

COMMENT IS FREE

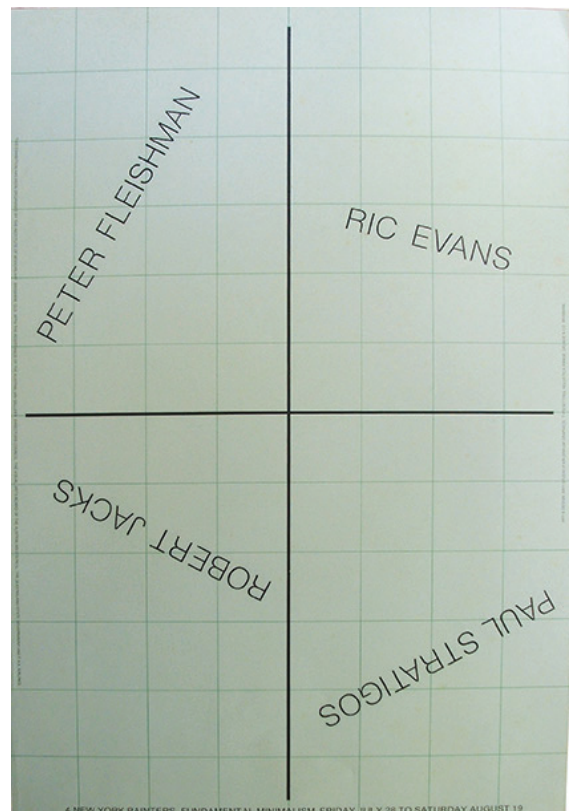
Conversation with Malcolm Enright

Marysia Lewandowska: Malcolm, you've participated in the art scene of Brisbane for many years in different ways: as a designer, as a curator, as a collector. As part of the Institute of Modern Art (IMA) team, you were contributing to the strategy and published design work.

Malcolm Enright: For free. Yeah, absolutely.

ML: You brought support in-kind to the gallery by using your professional printing trade contacts. Can you talk about the origins of your involvement with the IMA back in the late 1970s?

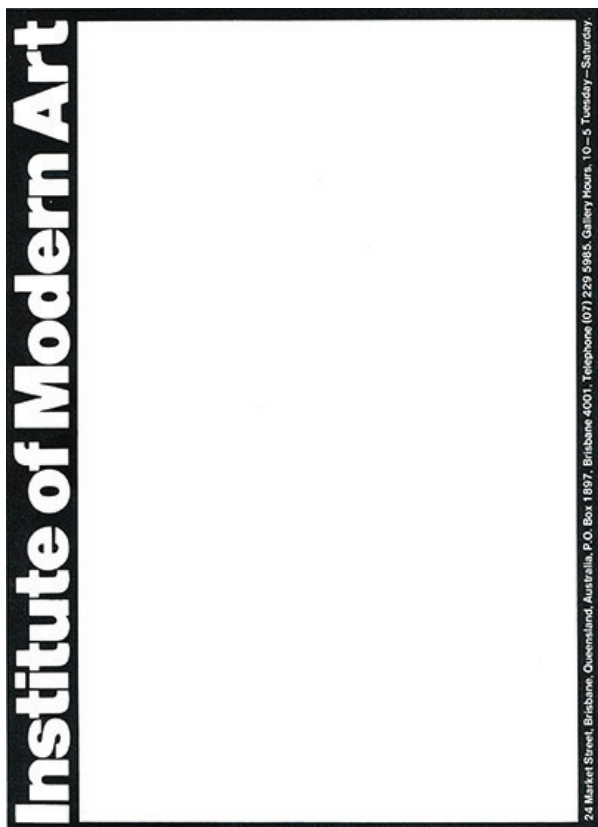
ME: I always worked in partnership with the director or whoever was giving me a brief. All of the early graphic work that I did for the IMA was essentially done in partnership with John Buckley [IMA director 1976–1980], with a goal of establishing the existence of a space like the IMA in the marketplace. What we did for Buckley was engage (with no budget) all of my suppliers in my early studio called Fair Dinkum Graphics, and we produced large, colourful pictorial posters. That was one of the marketing devices that existed then. Later on, when John Nixon [IMA director 1980–1982] took over—and I supported his work and was a good friend of his—I joined in with Michele [Helmrich] and Joan Sherrif in helping develop the format for their small A4 posters, their letterhead, and their promotions. It was interesting that you'd do a large poster for a show that lasts six weeks or so that would be sent to all of the cultural institutions in advance of the opening.



CONVERSATION

Date: 20 April 2015

Location: Newmarket, Brisbane



During the 'no-director' period, I was always looking for an active sort of element in relation to this, something that would have a life for a year on a refrigerator, rather than six weeks on a wall. What we did was to stimulate members to remember the date—what was happening in the calendar. I went through my ephemera archive and just loaded these with specific dates and started to stimulate people to use the poster as a tool.

