiest of these was Martin Wilson's, *Fuzzy Prime Ministers*, an exhibition of hooked rugs depicting all of Australia's Prime Ministers since Federation. The promotional slogan accompanying this exhibition was indicative of the Galleries more relaxed and experimental approach. It read: *These are our country's leaders as you've never seen them before – they're ours and they're fuzzy!!!* (AR, 01-02).

This exhibition provided an important educational component along with its artistic and comedic aspects. It was particularly seized upon by local schools as a fresh approach to teaching Australian History. Local textile artists also flocked to see this amusing approach to the medium and the Gallery walls echoed with chuckles throughout the duration of the exhibition.

Another educational touring show of 2002, was *Whichaway*, by Jon Rhodes; a photographic exhibition documenting twenty-two years in the life of the remote Aboriginal community of Kiwirrkura, in the Gibson Desert. *The Northern Rivers Echo* covered the show, reporting:

*The exhibition features 26 mounted series, created using more than 100 photographs. Each series tells its own story relating to a particular event or subject, from the establishment of the local school to how the elders stopped petrol sniffing in their community* (NRE, 7/2/02).

A forward to *Whichaway's* catalogue of works added another dimension to the cultural bridging inherent in the exhibition. Explaining the masking of some of the figures in the photographs, it read:

*Since these photographs were taken, one person has passed away. At Kiwirrkura, as in many Aboriginal communities, restrictions apply on the naming or display of photographs of deceased persons. At a special Kiwirrkura Council meeting in 1996, it was decided that, instead of completely removing the specific photographs from the exhibition and catalogue, the images of the deceased person should be covered over. The council believes that by doing this, non-Aboriginal people would gain a greater understanding about the attitudes and beliefs of the people from Kiwirrkura...* (Rhodes, 2002).

The Gallery also coordinated several interesting touring exhibitions during 2002. Perhaps the most fascinating was *Chen Chuan: Contemporary Chinese Woodblock Prints*. This exhibition was part of a cultural exchange between Lismore and Shandong province, China, the result of a visit to China by a contingent of Lismore citizens during 1999. The group of printmakers from Lismore exchanged examples of their own work for a colourful exhibition of woodblock prints by Chen Chuan, one of the few Chinese artists still working within this technique. Chen's exhibition expressed a feeling of a poetic memory of a remote rural past; and reflected the ancient and modern traditions of woodblocking, both Chinese and foreign. His work was shown at the Lismore Gallery in December 1999 to January 2000, his first Australian exhibition, and went on tour nationally in April 2002.

Also in this year, the Gallery extended its exhibition program through the creation of a new, twenty-four hour exhibition space for site-specific installations. This was *OuterSpace*, a display window created to face directly onto Molesworth Street. Passers-by could now view an exhibition without even entering the Gallery and this brought the Gallery into the public domain in a way that inspired fresh understanding

and interest from the community. OuterSpace was and is curated by Gallery volunteers and provides an opportunity for artists to introduce themselves to the public without the pressures of providing an entire exhibition of work.

The Gallery continued its experimental exhibition program with the establishment of the annual Winsome Hotel Australia Day Art Fair. Held January 21 to 29, 2003, this high profile event was officially under the patronage of Her Divine Holiness, Pope Alice; an alternate identity of internationally renowned Brisbane artist, Luke Roberts. Fifteen local artists were invited to create cameo exhibitions in the second floor rooms of the heritage-listed hotel. *The Northern Rivers Echo* reported:

*One of the most unique exhibitions to be held in Lismore for some time, the inaugural Lismore Art Fair, is now on show upstairs at the Winsome Hotel in North Lismore.*

*The exhibition features the talents of more than a dozen artists, who have all created an installation in a bedroom on the second floor of the hotel.*

*The bedrooms have been left intact with beds and tables still in their original positions, with each artist constructing their installation around these traditional features. One artist, Cal McKinnon, has even created an installation in the hotel's bathroom.*

*"We had a lot of expressions of interest from artists in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane as well as artists in the Northern Rivers, so it's a very diverse exhibition," Lismore Regional Art Gallery director, Bronwyn Larner, said.*

*"We're also very honoured to have Luke Roberts involved, who is better known as Pope Alice and was recently involved in the prestigious Sydney Biennale.*

*"I think the exhibition itself challenges the tradition of the vast white cube of contemporary galleries. These bedrooms are intimate domestic spaces and there's a marvellous dialogue between the different rooms. It's not a painting show – it's going to be fun and it's going to be different." (NRE, 23/1/03).*

This Exhibition was a huge success; and the new irreverence characterised by the Winsome Hotel Australia Day Art Fair extended into a fresh and varied exhibition program for 2003.

