Constructing Art in Australia: from Colonialism to Post-colonialism.

TAD3109

Janine Good Research Essay

Where are the great Australian women landscape artists?

In Australian art what role have women played in shaping perceptions of identity through landscape imagery in the second half of the 20th century?

Introduction

The landscape has persisted as a dominant focus of visual interpretation in Australian art since colonisation roughly two hundred years ago – reflecting attempts to identify with the new country and its environment. The land and its elements have remained inseparable from life and culture for indigenous people, forming the essential basis for physical and spiritual existence. The 20th century has been a time of enormous change: witnessing two world wars; industrial, technological and economic developments; medical advances; population increases; environmental and climatic changes – resulting in improved living conditions for some but far worse for others. The landscape has changed significantly with these changes. While these complex issues and many more continue to be debated as we accelerate into another millennium, what reflection does this have on our identity and does the landscape still play a role?

> Australian landscape has stimulated, centred, typified and constrained art in this country since the arrival of the white colonists and their prisoners two centuries ago. It has been said, for example, that the history of landscape painting *is* the history of painting in Australia: landscape has been made to serve every interest from homesick sentiment to nationalism to myth and back to fear of *terra australis.* Some contemporary artists have chosen to homage the landscape and have looked to an Aboriginal tradition, richer in its understanding of this land than ours, to draw out elements of ritual, time and symbolic seasonal change. (Burke, p.92)

Janine Burke's statement in 1990 about the impact of the landscape on Australian art not only describes the various ways this has occurred in the past but suggests there is a continuation. She welcomes the influence of Aboriginal culture and its influence on contemporary perceptions of identity by adding new elements and approaches to the dialogue of Australian art history. Aboriginal art is now *included* in most surveys of Australian art. While white male artists have always dominated the genre of landscape, recognising its importance for sustaining professional status, that dominance is now being challenged. With the opening up of society to diverse influences such as traditional and contemporary Aboriginal art, both male *and* female, and multi-cultural views, it is now time to also reveal the other side of western art – women's imagery. This essay will present examples of women's art since mid-century that show the way women perceive the land and landscape and question issues of identity.

* * *

It is important to recognise that painting and landscape have been dominated by white male influences throughout white Australia's artistic history – constructing a story of dominance, struggle, alienation and fear but also sublime beauty. Our perceptions of landscape have been moulded by male attitudes that have therefore governed the development of Australian identity. This inherent chauvinism was enforced earlier in the century to establish and retain white male superiority in the general community. This served to repress all other groups – indigenous, ethnic and women – but assured the professional status of men.

> Landscape was *the* serious art form, the mirror in which all the nationalist ideals of a generation were to be reflected and held up to the future as the composite picture of an heroic epoch. This was a male preserve. Art was an eminently suitable career for women, as William Moore acknowledged in his 1907 article, "Careers for Australasian Girls", but he warned of the impossibility of earning a livelihood from landscape painting. . .women were entitled to earn a living at art, but they were not entitled to become distinguished artists. (Hammond, p.14-15)

Most Australian landscape imagery shows the response to the landscape as something removed – something to be viewed with indifference or conquered, feared, and changed – but not united with. Jane Sutherland and Clara Southern, painters associated with the Heidelberg School presented gentler depictions of landscape than their male colleagues making the landscape a part of everyday life for women and children– in other words they 'domesticated' the landscape. For example, "in Jane Sutherland's *Little Gossips* (1888), the bush is benign, a secluded haven for two small children" (Hammond, p12). This feminine approach was contrary to the popular imagery at the time like Frederick McCubbin's painting *The lost child*, 1886, where the bush is perceived as a threat. The feminine depiction of the landscape, while valid, has remained unnoticed.

Society has changed dramatically since these times. There is a general acceptance now that multi-culturalism serves to enrich Australian culture rather than threaten it. Women and men tend to share the responsibilities of earning income *and* child-rearing in families, creating better understanding between the sexes. It is therefore essential that women's perceptions of life in Australia be promoted to balance the one-sided story that has prevailed through most of Australia's visual history.

Domesticating the landscape

Contemporary artist Louise Hearman (b.1963) revisits the "female landscape tradition" initiated by Jane Sutherland more than a century ago depicting children in the landscape. Although her focus is more about the 'human condition', the tension between figure and landscape contributes to the impact of her images. Her dark, mysterious paintings often depict children isolated in the Australian landscape, exposed to the environment but somehow familiar with it. Instead of innocence there is the threat of impending harm that seems more likely to come from the child than the landscape.

Courtney Kidd elaborates:

> Angelic though self-possessed, the child carries a sense of something known, a sense that there is some sort of 'hidden truth' to which we are not privy. (Cree/Drury, p.140)

Illus.1: **Louise Hearman**, *Untitled 659,* 1998. Oil on board 91 x 79 cm. (Cree, p.141)

Untitled 659, 1998, shows a baby dressed in white sitting amongst the green of a freshly mown clearing, yellow cultivated fields beyond - a semi bush/semi rural landscape familiar to many of us who live on the fringes of outer-suburbia. The pram is nearby out of baby's reach, perched close to a shadowy ledge. Although tension is created by dark shadows and the isolation of the child, instead of Courtney Kidd's reading of "displaced humanity", my reading is the tension between child and carer in an environment dominated by outdoor lifestyle. Kidd's interpretation:

> The romantic landscape, diffused light, and nostalgia for an Arcadian past is surely a metaphor for a displaced humanity in the contemporary world. . . Unlike Frederick McCubbin's *The Lost Child*, 1886, shrouded in bush, Hearman's child is alienated, separate from the natural world. We are poised

> . . . witnessing a beastly fairytale and locking into our darker psyche. The atmosphere is charged like that before a storm's impending havoc. (Cree, p.140)

My reading sees the diffused light as the haziness of parental sleep depravation and may also be symbolic of living at the edges of suburbia. Unlike McCubbin's child, Hearman's child shows no sign of distress or neglect and has been placed in the centre of the clearing out of harm's way allowing the parent some space to attend to other outdoor duties while still observing the child's safety. The vigorous quality of paint enhances the sense of urgency to get the job done quickly. This is a common situation for mothers sharing partnership in semi-rural businesses such as nursery work. Hearman is playing with contrasting meanings associated with the word 'nursery' – one of nurture, the other nature - combining both definitions in her painting. I would suggest that this child is more at ease with the landscape, able to safely explore, touch and experience her environment rather than the threat and alienation implied by Kidd. This is a contemporary depiction of Australian life today addressing the often forgotten circumstances for women and children. Hearman also establishes a sense of connection between children and their surroundings, disputing the stereotype of European alienation in the Australian landscape.

At the beginning of this research I wasn't sure to what degree women had participated in depicting the landscape. I knew of the expansive industrial landscapes of Mandy Martin and the sensitive minimalist constructions of Rosalie Gascoigne but women's interpretations about landscape were not conspicuous in Australian contemporary art. This was partly because by the time of the Women's Movement in the mid 1970s there was a general tiredness of landscape – that it was cliché, done to death.