Conversation with Malcolm Enright

ML: You are referring to a large poster that you're holding, which is conceived to act as a mental calendar including both the actual IMA pro-

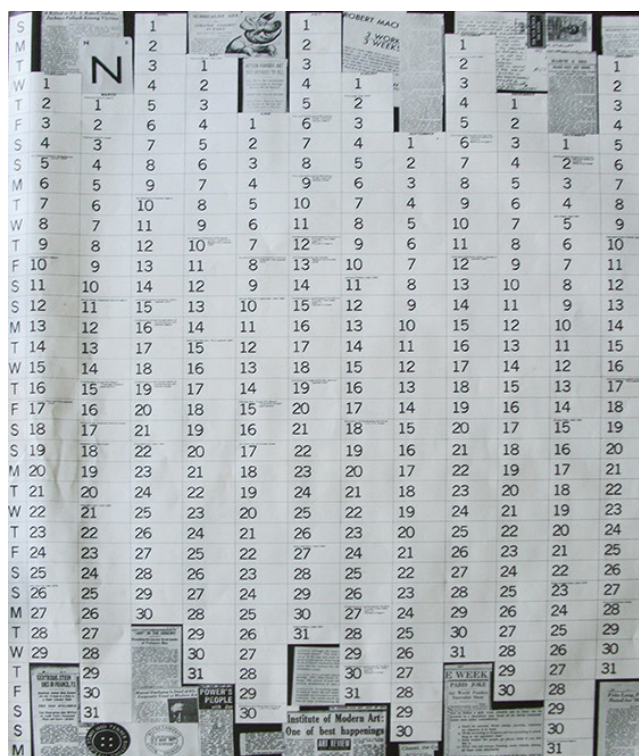
gramme and other personal favourites plucked from the history of art. When did you make it?

ME: 1984.

ML: So almost ten years after the IMA opened [1975]. Was it important to enlarge the terms of reference for what was happening locally?

ME: Yes, to give new people who had no comprehension of what contemporary art was an idea [about it]...so these names and events were signposts...Gertrude Stein... the first Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916, the Festival of Perth, the Armory show in New York that goes back to the 17th of February 1913. So it's actually adding activity that had a historical relevance.

ML: Looking at the poster, I detect your love of Minimalism... the grid, the legibility of the calendar ... and then you



overlay another element that reminds me of On Kawara's work—newspaper that also punctuates daily life. You run these two systems in parallel. Where do the news cuttings come from?

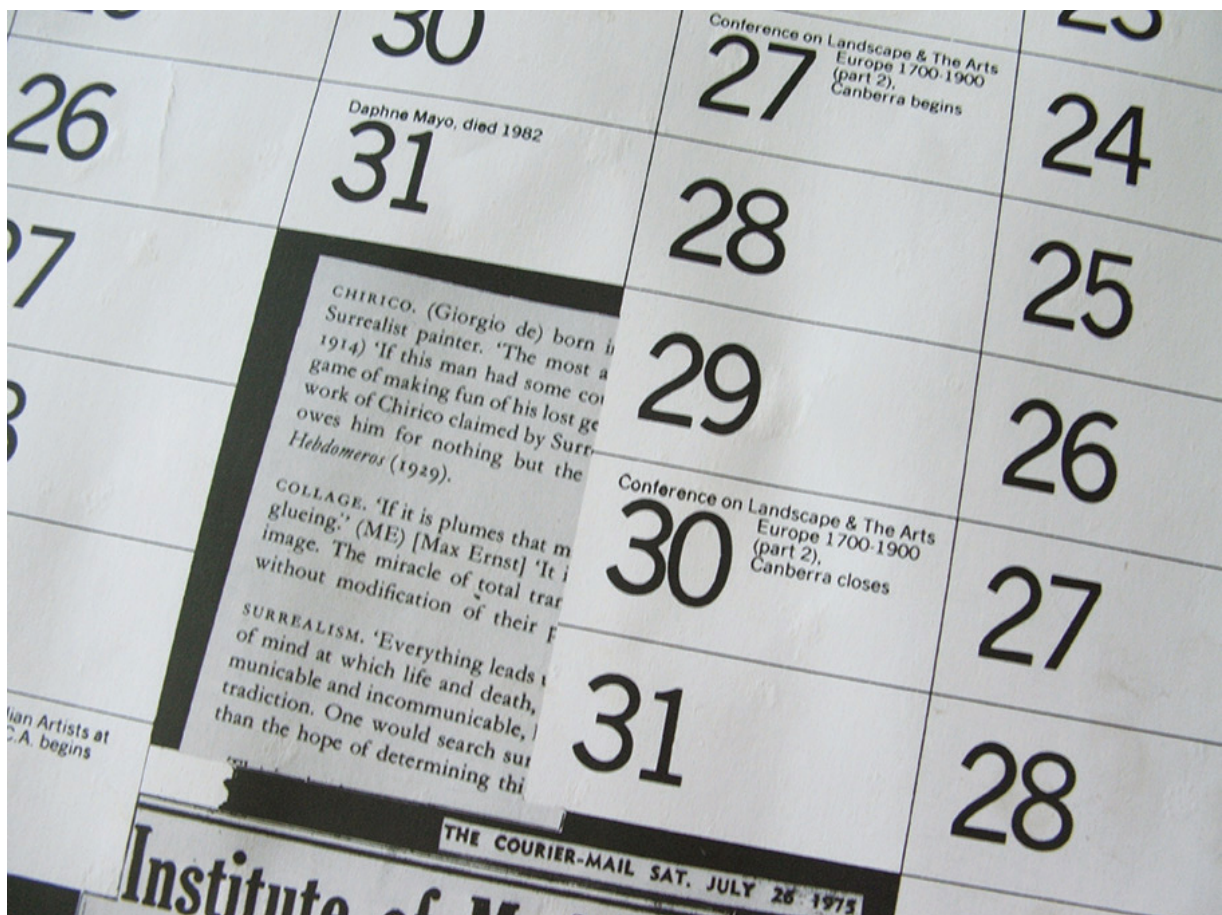
ME: Everything is from my own collection or my own design archive in the library.