2003 also saw the initiation of the International Internship Program, a Larner-inspired project, which saw five interns from France, and one from Germany, spend six months training within the Gallery as part of their University studies. Maude Laurency, Lauren Dejaeghere, Isabelle Lefebvre, Zöe Brody, Mathieu Le Cann and Alex Kabus all brought their own unique skills to furthering the Gallery's profile. Le Cann was particularly useful in setting up a multi-lingual website, while Laurency, Dejaeghere, Lefebvre and Brody co-ordinated children's workshops and fundraising activities as well as handling more mundane tasks like reception. This writer has particularly fond memories of Alex Kabus' sense of humour. On one nasty day when Larner was suspected to have broken her ankle, Kabus broke the tension by racing out to the ambulance with a camera and demanding that she say 'cheese!' (This was Larner's personal digital camera, which she keeps at the Gallery, facilitating the easy transfer of images to the computer database).

Marie Nelson retired from the Gallery (now known as Lismore Regional Gallery) early in 2003. Soon after, the Gallery employed Queensland artist, Darren Jones, formerly

the acting Director of the Griffith University's Queensland College of Art, to take on the role of Assistant Director. Jones took the Gallery to new levels of professionalism in the design and production of publications. He also instigated a further renovation of the Gallery premises, which was completed in 2004. This renovation involved the construction of an enclosed walkway between the main building and a side annex, giving the staff access to food-preparation and storage areas; and creating a perfect co-ordination area for Gallery events.

By 2004, the redevelopment of the old Lismore High School building has become known as the *Art in the Heart* project. The Gallery's Art Advisory Panel has been involved in this project from its inception and many panel members, including Larnier, have joined Council's Art in the Heart Advisory Panel. 2002 saw the encouraging start of work on the site and by 2003, the Richmond-Tweed River Library was able to take residence in the building. The Gallery is still waiting for funds to be made available so that it too can join the new cultural complex.

In 2004, Lismore Regional Gallery is acknowledged as the third oldest regional gallery in NSW. It is recognised as a regional gallery of significance; and its fortunate location in an area with a high concentration of established and emerging artists allows it to maintain this standing while including a strong local content in its exhibition program. The Art Advisory Panel continues to have a significant involvement in Gallery decisions and policy; and John Stretch remains on the panel, although John Page now fills the office of Chairman.

The Gallery still very much operates as a community cultural space, relying on the support of volunteers, bequests and donations, as well as corporate sponsorship. It works to return the support given by its community in many ways, through art classes, children's art and poetry workshops, curatorial classes, music events and a wide range of seminars covering the philosophical and practical aspects of art creation and appreciation. Its volunteer program has been expanded to encompass the *Work for the Dole* initiative and equips many local people with the skills, experience and self-confidence to take advantage of employment opportunities and to interact with their community in a more dynamic and meaningful way. Furthermore, the Gallery has extended this service to the international community, with the successful implementation of the International Internship Program and the establishment of the multi-lingual website. The Internship Program has been a particular success and over forty applications have been received for the 2004 positions.

In 2004, the Lismore Regional Gallery's Permanent Collection numbers 450 works and is estimated to value over \$600 000. Its most recent additions are Jacklyn Wagner's *Walk on the South Side*, an 89 work photographic essay on the residents of South Lismore; and Stephen Henry's *Sid and Irene*, a pair of life sized photographs, which won the 2003 Lismore City Art Prize. Due to the acquisitions policy adopted by Maude in the 1990's, the Collection now encompasses an impressive array of contemporary, local work, as well as works by artists of international acclaim. These works encompass the traditional mediums, as well as more experimental approaches such as those incorporating electronic media.

Despite the 'temporary' nature of the original tenure, the Trench Building is still home to the Gallery in 2004. The building now stands as an icon of Lismore's Central Business District and, in 1972, was assessed by the Historic Building Committee as almost unique in NSW for its fusion of Art Nouveau and Continental Secession architectural styles. The Gallery still desperately requires a more appropriate location, however, and hopes that the Council will follow through with its promises of relocation. In the meantime, it works passionately to uphold the original charter set out by the Arts Trust;

that being to collect, conserve, research and exhibit works of art for the enjoyment and education of the public and the cultural development of the community.

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