> **Geoff Levitus**: . . it's been done to death and it's a cliché now. It's not something that people will necessarily draw strength from. I don't know anywhere else in the world where that kind of myth making is necessary either, especially European countries. But identity is much more an individual thing that's being explored these days than a large group phenomenon. (Copeland, Ep.3, p.15)

This commentary from the ABC Radio National discussion "A Brush With Landscape" in 1998 supports the idea of Australia as a conglomerate of diverse individuals of various ethnic, religious, social and cultural backgrounds, all with uniquely individual experiences of identity. Levitus also indicates three important issues about Australia and landscape: many myths have been constructed around landscape and identity that are no longer valid; the dialogue in Australia is relative to world influences; and the dominant white male perceptions of landscape have "been done to death".

The problem with the idea of identity centring around a diverse collection of views is getting those views noticed by established hierarchies. Not all individuals in Australia are

treated equally despite the implementation of anti-discrimination and equal opportunity laws.

While Geoff Levitus may be implying that landscape is an outmoded subject for effecting identity, I would argue that because it has been such a male-dominated area in art, there is still a great deal of potential, particularly for women's expressions. Women's mythology has always related to the earth and nature – earth *mother*, Gaia the *Goddess* of earth, *mother* nature, etc – and symbolic use of landscape elements have been popular in women's art. For Aboriginal women elements from the earth provide significance as sustenance as well as ceremonial importance.

Sacred land

Symbolism, myth and celebration of the land are the elements essential to most aboriginal art. Ada Bird Petyarre[1] (b. c.1930) is one of the many aboriginal women who paint about ceremony and ritual associated with her country. Her painting *Sacred grasses*, 1989 achieves a jewel-like quality and mystique with its masses of layered coloured dots. The plants Petyarre depicts at first resemble botanical studies, each treated individually emphasising details of form, but they also begin to take the form of spiritual beings.

Illus.2: **Ada Bird Petyarre**, *Sacred grasses* 1989. Synthetic polymer on canvas 130 x 230cm. (Caruana, p.145)

> Women's ceremonies are the subject of *Sacred grasses* by Ada Bird Petyarre. The plant-forms around the perimeter of the canvas point inwards to the centre of the work where a circle represents a ground painting. On

[1] Anmatyerre language group

> either side of this circle are rectangular shapes described in dots which resemble a ceremonial ground. The painting indicates a planar perspective landscape, as though one were looking down on it from above, while at the same time the composition suggests the viewer is looking up through the ground as, indeed, the supernatural beings are said to view the world from their subterranean home. (Caruana, p. 143)

This painting shows the deep connection with the landscape and its elements forming the basis of sacred ritual. It is also a remarkably balanced composition with each piece fitting together like a jigsaw puzzle, reflecting the colour, light and spirit of the country.

For indigenous Australians, paintings of the land and its elements helped to establish a "record" of identifying regions and aspects of cultural significance, and as a consequence recognisable proof in western terms for overturning the long overdue lie of *terra nullius*.

> Aboriginal artists continue to produce paintings about their land, their form of landscape. It is they who, using traditional or western techniques to 'talk' about country, continue the legacy of the first Arrernte watercolourists of the 1930s – and indeed artists from throughout the continent and throughout the period of occupation of their lands. (Levitus, p.108)

The increased exposure of aboriginal art has helped boost the overall number of women artists receiving promotion in Australian art. Western art does not recognise distinctions between the artwork of aboriginals based on gender as it does for western art, so a more even distribution of women's and men's art is represented.

Maternal landscape

Not all women have strong political and feminist ambitions yet still produce artwork that has a strong feminine aesthetic. Shay Docking (b. 1928) was one of few women documented in Australian art between the 1950s and 80s, having spent thirty years developing her own personal vision of the landscape. Mostly self taught, she developed her own particular style of painting and drawing that combines childhood fantasy and Celtic imagination with the ancient volcanic landscape of her early years in Victoria's Western District – imagery that fascinated her throughout her dedicated career. (She completed a substantial body of work comprising well over 500 works in oil, acrylic, watercolour, pastel and pencil between 1950 and 1980.)

> In her imagination this maternal landscape came alive, the abode of earth spirits and legendary magic. She remembers with great clarity when, as a little girl of about four, she was transfixed by the sight of a deeply weathered fence post, old and silvery grey, and of experiencing an ecstatic awareness, looking at its patterns, textures and gleaming surface. (Prunster, p.11)

Docking finds comfort in the landscape forms that offer symbolic representation for maternal metaphors, supplementing her personal inner feelings of loss for being unable to have children.

Illus.3: **Shay Docking**, *Harvest Moon and Tree of Serpent Goddess (Ku-ring-gai Chase series)* 1978. Oil, 162.4 x 218 cm. (Prunster, p.128)

This image shows Docking's surrealistic use of natural elements that symbolically depict procreation while still representing a specific landscape. Her hillocks are often remarkably similar in shape to a pregnant belly. Docking modifies elements such as the umbilical-like tree form and the volcanic appearance of distant hills to satisfy her personal mythology.

Textures, colours, rhythms and organic forms were her focus for explorations of landscape as direct responses of feeling about the landscape, yet the imagery remained strong and entirely original. Docking was questioning perceptions of the Australian landscape well before the innovations of the 70s and 80s. She refused to see the landscape as threatening, it was earth mother to her - comfort, inspiration, meditation. Her fascination with twisted flood-ravaged trees and burnt-out tree skeletons did not impose fear of death but to Docking symbolised regeneration and growth.

> **Shay Docking:** I was quite obsessed by the burnt and dead tree, which in the bush, takes on a symbolic quality . . . one walks through the grey-green bush and suddenly comes upon these barbaric sculptures, their swirling and twisted shapes looming up in front of one. They have a rigidity, yet are tender and radiant in colour. I would stop in my wanderings and gaze at them, transfixed by their totemic power. I realised that here were natural icons, which I felt equated aboriginal spirit presences; they are inanimate perhaps, but charged with a mystic life and power which fills the bush around them. It is characteristic that many burnt-out trees spring to life again. The

> resurrection, the rebirth, is very much a part of the Australian bush. Often these hollow, blackened husks miraculously send up fresh new shoots of delicate green which become canopies of foliage on the scarred, pierced trunks. (Prunster, p.31)

Illus.4: **Shay Docking**, *Calligraphy of Growth (Tree Fiesta series)* 1963. Oil, 137.2 x 167.7cm. (Prunster, p.39)

Her Tree Fiesta series of paintings celebrate the exuberance of nature not only expressing the colour and texture of the bush but also attempting to capture the sounds of birds, insects, frogs - in the musicality of her fragmented forms and tactile paint. These paintings seduce the viewer with their surfaces and rich colours drawing you into the experience of the bush, in some ways similar to aboriginal art. Docking associates the regeneration of the bush with divine forces, the resurrection of Christ – rebirth. Tree forms became “metaphors for human states of mind or feeling – to be subjectivised” (Prunster, p.31). In this sense her paintings describe a type of sacred women’s business.