ML: But it seems that there are actually only two places [referred to in the poster]; apart from the IMA's events, you refer to what is happening either in Paris or New York.

ME: Yes, I was interested in these two places at that time.

ML: So your 1984 calendar poster was very subjective.

ME: Well, yes, I had that freedom. All of these are things that I have collected in my ephemera collection.

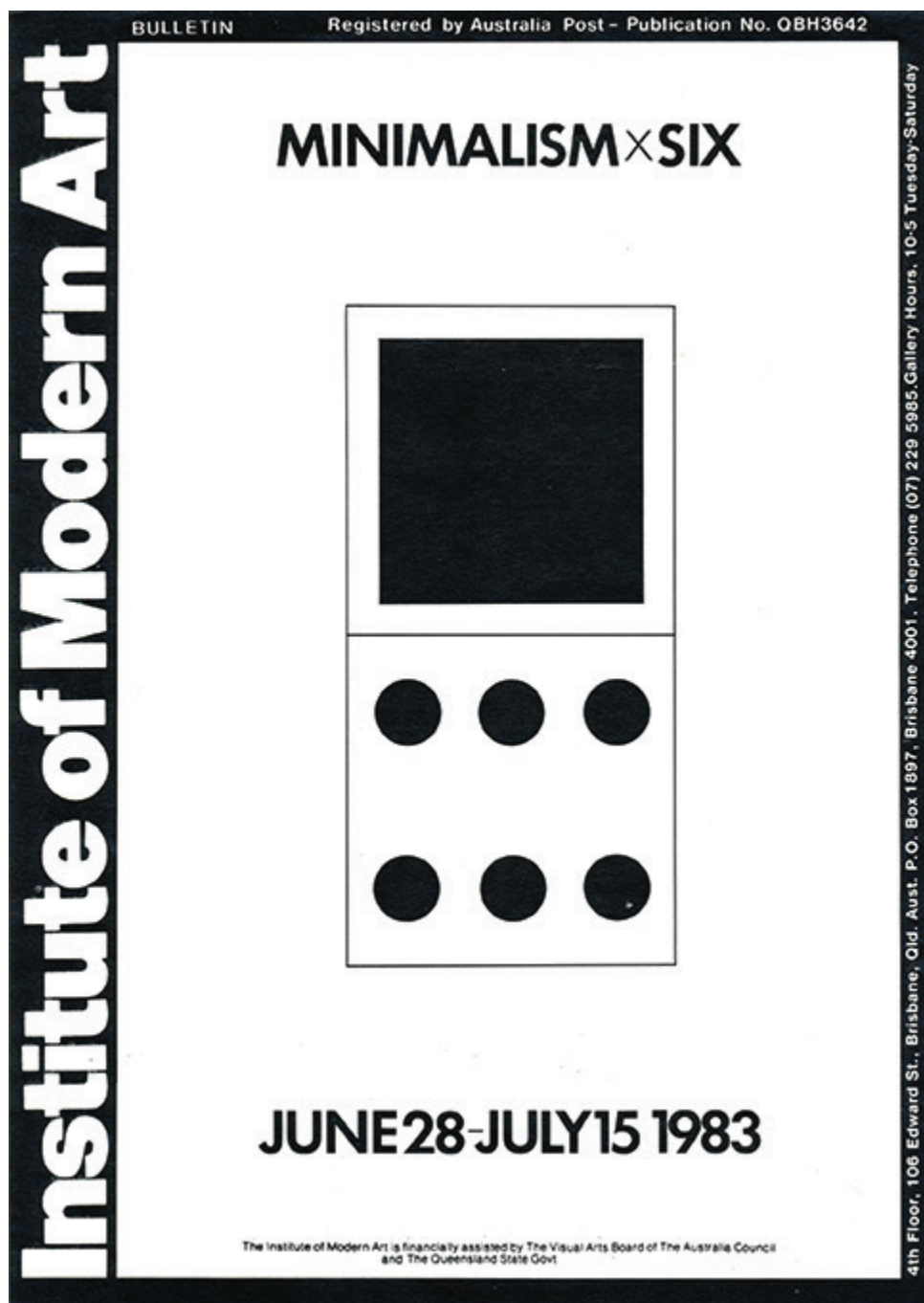


ML: Looking through the IMA archive, I noticed that in 1983 you curated *Six Times Minimal*?

ME: *Minimalism x Six*.

ML: Can you say more about that exhibition?

Conversation with Malcolm Enright



ME: It came about during the period of ‘no-director’ time; there was a time-slot to fill, so I put a concept forward to the committee. It was a show about Minimalist art. I saw all of those people’s practices as strong and minimal. *Minimalism x Six* had Jenny Watson, Peter Tyndall, Robert MacPherson, Robert Jacks, Imants Tillers. They were artists who I knew and with whom I had an intimate relationship in that I was collecting and buying them. I had absolutely key works of Jenny and John [Nixon]. The premise of the show was to say, I have an old work of yours, would you like to give me a new work? And then I created the dialogue and made the notes that juxtaposed an older work and a newer work. I did the catalogue as well.

ML: When did you start collecting?

ME: 1968.

ML: Do you remember what the first work you ever bought was?

ME: No... I couldn’t tell you...

ML: Where would it have been from?

ME: It would have been the work of a friend.

ML: From an exhibition that you were visiting?

ME: Probably.

ML: Would you normally buy from an exhibition, not from an auction or a showroom?