Shay Dockings imagery at first seems quite unusual and very different from landscape depictions we are familiar with. This is because hers is a female interpretation, containing female symbology. The various types of landscape she painted over thirty years are dedicated explorations of particular places. She rejects the gold and violet of

the Australian impressionists and shows the land how she sees it. Although I found two books about the work of Shay Docking she is quite the exception for her time. The following details of books and publications show how biased the promotion of men is over women.

Between 1940 and the 80s very few women artists were documented in the pages of Australian art literature. Although some books published recently such as *Australian Painting Now,* 2000, have shown regard for a more balanced ratio with twenty-nine women to fifty-one men, including aboriginal artists and migrant artists it seems to be the exception, even if these numbers are still considerably biased. Most books on the theme of Australian landscape art seldom represent more than one or two women and these are often associated with the first half of the century such as Grace Cossington Smith, Margaret Preston and more recently Clarice Beckett. For example, *Australian Painters of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Lou Klepac, 2000, a recently published selection of Australian painters which features landscape, recognises two women Margaret Preston and Grace Cossington Smith of the nineteen chosen artists. The illustrations used to back up arguments in *Lying About the Landscape*, a collection of essays edited by Geoff Levitus, 1997, includes works by Grace Cossington Smith, Clarice Beckett, and Daisy Andrews. Bernard Smith's, *Australian Painting 1788-1990,* has 24 illustrations by women of a total 313 illustrations. This is marginally better than books published in the 70s such as *The Australian Landscape and its Artists* by Elwyn Lynn, 1977, with two women featured of the fifty artists - Judy Cassab and Shay Docking. Similarly, of the forty-five artists in *100 Masterpieces of Australian Landscape Painting* by William Splatt and Susan Bruce, 1978, two of the one hundred images are by women - Clara Southern and again Shay Docking. Many books, for example, *The Artist and The Desert* by Sandra McGrath and John Olsen, 1981 and *Great Australian Paintings*, Lansdowne Press, 1982 include no female representation at all, unfortunately justifying the need for books specifically dealing with women's art.

Recent research by female art historians Janine Burke, Helen Topliss and others, have provided documentation of women's art from colonisation to the 1940s[2]. It is now recognised that artists like Margaret Preston, Grace Cossington Smith, Clarice Beckett and Anne Dangar between the 1920s and 40s made a significant contribution to the way we see the landscape by embracing modernism and rebelling against the conservative mainstream of male artists. The documentation has established these artists.

[2] Titles such as:
Australian Women Artists, First Fleet to 1945: History, Hearsay and Her Say, C. Ambrus, 1992;
Australian women artists, 1840-1940, J.Burke, 1980;
A Century of Australian Women Artists 1840s-1940s, V. Hammond, 1993;
Strange Women: essays in art and gender, J.Hoorn, 1994;
Modernism and feminism: Australian women artists, 1900-1940, H.Topliss, 1996.

Apart from these early efforts acceptance of male dominance over the landscape genre has generally prevailed until the 1970s and 80s, the decades of rebellion, revolution, re-evaluation and social change.

The women's movement

The Women's Movement in the mid-1970s enabled women to be more seriously regarded by the art establishment. Groups of Australian women, inspired by social revolution and encouraged by visiting American critic and feminist Lucy Lippard, formed what is termed now, the Women's Movement. Lucy Lippard's 'Preface' for *Contemporary Women Artists* explains the events that occurred in most western countries throughout the world due to the concerns women had:

> The explosion of women artists on the international scene during the 1970s changed the world of art forever. Until then the vast field of visual expression (with rare exceptions) had expressed only the visions, styles, and experience of one half of the population. . . We were convinced that we were going to transform (if not entirely change) the world by introducing female imagery, theories, approaches, and opinions, by changing the character of art itself and its place (and context) in society. . . It is difficult to ignore the connections to lives cut and pasted between professional and familial obligations; the societal emphasis on female appearance and presentation and on communication and care-giving. (Hillstrom, p.vii)

Women influenced by the Women's Movement were keen to reject traditional methods of art-making such as painting, viewing it as conservative, and so began exploring the areas of installation and performance art. Unfortunately these methods are hard to preserve resulting in another example of women's absence in artistic representation.

The rebellion of women contributed to other areas of social questioning in the 80s when Australia began to take a hard look at itself. Pat Hoffie's essay 'Landscape and identity in the 1980s' describes areas of upheaval in Australia during this time:

> During the 1980s those icons of cultural identity that had become limiting or outmoded or prescriptive were challenged by a number of sources, including feminist practices and theory, community arts, various 'multicultural' critiques, Aboriginal groups and debates surrounding the topic of 'regionalism'. . . Concepts associated with 'nature', 'the land' and 'regionalism' underwent profound changes in the 1980s. (Levitus, p.71)

As mentioned during most of this rebellious time landscape and traditional methods of making art had been rejected in favour of conceptual styles. But later in the 80s painting was 'rediscovered' by a group of women painters who were determined to challenge male dominance of painting, with an exhibition called '**Heartland**' in 1985 at the Wollongong City Gallery.

Heartland

> The title 'Heartland' was chosen to suggest in an almost geographical sense that the work of these artists is central to the concerns of recent art practice,

> and perhaps as a concomitant to that, that painting is also returning to a central role".[3] (Ewington, Foreword).

This important exhibition including works by Susan Norrie, Mandy Martin, Wendy Stavrianos, Kate Lohse, Margaret Morgan and Ania Walwicz, qualified women to participate in the painting tradition and comment on issues of Australian art and society. In a sense it was a response to the all male exhibition '**An Australian Accent**', 1985, paintings by Mike Parr, Imants Tillers and Ken Unsworth. The previous year a mixed survey of Australian art, by men *and* women, had been held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, '**Australian Visions: 1984 Exxon International Exhibition'**, yet in Australia women were still being excluded.

The '**Heartland**' and '**Australian Visions**' exhibitions showed the complexity of issues artists felt compelled to deal with as well as identifying some complexities surrounding women's art. There was the problem of women's art being pigeon-holed by historians and critics into feminist themes as a sort of novelty category rather than being included in the wider dialogue of Australian art. Women have always addressed a multitude of issues in their art but have been recognised more often for their feminine contribution. Julie Ewington from the Heartland catalogue:

> . . .it struck me that women who had not specifically addressed feminine themes or concerns in their work had not been included[4] . . . The important point is that women's allotted place in culture was now confined to engaging directly with the now fashionable fact of femininity. This is not a demand made of men. They need not speak their masculinity openly in their work, as the proper matter of their artistic practice. (Ewington, The Young-Woman-Painter Question).

The women in '**Heartland**' confront this issue from varying perspectives for example Mandy Martin intentionally avoids any reference to feminine sensibility, confronting issues concerning the environment using male iconography such as chimneys, jagged factory forms and barren landscape. In contrast Susan Norrie depicts overtly feminine imagery that becomes unbearably claustrophobic.