ME: No, I bought either directly from the artist—and I’ve gotten into trouble from buying from artists and not buying from dealers. But I’ve survived that.

ML: How big was your collection when you sold it in 1999—how many pieces did you have?

ME: Well, 463 major works, and then hundreds of small works in the ephemera archive.

ML: So the ephemera archive was also sold?

ME: No, it still exists as a visual database and it still exists in eight cartons. Physically. In my lock up.

ML: Was the sale offered as the Malcolm Enright collection?

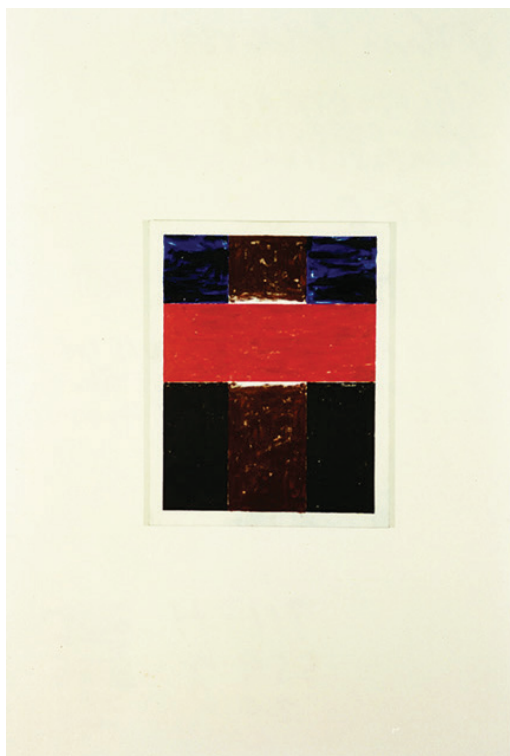
ME: Yeah, I'll show you the auction catalogue—it's downstairs.

ML: You had a passion for collecting and the means with which to acquire artworks. You have been committed to those works for thirty years; everyone knew that you owned them. During that period, did you lend works to exhibitions?

ME: Oh yes.

ML: So people in wider circles knew you as a collector?

ME: I had a fabulous work by Jenny Watson featuring her own hair, which was in an article by Maria Rilke in the art journal, *Parkett*. We should just go through the catalogue. So Spoleto Festival in Charleston, USA, is where another Narelle Jubilan work I owned went on show. I mean the John Nixon Night Painting was with Anna Waldman's show, *Australians to New York*. All these works went to the secondary market and are in my auction catalogue.



ML: Can you say something about how you saw the relationship between IMA as a public gallery and dealers and collectors like yourself? How do you see it now from a longer perspective; what has changed?

ME: They've changed radically, haven't they? I mean, maybe we should go off the record.

ML: What was involved in the process of making a graphic design and how it related to a specific exhibition?

ME: It's an interesting question that would put me on the spot, because it's memory going back forty years. I do know though that if you're a designer and you have a format, and you have a client who is the director of [an art gallery], the person who's running the process, you essentially have to find something to represent the show. (...) In relation to John Nixon, every work is basically a 'selfie'. If you look at Malevich's *Cross*, it's just a representation of a person. Historically, if you look at a photograph of John, it's another selfie or a representation of the artist. I don't know that there was actually a strategy there.

ML: Not on your part?

ME: No, maybe not. I mean, John would have given me the Richard Dunne photograph and I would have used that. That's a great question for John actually.

ML: Where is John Nixon now?

ME: I think he's in Sydney, with a family.

ML: So he was here for a few years?

ME: Oh, quite a few. He and Jenny were in a relationship here and lived up in Phillips Street, Spring Hill, and created fabulous work. He did works with [Robert] MacPherson, and they all exchanged works. I supported him and was friend of his; we got on like a house on fire.

ML: What emerges as a particular feature of Brisbane in those days is that there was a relatively small community of artists and other creative people, including musicians...

ME: Certainly a lot of music. A lot of music came from Nixon and a lot of artists were also making music. John was making anti-music, Peter Tyndall

was making Slave Guitars. A lot of artists were also making music in Melbourne.

ML: It seems that there was much more open-ended work that simply didn't fit into exhibition as a format.

ME: Not as a commodity, that's for sure. So much of the work of Buckley was imported and of interest, but the local community still wasn't involved that much. With John Nixon, it was Melbourne and Sydney—you know, Imants [Tillers] came up—I have all of the documentation of Imants's early work at N-Space. Certain local artists got a look-in—high-profile artists like Robert MacPherson, but you'd have to really sit with me and go through each of the bits of the program. It depended on the relationship with people. But when there was 'non-director' time—when Barbara Campbell and Ted Riggs took over for a seven or eight months program in 1982/1983—that was when local people became more involved. Then Peter Cripps came and he was a working artist from Melbourne and he made friendships with certain people like Bronwyn Clark-Coolee.

ML: So it's May 1983. What is this logo here [on a poster]?

ME: I think it's a Mandala. It's the work of Eugene Carchesio—he's a musician and a Minimalist Expressionist painter—and this is one graphic of his but it's very much a Himalayan Mandala. I had one here upstairs above the kitchen, a frog poem made by Bob [Robert MacPherson] from the three frogs out there in the box tree. So the first show of Bob's that I saw at the IMA was in August/September 1975. That was the time of Robert [Jadin de Fronenteau], the first director.

ML: The temporary director.

ML: This particular template [of a poster] was from 1978?

ME: It was 1979, during Buckley's tenure. At that time, I was just there and producing all of his graphics. But when Buckley left, there had to be a system designed where a designer wasn't doing it. I mean, I still worked with them. So John Nixon came in 1980—and there wasn't a jump between Buckley and Nixon, it was quite simple, it was the same language and it was the same interest and the same people. But when you really look, there's Hilary Boscott, Robert MacPherson, Jenny Watson, John Dunkley-Smith, John Davis, Gunter Christmann, Ti Parks, Robert Jacks, Peter Kennedy. Peter Kennedy was a local person but working in Melbourne. That's all Melbourne, basically. You get

a couple of other local people coming in—Luke Roberts curated by Ted Riggs, Hilary Boscott, Lisa Anderson.

By the time John's gone, it's *No Names* exhibition. So *Minimalism x Six* filled a scheduled space during that time, so that's when I curated that show. ... Barbara Campbell ... Adrian Martin did *That Sound of the Kangaroo*. Margriet Bonnin was a historian at one of the teaching institutions ... Jeanelle Hurst... So this is where the local people really had more of an opportunity to expand and be included, and, of course, at the same time, there were all of the other ARIs [Artist-Run Initiatives]. ...Yes, there was One Flat and The Observatory and Crux—all of these are around 1979, 1981, 1982, right through.

ML: So, after the IMA had been established?

ME: Yes. It was a dynamic time. Remember, everyone's hooked into the learning institutions, and John [Nixon] was really sort of pulling in the relationships that they had in Sydney and Melbourne, maybe Adelaide. But ARIs are really in focus now, and you didn't just go to one thing; you went to everything. I remember I collaborated on a show at THAT Space called... *Outside Art* [in 1986], where I showed work I travelled back from New York with. The Artworkers Alliance was initiated at THAT Space, which filled a hole as an artist union. All nine of us got together and created *Eyeline*; the first seven issues were done here at my home on three long tables in this room. There were three designers for the first issue. Because of my experience, I was doing so much of it—I took it over after that—but I had fantastic help from people like Brian Doherty... He was a film historian, very instrumental at Artworkers Alliance. Damien Ledwich was a designer then. Michael Phillips, Andrew Ness and Robert Whyte all chipped in.