The work of Susan Norrie (b.1953) from the early 80s draws attention to an artificial world of objects associated with women's rituals – from the false world of women's magazines. These paintings included in both the **Heartland** and **Australian Visions** exhibitions in 1984-5 are about objects that are opulent yet bizarre, metaphors for the strange obsessions humans sometimes adopt. Norrie instigated the '**Heartland**' exhibition in 1985 recognising in her own work the need to draw attention to the work of young women painters that reflect the "social, political and cultural changes" brought about by the women's movement of the 70s.

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[3] Foreword by Frank McBride, Director, Wollongong City Gallery.

[4] This comment is made in regard to the Australian selection for the 5th Biennale in 1984. Included were Davida Allen, Annette Bezor, Vicki Varvaressos and Jenny Watson.

Although Norrie's work confronts gender-specific assumptions using perceived luxury objects, arranging them like claustrophobic kitsch morphs between bridal corsages and pastry shop windows, she addresses the broader issues about art, society and Australian identity. One painting from the series, *Lavished Living* 1983-84 exhibited in '**Australian Visions'** specifically comments on landscape in Australian art incorporating a section of Eugene von Guerard's painting *Mt William From Mt Dryden* of 1857. The following excerpt by Julie Ewington from the '**Heartland'** catalogue accurately summarises Norrie's central concerns surrounding the perceptions of landscape as a popular vehicle for establishing national identity, distorted by one-sided male interpretations:

> Landscape is a good starting point in Australian art, a central concern. Not because of the often-asserted "presence" of the bush, the space light and heat most urban coastal dwellers have never seen but because of the stubborn persistence of landscape in the cultural imagination. . .Yet as a site of the drama of national identity, the Australian landscape has been a masculine forum dominated by the virtues of heroic endeavour and laconic mateship and makes the outback a theatre of strength, a masculine-proving place. (Ewington, "Within the gaps")

In *Lavished Living* Norrie pays tribute to the Von Guerard image carefully placing it centrally, glimpsed through a small window behind thick folds of fabric like a theatre set or display window. Although the interior is the dominant focus of the painting with its bizarre surfaces and folds of material that appear organic yet can be nothing but artifice, the eye gets drawn to Von Guerard's fragment of natural landscape. But what is natural and what is artificial? The Von Guerard appears false in Norrie's interior. It is a landscape of male heroic endeavour, a wilderness to be conquered, part of our constructed myth of settlement, but for Norrie it appears merely as a backdrop. Within contemporary contexts this landscape of myth fades into the background, a thing of the past, that "stubborn persistence of landscape in the cultural imagination". Norrie alternatively insists that our identity resides more truthfully in a claustrophobic interior of rich fabrics and lace, taken from the pages of *Vogue Living* – the middle class suburban dream. Symbolic of comfort yet this interior is ill at ease because it is the backdrop of landscape, the "presence of the bush, the space light and heat most urban coastal dwellers have never seen" that history says we should identify with. Memory Holloway elaborates:

> Norrie's is an ironic observation on the monopoly that landscape has had in Australian art. It has been at the centre of what has been seen and said about Australia for two hundred years. . .With a single blow Norrie delivers homage to the lingering power of the myth of the landscape, and shows an intensely sceptical mistrust of its grip on the imagination. . .also a critique of Australian materialism of a fantasized lifestyle based on women's magazines and a play on the title of *Vogue Living*. . .(Waldman, pp.14-15)

Illus.5: **Susan Norrie**, *Lavished Living,* 1983-84. Oil on plywood, 183 x 123 cm. (Waldman, p.88)

Norrie's intentional use of domestic imagery such as fabrics in combination with landscape confront the question of what are male and what are female domains? We have been conditioned to believe certain imagery is almost gender-specific. (What a nightmare the French must have!) But Norrie gives her fabrics harsh textures conflicting with our perception of these items – you can look but you can't touch. In contrast her treatment of the Von Guerard painting is rich and silky and here she is making a statement about art and artefacts because again you can look but not touch.

> …domestic imagery is so foreign to the dominant visual discourses of this culture as to instantly signify femininity. . . if a woman makes a landscape in Australia, she stands in a particular relation to a long tradition that has tended to place her outside its concerns.(Ewington, Feminism/Femininity)

Male dominated themes like landscape were an obvious focus of attention in '**Heartland**', the most overt being the series of dark, industrial wastelands of Mandy Martin (b.1952). Terry Smith comments about *Great Divide*, 1984, a painting included in both, **The Australian Visions: 1984 Exxon International Exhibition** and **Heartland**.

> No simple male/female reading of the components is intended, but rather a refiguring of the landscape as a site for epic struggle, and not only between the sexes, but also between the mining companies and the conservationists, between capitalist exploitation and the inner logic of the land. Martin's landscapes of the mineral-rich interior explore more critically than do those of Williams and Olsen, the devastating degradations of extraction. Yet they also recognize the power of industry and, paradoxically, the new beauties it so casually creates. (Smith, p.546)

Unlike Norrie, Martin tackles the landscape head-on, intentionally avoiding any reference to feminine sensibility, using paint and form symbolically to focus on the destruction of environment due to industrial exploitation of the land, expressed as male iconography. Although there are issues of gender in her work, Martin's powerful images also refute feminine stereotyping, "to avoid being trapped in the man-made category of woman as repository of feeling, subject to the tyranny of emotions. . . treated as emblems of this image of trembling femininity. . . described exclusively in terms of sensitivity, delicacy, grace, charm and other intended derogatives." [5] (Ewington, Heartland). Martin has consistently commented on social, political, environmental and cultural issues since her early involvement in the Adelaide Women's Art Movement in the 1970s, but her main concern here is the environment.

> **Mandy Martin**: If when people look at my work they think of issues about ecology or land ownership then I'd be very happy, because I think they're the dominant and burning issues. And I think essentially we've reached a point with history landscape painting where it has to be for something. . . Just sort of as a genre in itself, was pretty well and truly dead a long time ago, but in terms of a vehicle to raise other issues I think there's still a lot of potential there. (Copeland, Episode 3, p.1)

Martin's series of landscapes from the early 80s present a bleak but powerfully emotive picture of Australia. There are no illusions or myths, no sunny pastures, just industrial wasteland - the new Australian economy that's shifted from the sheep's back to the environmental devastation of the mining industry. It is a wasteland of two hundred years of European settlement that appears to have failed.

Most of the paintings in this series contain factory imagery with chimneys spewing smoke into blackened skies. *Spearhead*, 1983, is an exception showing two wedge-shaped forms, one embedded in the earth and one floating above a barren landscape like ancient artefacts revealed after the earth has been disturbed. Martin's rich sensuously painted

[5] Excerpt by Griselda Pollock, from the catalogue SENSE AND SENSIBILITY IN FEMINIST ART PRACTICE, Midland Group, Nottingham, 1982.

forms loom against darkened skies that are both turbulent yet static. They reflect pink light against a blackened sky like a sunset after a storm, but their colour also implies references to body. Their beauty belies the narrative and gives the image a sense of optimism despite the darkness and starkness of the terrain. All is quiet – abandoned, but is it? The image is full of dualities - the paint is fluid yet forms are solid; floating shapes are juxtaposed against hard forms; the landscape is barren yet somehow still alive – there is movement – possibly a symbolic statement about *terra nullius*. Nancy Heller in *Women Artists: An Illustrated History* writes:

> "Even her titles – *Powerhouse*, *Spearhead*, *Barricade* – convey a sense of boldly facing up to the tough realities of late twentieth-century industrialised life." (Hillstrom, p.445)

Illus.6: **Mandy Martin**, *Spearhead,* 1983. Oil on canvas 150.5 x210 cm. (Waldman, p.54)

It is interesting to note that works from the **Australian Visions: 1984 Exxon International Exhibition** and **Heartland** are not identifiably Australian, yet they are important exhibitions for altering perceptions of identity in Australian art. This was an observation made in the **Australian Visions** catalogue:

> It has been said often enough that Australian art today attempts to bring together personal identity and regional identity and that this search is in opposition to the blanket of international modernism that for fifteen years smothered a national Australian style. Yet not one of the artists in the

> present exhibition feels compelled to define “Australianess” in their work. (Waldman, p.17)

Australian artists had been attempting for some time to comment on and gain recognition in the international arena and were also intent on updating perceptions of Australian identity. This provincialism, of existing outside the current avant-garde art centre of New York and seeming to imitate international styles attracted criticism. Meanwhile Australian art connoisseurs were still looking for familiar imagery, and failed to some degree to recognise that the new raw energy of this Australian art was forming a new symbolic language that confronted and questioned. Artists used a combination of local issues and a style of expression that symbolised the nature of the country and its culture rather than depicting identifiable imagery that was potentially loaded with undesirable meaning. The romantic element still remains to some degree but it is more demanding – “It asks of us rather than simply gives to us.” (Waldman, p.10).

In the late 80s issues such as Aboriginal land rights and environmental destruction began attracting a youth audience encouraged by visual artists, writers like Tim Winton and musicians like the popular rock band Midnight Oil. Midnight Oil educated audiences about issues and encouraged action with songs like *Beds Are Burning*, *The Dead Heart* and *River Runs Red*.

River Runs Red could almost be a description of Mandy Martin’s industrial wastelands:

> So you cut all the tall trees down You poisoned the sky and the sea
> You’ve taken what’s good from the ground But you left precious little for me
> River runs red Black rain falls Dust in my hand
> River runs red Black rain falls On my bleeding land.[6]

Beds Are Burning confronts the issue of *terra nullius* admitting: “it belongs to them let’s give it back”[7] and *The Dead Heart* describes the spiritual connection between Aboriginal people and land, highlighting white society’s preference to favour companies over the rights of forty thousand years of culture:

> “we carry in our hearts the true country and that cannot be stolen,
> we follow in the steps of our ancestry and that cannot be broken” . . .
> ”collected companies got more right than people, forty thousand years can make a difference to the state of things, the dead heart lives here”[8].

The lyrics observe the dead heart lives here in what seems a heartless white society, while the heart and soul of Aboriginal culture lives on in spirit - “we carry in our hearts the true country and that cannot be stolen”. This is the focus of contemporary aboriginal artist Judy Watson (b. 1959) in her painting that shares the title of the women’s exhibition, *Heartland*, 1991. Watson’s political and feminist background would suggest she probably

[6] Copyright 1989 Midnight Oil from Blue Sky Mining.
[7] Copyright 1987 Midnight Oil from Diesel and Dust.
[8] Copyright 1987 Midnight Oil from Diesel and Dust.

knew of the **Heartland** exhibition. There is an interesting parallel between references to metaphoric locations and mapping in her work also referred to in **Heartland** the catalogue:

> Many lands and locations, actual and metaphorical are valued by women artists, by women still mapping themselves with wilfully shifting sets of co-ordinates. (Ewington, Heartland)

Shaping absence

Judy Watson's *Heartland,* 1991 cannot celebrate the land like Ada Bird Petyarre does with *Sacred grasses*, yet there remains a sense of ritual and ceremony in her haunting compositions. Watson's paintings are made on unstretched canvas taking on the appearance of a skin that allows layering of paint washes and dry pigment to flow and merge with the surface, symbolic of the natural elements that shape the landscape. She expresses the loss and sorrow felt by her ancestors displaced from the land, yet the work is strong and optimistic. Watson's paintings are metaphoric mappings – mappings of lost culture, lost identity, lost homeland, –

"it is only in shaping absence that presence can be described." (Cree, p.312).

> The concepts linking land, family and history are expressed in her work. Washes of paint and marks in dry pigment combine to produce textures of stone, water and earth, and refer to the presence of her ancestors in the land. Paintings such as Heartland are tactile maps of her ancestors' country of north-western Queensland. (Caruana, p.201)

Her painting *Heartland*, 1991 resembles many things yet there is no specific imagery, it is symbolic of the spiritual and emotional absence – the dark past. The form emerging from the heart of the work vaguely resembles a heart shape but could be ancestral bones or a ghost presence. The ebb and flow of time is etched into the surface by finely marked dashes that dance in spirals across the surface creating a pulsing glow, like strong light seen through closed eyelids. Indiscernible forms surface then fade away, like flashes of memory. Hannah Fink elaborates in *Australian Painting Now:*

> Forms emerge and retreat within a layered environment, modulating between density and transparency, near and far. Figure and ground vacillate in a shimmering interchange, as shapes that at first sight appear solid suddenly float to the surface, becoming translucent like shot organza. (Cree, p.312)

For me the reading is that blood still pumps from the heart of the country, meaning that the spirit is still there despite displacement of Aboriginal culture. Watson's imagery gives the impression of floating above looking down on the land, while simultaneously peering up from beneath the earth's surface, similar to Ada Bird Petyarre's *Sacred grasses*. This is not considered a 'typical' view of landscape in the traditional sense but is included because interpretations of landscape like Watson's form part of the new dialogue of landscape and identity in Australia. Her process of making art is symbolic of climatic

impact on the forming of the landscape and describes a strong physical and spiritual connection with the land, yet also speaks about current political issues.

> It is a metaphoric, resonant art, but also, unmistakably, a deeply political art, one informed by the artist's commitment to the environment, to indigenous culture and to feminism. . .Far from being inimical, poetry and politics for Watson are sounded in one voice – exquisite explorations of the grief that gnaws at the heart of Australia today. (Cree, p.312)

Illus.7: **Judy Watson**, *Heartland*, 1991. Powder pigment, pastel on canvas, 176x173.5 cm. (Caruana,p.200)

> **Judy Watson:** "When I am making images which draw the source of inspiration for a lot of my work from my country I choose to do that because it's actually something that gives me a lot of strength." (Copeland,Ep.1,p.1)

Australia's Bicentenary in 1988 provided an opportunity to assess the changes of the previous decades through survey art exhibitions and documentaries. It was recognised that Australia's cultural identity was far more complex and diverse than the dominant white male perception that had been proclaimed in art as our national identity. The two groups recognised to benefit from the re-evaluation of the 1970s and 80s were aboriginal

art and women's art. In society women are well ahead of aboriginal people as far as quality of life and rights, their struggle has been more widespread and international, spanning a longer period of time. In society aboriginal people remain the most disadvantaged group of citizens in Australia. In art however aboriginal culture has made enormous progress whereas women's art continues to struggle. A dialogue existing between traditional Aboriginal art and modern western art styles such as abstract expressionism was identified.