ML: Tell me more about Artworkers Alliance. What kind of organisation was it?

ME: It was actually a union of artists. The interesting thing about all of this is that when directors came [to the IMA], they had their own agenda and their own connections; some of them even had their own art careers. Everyone put their energy into the space and furthered the dialogue and so many of these other little pockets of ARIs sprang out from that.

ML: I read somewhere today that in the first three to four years, there were doubts and criticism over whether the IMA could survive, whether it had any relevance. Were you aware of that?

ME: The first year, I don't know so much. Ray Hughes and Joy Schoenheimer were older than I was, more involved with the straight art scene, but still looking for a different vehicle in the gallery scene to actually generate activity and art. John Stafford would be a fantastic person to speak to; he and Lindy Johnson were key players very early on. Lindy Johnson was in government, and Arts Queensland was, and still is, a major benefactor to artists and spaces. You'd have to speak to [Michael] Snelling, I suppose, since he was a really major force behind getting the IMA to the place it is in now—finding that building [Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts] and getting the government to actually purchase it and partner that initiative. Funding priorities change and then the dialogue for an institution to keep going has to change, and it's all based on getting the money, it's all based on getting the support.

ML: But why would the funding be easier to obtain during the early period? Was the IMA fully funded by the public purse?

ME: There was funding for the IMA. I think it was probably easier because there weren't all of the other hands in the purse. The ballet would have been performing arts. And then, of course, you know, as things went on, there was installation, and digital art, and there was video art. That's all hard to comprehend from Arts Queensland or a funding body. There's not even an object left from an installation.

ML: I want to return to the relationship between private interests connected to certain individuals at the IMA and the organisation's benefit to the public.

ME: In forty years, artists have become incredibly professional. John Nixon used to have a show a day in his bathroom! He had a fourteen-page CV; it was the laughing stock of lots of other artists, but he was one of the very early people who realised the strength of documenting what you do and creating a CV. We get calls now for our CVs to be reduced to one page. It's all become very bureaucratic, hasn't it?

Part Two

ME: So, this is the front page of the *Minimalism x Six* catalogue: "Robert Jacks, Robert MacPherson, John Nixon, Imants Tillers, Peter Tyndall, and Jenny Watson." This was my statement that pulled together my thinking about this show: "This show further celebrates the current non-director status of the IMA and adds validity to the public selection concept of using self-motivated guest

curators.” I suppose Barbara Campbell and Ted Riggs were behind me taking this gallery space. The six selected artists were all bound by the current recessionary mode of art production, and all cite the importance of the earlier minimal grounding. I know that because I know each of the artists and this is what pulled my concept together. “This formulate of lineage may be traced in part by juxtaposing an old and a new work”, and that’s what I did. I asked them to put in an old work and then show a new work, and the catalogue actually has their notes. “The catalogue notes have been prepared exactly as each artist has requested; the painting selected retains the honesty of each artist’s own representation.”

ML: Can I ask what you meant by the “recessionary mode”?

ME: Well, there was a whole dialogue about recessionary art, and if you go back through the IMA, you’ll see it’s been taken up by other curators between the directorships of John Nixon and Peter Cripps. If you look through Peter Cripps’s lineage, you’ll see different shows. There’s a recessionary show that actually came. This was the current sort of stream of artists working at that time.

ML: Something else you said that struck me was the idea of “retaining honesty”; how important was the ethical dimension to you?

ME: Well, the interesting thing here is that artists represented themselves. There wasn’t a dealer in between and, as the curator, I was just dealing with the artists. As there was no director at the IMA, I was pulling the whole thing together—i.e., the whole catalogue, the way the show was announced, and then the way it was remembered.

ML: So this was at Market Street?

ME: Edward Street.

ML: Can you say something about the difference in locations that the IMA occupied? What kind of place was Edward Street?

ME: It was a four-storey building, strangely owned by Gino Milani. He gave the top floor basically as a philanthropist. I had a great relationship with both Gino and Lyndall for a long period.

ML: And so the rest of the building was occupied by his law firm?

ME: One floor I think, I’m not too sure. I know that we had to walk all the way

up to the top floor. And, during a huge storm, they lost a lot of their documentation that was housed up there.

ML: Was that at the second location?

ME: The second location, Market Street, was really just one street away and around the corner. John Buckley really empowered that space.

ML: And what's the next one after Market Street?

ME: The third one was on the corner of Ann St—it's where Birdee Num Num's (a backpacker's hotel and nightclub) is now. It was actually right next door to the most important lithographic firm, which is in Gipps St. That was during Michael Snelling's directorship. Then the fourth space is the current one at the Judith Wright building on Brunswick Street.

ML: Tell me about the printing industry. Because you were regularly working with these people you secured their support for your graphic design with the IMA. Are any of them still around?

ME: It was interesting, in a way, that Savage and Company wasn't so supportive of the IMA. What happened is that I was giving them all my work from an art studio with nine people—so, all my typesetting was being done by Graham Savage, all my negatives were being done at a lithographic firm, all my printing was being done at one of three places. So, if they got the volume of my commercial work, then they supported this. I mean, I conned them in a way...

ML: But you also raised the consciousness that not everything can be commercially viable and monetised.

ME: Graham Savage was a great soul. He married into the business—his wife Dorothy's father and, I think, uncle had a typesetting firm, and from the 1960s to the 1990s, he was in Constance Street in the Valley. He was ahead of every major change. But that industry doesn't even exist now.

ML: So who were your commercial clients in Brisbane?

ME: The interesting thing was that from the 1960s to the 1980s, I went from being an art designer to an art director, to a strategist, a creative director, and then went onto building teams and doing strategy and doing audits. Then post-1985, I started doing digital things and working for boards and owners of

business. You have to just go with the flow. You have to stay alive by embracing the next new thing.

ML: So that's how you started working digitally?

ME: Yeah. I embraced the Mac in 1985.

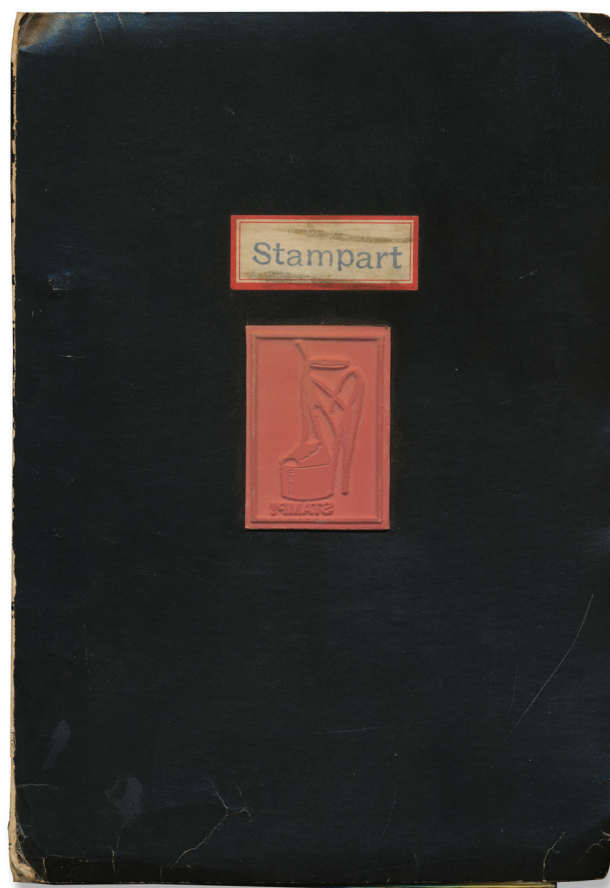
ML: So, pretty much as soon as it became available?

ME: It was out in 1983, so I knew designers then who were using it, but it was pretty rudimentary.

ML: Let's have a look at your exceptionally detailed database.

ME: I keep everything. This is a letter from Peter Tyndall: "For Robert Johnson and Malcolm Enright. As they cast their minds back to the moment almost thirty years ago when Minimalism appeared to be at a cross roads." And this is a statement by David Pestorious, who was Nixon's dealer, and that was just a little card. In here also there's another note from Tyndall saying that he loved the design and the catalogue and he had a note from Daniel Thomas, a really great Australian art historian. They were very excited by this show, which was good feedback. But yes, everything is here.

Turning to the *Made in Dadaland* publication, which is in the archive. Robert Jacks and I used to exchange and do rubber stamp works in the 1970s, so this is an October 1979 invitation for artists to participate in an Anna Banana and Bill Gaglione project, Dossier Editions, in San Francisco. The project was called 'Stampart Vile 7'. There were four artists from Australia—Robert Jacks, M. W. Baker, Terry Reid, and me. So each of us did 300 similar works; we sent them off to be collated and bound, and then each



artist received a copy in return. The were 100 copies for the market. A copy today, if it can be found, commands US\$3,000, and was sold for US\$20 on the day!