> It was only a short, but ideological, step for Aboriginal motifs to be placed on canvas, and so the continuing tradition of Aboriginal art and culture came out of the desert and into the art galleries when European artistic tradition had advanced sufficiently to accommodate them. (Narogin, p.395)

It is ironic that the art of the most disadvantaged people, often living in third world conditions, has been embraced by the most elite and contemporary of international tastes! Nevertheless, the influence of western artistic tradition on aboriginal art encouraging the use of commercial paints and canvas has been beneficial culturally and economically for aboriginal people by providing greater independence and educational potential. Painting has also provided Aboriginal cultures, both traditional and contemporary, with a means of interacting with and responding to contemporary issues, significantly altering the perception of 'ancient culture' to one of 'active culture'.

Traditional and contemporary forms of Aboriginal art have added a richness and optimism to the Australian art dialogue that is priceless.

Disputing myths

Susan Norrie confronts issues of identity and white Australia's refusal to accept history's truths with *Les romans de cape et d'epee I*, 1987. This time Norrie uses the relationship between figure and landscape in an abstract expressionist style, to metaphorically look at the role of myth in forming identity. Her title referring to the cloak-and-dagger novel is a direct reference to the drama and deception of history. She writes:

> In the cloak-and-dagger novel the fictional characters must move among real historical figures who will support their credibility (umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyper-reality*).
>
> The character in this painting disintegrates with the landscape . . . fearing extinction, struggling with identity, encased in a suit that doesn't quite fit. The misery of national enslavement and foreign domination is suggested in the way that the character has turned away. Refusing to see?
>
> Still, the tale has been pinned in the right place.
> SUSAN NORRIE November 1987(Foss,p.112)

Illus.8: **Susan Norrie**, *Les romans de cape et d'epee I,* 1987. Oil on canvas, 240 x 190 cm. (Foss,p.112)

Norrie uses text cryptically to hint at meanings as ambiguously as her imagery. She implies that history is a combination of fact and fiction in a drama that becomes myth. But when history is revealed as myth – "encased in a suit that doesn't quite fit" – it responds by turning away. Expressive paint is used to symbolise struggle with identity - it's almost as if the figure is wading through the painted surface as it "disintegrates with the landscape". Fragments of identifiable landscape are glimpsed through the layers of paint but they appear dead and barren, disintegrating with the foreign body who has turned its back on the mess of confusion created. The light in the painting is a spotlighted drama, creating dark shadows that hide the ghosts of the past and emphasise the sense of 'the play'.

This painting can be read in many ways. It is a commentary on environmental destruction, of going down with the sinking ship; of our refusal to accept the reality of our history and our cultural identity, preferring distorted views; and is commentary of our ignorance to address issues such as racism and repression of aboriginal people.

In the late 80s Mandy Martin's work returned to more recognisably Australian landscape where like Norrie she deals with the dark side of our history. She is perhaps one of Australia's best known female landscape painters of recent decades since her monumental work, *Red Ochre Cove*, 1988 was hung in the new Houses of Parliament, Canberra. Not only because of its scale, almost three metres high and spanning over twelve metres long, but because it comments on Australian history, Australian art, Aboriginal history, environmental issues and issues about gender, while promoting the ancient beauty of the country. Terry Smith comments in *Australian Painting 1788-1990*

> The overall structure of the painting is a great 'eye' of historical memory and present perception, taking us from the rocky, violent edge of the continent to its spare, almost spent, desert interior. It is a reflexive, and challenging, image of our national landscape. (Smith, p.546)

Martin's recent painting, *N-O-T-H-I-N-G*, 1993, returns again to the desert interior, continuing her concern for environmental issues, but also incorporating a broader, more historical content that looks further back than colonisation to trace colonial and Aboriginal history. Speaking about her work on A Brush With Landscape, Martin says

> They're intent on identifying the landscape mosaic. . . much more complicated in one sense, in that I introduce text and historical art and political references into the work, and it enables me to say that yes, these are landscapes, but they're landscapes with other layers of reading and meaning in them. . . they are basically identifiable as a clay pan. . . you know wherever I happen to be working, but they're new landscapes in other ways. (Copeland, Episode 3, p.6)

N-O-T-H-I-N-G is what early explorers saw in inland Australia. The painting shows a whirlwind coasting across a flat claypan, sucking dust into its conical shape as it goes. The painting incorporates text descriptive of the phenomenon to emphasis that it is just a climatic occurrence that has been happening for forty thousand years and that witnessing it has no bearing on its existence. She also notes her use of 'rose madder and gold' paint rather than ochre, asserting her ties with western art tradition. In a simple statement Martin captures the light, dust and open space of Australia and in this way engages with the type of Australian landscape familiarised by the Heidelberg School. Yet the simple flat horizon and use of calligraphic marks relates more to the landscapes of Fred Williams. Rather than depicting specific scenery she is recording the atmosphere of an environment. Where these other images from Australian art history refer to a particular place or event, Martin's are unspecific descriptions used as a metaphor for deeper more political layers of meaning.

Like Sidney Nolan who commented on William Strutt's illustrations of early explorers Burke and Wills, Mandy Martin's work is informed by the explorations and expansive landscapes of another early artist, Pigenuit. Martin combines the three attributes of artist/historian/explorer, retracing the process used by early settler artists to construct the narrative of Australian history. Her aim is to reconstruct that narrative from its male-dominated Eurocentric myth, asserting that the outcomes of Australian myth we know have been largely destructive.

> This image is based on the research I undertook. . .on Piguenit's suite of sketches. . .[that] is an overall reflection on the agricultural and concomitant cultural colonisation of the Australian landscape. . . N-O-T-H-I-N-G is also based on the European explorers' idea of "nothing" being in the Australian landscape – the "Terra Nullius"! It is also influenced by my experiences of Lake Mungo. (Voigt, p.188)

Illus.9: **Mandy Martin**, *N-O-T-H-I-N-G,* 1993. Oil on linen 152 x274 cm. (Voigt, p.189)

Lake Mungo, an aboriginal burial site and ancient dry inland sea-bed in western NSW has been the recent focus of Martin's work. Although Lake Mungo is a vast burial site of enormous cultural significance to Aboriginals and ultimately the history of Australia, the area has largely been considered worthless by Europeans, hence the title *N-O-T-H-I-N-G*. Martin became fascinated by the narrative about the early explorer's search for the inland sea that would presumably provide them with wealth and abundance, yet they were not to know as the Aboriginals did that it had existed forty thousand years earlier. These kinds of historical narratives emphasise the misconceptions of early settlers based on European ideals that have forged the wrong approach in dealing with this country.

While exploring outback areas Martin discovered the deep connection felt by people about the land and that sometimes art can act as common ground for uniting divided groups of people.

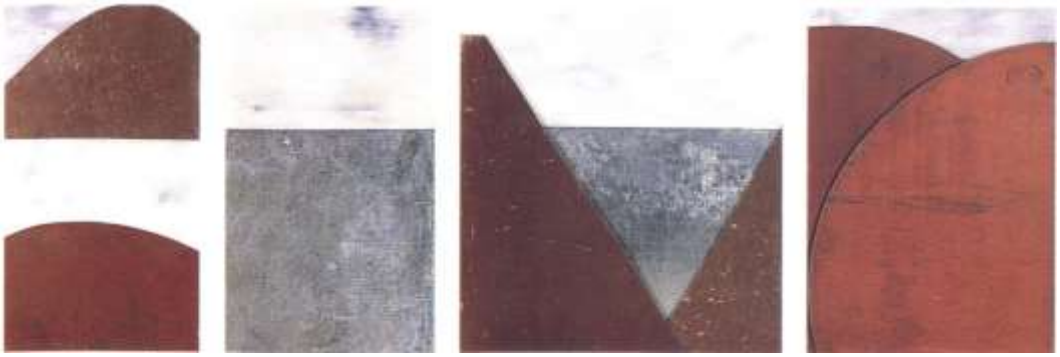
> . . . the thing about people in outback Australia is that everyone knows a poet, everyone has a painter in the family, and everyone is very romantic about that, and you know I'm talking about black and white people in these communities. . . everyone has a special place in their mind and their heart in the landscape. (Copeland, Episode 3, p.6)

No survey of Australian women's landscape can be complete without acknowledging the contribution of Rosalie Gascoigne (1917 – 1999). Like Mandy Martin, Gascoigne recognised the sympathy and affection people in rural areas have for their country.

> Although her love of nature is profound, her interest in the evidence of human activity in the rural landscape and sympathy for its inhabitants, combined with the formal qualities of her art, place Rosalie Gascoigne in a different category from the environmental artist. (Kirk, A&A, p.514)

A natural collector of relics, Gascoigne had the insight to use the discarded, decayed objects of society, recycling them into sensuous arrangements that speak of the land. Using corrugated iron, discarded timber, weathered road signs – objects with a humble past – Gascoigne reconstructed a new natural order that reflects the weathering and impact of time on the landscape.

> **Rosalie Gascoigne**: Nature selects, makes, abandons, is big. We need to be reminded of this because suburbia is boxed in; we need confirmation of an expanding universe. Still, art ought to reflect a human scale: small enough to touch, large enough to extend your reach. (Cree, p.120)



Illus.10 **Rosalie Gascoigne,** *Suddenly the Lake* 1995, four panels, 129.1 x 69.7cm

Acrylic on composite board, galvanised tin. (Cree, p.121)

Rosalie Gascoigne contradicts the stereotypical perceptions that connect contemporary art with youthful academics. Her first exhibition was in 1974 at the age of 57, when her commitment to family and child raising was complete. With no formal art school training, Gascoigne's work is purely intuitive, about feeling the land. Her background of Ikebana, Japanese flower arrangement, taught her Japanese minimalist aesthetic and the importance of form. Her art projected a sense of abstraction, minimalism, conceptualism and classicism, before she had knowledge of these styles. Although her work is not considered painting it is done in a way entirely informed by the painting tradition, as can be seen in her four panels *Suddenly the Lake*, 1995. The texture of galvanised tin makes associations with imagery of water tanks and shed rooves, elements of rural Australia while creating a painterly effect of water in the lake. Similarly the red timber has the same association with textures of land. Like Mandy Martin's *N-O-T-H-I-N-G,* Rosalie Gascoigne's pieces do not generally "refer to a particular place or event but rather serve to awaken in the viewer a whole cluster of remembered scenes." (Kirk, A&A, p.515)

* * *

At the end of the 1980s it was recognised that to gain a better understanding of history we need representation from all areas of society – male/female, indigenous/non-indigenous, old/new and young/old. It was expected that progress would continue over the following decade and into the new millennium. Leon Paroissien summarises in his article in 1989, "Reworking Australian Art History":

> Australia has a culturally complex society. Its history has abounded in self-sustaining myths and contradictions. As a result of an enormous body of recent work that has proceeded from a recognition of the partiality, projections and occlusions in all expository writing, the next decade may prove to be even more prodigious in relating Australian art to a wider framework of interpretations. (Art and Australia, p.252)

Now more than a decade later we are celebrating one hundred years of Federation. Have we progressed? In some senses we have – there is almost a kind of exoticism attached to ethnic or indigenous heritage that has encouraged promotion of these artworks, but what about women? Recent criticism of the current exhibition **Federation: Australian Art and Society 1901-2001** at the Museum of Modern Art, Heidi, by artist/critic Jeff Makin was that "women are the losers of this exhibition"[9]. Not that women were excluded from the exhibition – there was a reasonably high content of women's artwork along with some less stereotypical depictions of women. But the works by women were generally minor examples such as sketches, studies, or prints and were predominantly from the first half of the century by artists such as Margaret Preston, Grace Cossington Smith, Ethel Spowers and Jesse Traill. Most of the examples by these women were of non-feminine subjects such as industry and political struggle - depictions

[9] ABC Arts Program, April 26, 200l

of the country as a male dominated society, which is a fairly accurate reflection, but it also implies that women were generally passive bystanders, recording but not necessarily participating. There was nothing that spoke of contemporary life for women in Australian society during the past thirty years, and there were no depictions of women in the category “At Ease.”

Does this mean that it takes fifty years before art by women can be confidently included into our history? Although this exhibition appeared to intentionally avoid an emphasis on the landscape tradition, it also avoided feminine (as distinct from feminist) genres, trying to associate identity with themes other than the land, such as feminism, racial equality, war and economic struggle. As a consequence it portrayed a rather bleak interpretation of Australian life and society.

It appears we are still coming to terms with women’s art and how it fits into the bigger picture of reflecting Australian society. Women, like men, need to be able to express themselves in various ways that don’t necessarily have to do with their sex – they shouldn’t be singled out and stereotyped *or* buried as inconsequential.

* * *

Conclusion

The result of this essay has shown that women have made a valid contribution to landscape imagery in Australia and continue to shape our perceptions of identity by using the landscape to address contemporary, personal and spiritual issues. They have done this with originality and conviction. Although lengthy this essay has still not covered all of the interpretations of landscape that should have been covered. For example, Leslie Dumbrell (b. 1941) who bases her colourful geometric patterns on the rhythms and textures of the landscape, and uses it as a reference unlike any other artist described here. Austrian born Judy Cassab (b. 1920) was profoundly influenced by the interior landscape of Australia that marked a turning point in her career. The colour, form and texture inspired developments in her painting process that she then could apply to portraiture and landscape painting. There are many more women who could be added, including “the lost/forgotten connections and absences” (Voigt,p.20) - those undiscovered artworks by women who for various reasons don’t play the game of ‘gallery prostitution’.

The examples that have been used show diverse styles, approaches and intentions but they all have a connection with the landscape, either as a thing of beauty in itself or as a vehicle for expressing other issues, or both. For some women art is a journey, some a celebration, for others it is symbolic and spiritual, while for others sensuous and expressive. Susan Norrie even shows us that landscape can be used to criticise its own status in history. The work shown ranges from dynamic, forceful statements to meditative contemplation. In some regards women’s position outside the

dominant structure of the art establishment is advantageous allowing greater freedom of expression – just as the women earlier in the century explored modernism when it was rejected by the mainstream and as a consequence produced some of Australia's most memorable images. But like all artists women need some recognition to drive (and fund) their passions further.

The dominant network of male artists, critics and historians, gallery directors, teachers, lecturers and academics, have perpetuated the prevailing attitudes established centuries ago protecting the professional territory of male artists. Statistics[10] indicate that women have had a prominent, yet largely invisible role in Australian art history, comprising "the overwhelming majority of students in Australian art schools for more than a century". Julie Ewington goes further to add:

> ... it is worth recording that some of these artists have never encountered a woman lecturer in their career as art students. To say this is the norm is to reveal an unconscious acceptance of men as the bearers of "artistic standards" that does, in truth, still pervade art schools. . . One fact revealed by the 1982 WOMEN AND ARTS FESTIVAL[11] research study was that more women successfully complete art training than their male counterparts; it is after leaving art school that women become discouraged, and drop away from practicing as artists. (Ewington, "The Young-Woman-Painter Question")

This proves that women have the desire to make art, but for various reasons they are prevented from practicing. The most common reason for women ceasing to practice as artists is family commitments – something that affects women far greater than men. Mandy Martin has managed to retain a successful career in art while juggling the demands of marriage and raising children.

> Martin: I have been able to travel interstate and overseas, but not to work there – except for very brief periods and very rarely without family commitments. Possibly this has held back my career somewhat, but I do not regret that. Certainly having children adds to the massive financial burden of producing art. (Voigt, p.187)

With the added hurdle of male bias in the art world many women become discouraged about persisting with a career in art. Although public collections have increased their exposure of women's art, most commercial galleries still prefer to promote male art or only women's art with an extreme feminist content that is likely to shock. I was horrified to learn recently that one of Australia's leading commercial galleries, I won't name, will only exhibit women's work on paper – immediately forcing women's art into a subordinate role. This is a peculiar strategy considering women comprise half of the buying public. Women are still under-represented in art exhibitions and publications in Australia, despite favourable critiques overseas. For example, Anna Bock's report on the Bicentennial

[10] Details of statistical evidence to support this can be found in *Australian Women Artists, First Fleet to 1945: History, Hearsay and Her Say* by Caroline Ambrus, Irrepressible Press, 1992.
[11] Research Advisory Group, Women and Arts Project, "Women in the Arts", Australia Council, 1983, pp.42-43,72.

Perspecta exhibition in April 1989, "The Australian Exhibition – Australian Art in Frankfurt and Stuttgart", found the German critic Hubl disapproving of aspects of Imants Tillers and Juan Davila's work but:

> In his search to find something Australian in the show, the critic saw the silver lining in the strong impact of women artists...(Bock, A & A, p.249)

Women have won far fewer major art prizes and have received far less recognition. For example the Wynn Prize, Australia's longest-running art prize established in 1897 and most prestigious award for landscape was won only four times by female recipients over a period of ninety-seven years, until 1994.[12] They were: Lorna Nimmo, 1941; Margaret Woodward 1971; Rosemary Madigan 1986; and Suzanne Archer in 1994. Between the years 1995 to 2000 I have no results, but a Craft Arts magazine article reported that Margaret Woodward had won the award again in 1997[13] the centenary year of the prize.

I think women need to take note of Aboriginal artists who have overcome extreme personal and cultural hardship using their art somewhat as a remedy - beneficial to community and culture. Women need to embrace their feminine sensibility and express themselves however they wish, as it is for men. Rosalie Gascoigne is proof that if the motivation for art is honest and sincere, it somehow finds its way through the debris of social, political and economic structure – transcending fashions and enforced limitations such as provincialism, racism, and sexism. Quoting Linda Nochlin's conclusion from *Women, Art and Power*:

> Rather, using as a vantage point their situation as underdogs in the realm of grandeur, and outsiders in that of ideology, women can reveal institutional and intellectual weaknesses in general, and, at the same time that they destroy false consciousness, take part in the creation of institutions in which clear thought – and true greatness – are challenges open to anyone, man or woman, courageous enough to take the necessary risk, the leap into the unknown. (Nochlin, p.176)

The landscape is our environment and can't help but impact on our perceptions of Australian life. The art of women is strong, rich and diverse and *has* something to say from a different perspective to the dialogue we have been conditioned by. The inaccessability of women's art means it hasn't yet been said loudly enough but the volume is slowly increasing. There may even be a time in the future when we are not only concerned about *his*tory and *her*story but also *our*story.

* * *

[12] *The Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, McCullock, pp.860-861.
[13] G. Whale, 'Wynne Prize Centenary Exhibition' Craft Arts International, No.41, 1997-98, p.104

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Details of Works

Illus.1 **Louise Hearman**, *Untitled 659,* 1998. Oil on board 91 x 79 cm. Courtesy of the artist, (Cree, p.141)

Illus.2 **Ada Bird Petyarre,** *Sacred grasses* 1989. Synthetic polymer on canvas,130 x 230cm National Gallery of Australia. (Caruana, p.145)

Illus.3 **Shay Docking**, *Harvest Moon and Tree of Serpent Goddess (Ku-ring-gai Chase series)* 1978. Oil, 162.4 x 218 cm. NSW Parliament House, Sydney. (Prunster,p.128)

Illus.4 **Shay Docking** *Calligraphy of Growth (Tree Fiesta series)*, 1963. Oil on board,.137.2 x 167.7cm. (Prunster, p.39)

Illus.5 **Susan Norrie,** *Lavished Living,* 1983-84. Oil on plywood, 183 x 123cm. Private collection. (Waldman, p.88)

Illus.6 **Mandy Martin,** *Spearhead,* 1983. Oil on canvas, 150.5 x 210cm. Courtesy Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne. (Waldman, p.54)

Illus.7 **Judy Watson,** *Heartland*, 1991. Powder pigment, pastel on canvas, 176 x 173.5cm. National Gallery of Australia. (Caruana, p.200)

Illus.8 **Susan Norrie,** *Les romans de cape et d'epee I,* 1987. Oil on canvas, 240x190cm. Courtesy Mori Gallery, Sydney. (Foss, p.112)

Illus.9 **Mandy Martin,** *N-O-T-H-I-N-G,* 1993. Oil on linen, 152 x 274cm. Courtesy of the artist. (Voigt, p.189)

Illus.10 **Rosalie Gascoigne,** *Suddenly the Lake* 1995 Acrylic on composite board, galvanised tin, four panels, 129.1 x 69.7cm. National Gallery of Australia. (Cree, p.121)