I had no intention of ever selling the artworks I had collected all my life, but through a business partner defaulting, I inherited this exposure to a bank loan and had to sell my collection. Then, if I couldn't prove that I bought something earlier than 1984, I would have to pay capital gains tax on the item. So I had to document everything I had collected. So, the necessity to get out of paying tax on the sale meant that I wrote this database to prove purchase date, etc. In the end, I was forced into another learning situation and embraced FileMaker Pro and created a dynamic database, one that is infinitely searchable. As I had documentation on almost everything I had collected, I created

the template incorporating all the essential info and then worked through photographing all works and making content match every artwork I owned.

art collection 010

564 / 641
Found (Unsorted)

Layout: Layout #2 View As: [Table] [Grid] [Preview] [New Record] [Delete Record] [Find] [Sort]

artist first name	Robert
artist last name	MacPherson
title of work	SCALE FROM THE TOOL GROUP ONE (3 panels)
date of work	1976-March 1977
medium	Acrylic on canvas
dimensions	H 1260mm W 49mm 60mm 109mm D 31mm
inscription	R.M. BRISBANE MARCH 76-77 GROUP 1 - Numbers 1, 2 & 3
provenance	Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane ex Coventry Gallery, Sydney
status then	By:
status now	Phillips \$5 SOLD 7,800.00
purchase date	1977
reserve price	6,000 - 9,000

thumbnail

notes on work

The significance of this set is that it is the first group in the scale from the tool series. Three strokes with the same brush, laden and applied with the vertical tip first. The tip was then pressed to the canvas for the second stroke and the third stroke being that with the brush held horizontally. All three canvases are the width of the brush mark and the height of the artist's reach. In an early interview with Peter Cripps in 1980 MacPherson talks of 'this search for the basic element in painting. He has made use of all sorts of devices. These have not been formally measured devices, but developed out of the physical characteristics of the body (how far you can reach etc.) and moved into the properties of the brush.'

See Peter Cripps' introduction to the Robert MacPherson Survey Exhibition at The Institute of Modern Art, September-October 1980, jointly curated with Malcolm Enright and using works from local collections. MacPherson's own archive and those works owned by Enright, this touring show was allowed to cover activity from 1975 to 1980 (Other Aspects Of Culture, included). It set an exemplary direction in the study and understanding of MacPherson's place in post 1950 Australian modernism. This work is illustrated on page 13 in the catalogue.

See Art & Australia Volume 24 Number 1 where this work is reproduced on page 37 as part of a Brisbane Scene commentary by Sarah Follett.

See Ingrid Peris' essay in her Various Artists Exhibition at ArtSpace, Sydney 1982 for more on this series of signature works.

notes on artist

next
previous
first
last

ML: Did someone help you with this?

ME: No, I did it all from my notes. So I created all of the fields, and then reduced down the small work, and then wrote all the notes on the work and then notes on the artist.

ML: How does the IMA feature in here?

ME: [Reading off database] "See Peter Cripps's introduction to Robert MacPherson's survey exhibition at the IMA jointly curated by Malcolm Enright and using works from local collections. MacPherson's own archive and those owned by Enright was allowed to cover

activity from 1975 to 1985. Other aspects of Cubism excluded. It set an exemplary point of understanding of MacPherson's place in post-1950s Australian Modernism; this work is illustrated in page 15 of the catalogue. See *Art in Australia* volume 24, number 1 where this work is reproduced on page 37, as part of a Brisbane scene comment by Sarah Follent. See Ingrid Perez's essay on her various exhibitions and Art Space Sydney for more on this series of signature works."

ML: So you are an art historian, a critic, a collector, an archivist, a curator... You have created not just data files, but also added reflection and commentary...

ME: This is research; this is why you and I have a connection.

ML: I don't think many collectors would do this, even given the extraordinary circumstances that prompted making this. Namely, the sale at auction, which is connected to a sense of loss.

ME: That's nice of you to say so. Really, the people of interest all know about this, but they're about ten people. So this is the one, *Royco*, ten panels with the one brush, and this is *Minimalism x Six*, the two works by Sylvia Holmes.

ML: Would you be able to say from this, what was the first work you bought? The first work that established your collection?

ME: This is the first work by MacPherson in the database, and then we scroll down, so this is a Mayfair statement, but this is also a packet that you got your sandwiches in from the Mayfair Bar, signed by MacPherson. This test was originally created for the artist's notes page for the *Minimalism x Six* show that I curated. This is all a one-year exhibition, and I can show you all the panels. This is the *Other Aspects of Boredom* that was exchanged between Bob [MacPherson] and Tyndall, so it just goes on and on. This is *Relics of Boredom*, it's every paycheck that he got because he was a cleaner in the building that I was working in. So, we would see each other going up and down in the lift and exchange things. But he [MacPherson] won't even speak to me now.

ML: Because you sold the collection? How do you feel now, knowing how much you've contributed to the Brisbane contemporary art scene, and helped to establish the careers of quite a few artists? At the same time, you gained something in financial terms. What was precisely your crime? Was it the advantage of access to artists and their works, perhaps? You're talking 1999—so, just before a substantial art market boom.

ME: But from the 1960s, this was something that you lived and breathed. You know, I didn't have sex with them, but it might as well have been, it was so intimate.

ML: What is Urban Archeology? When did you establish it?

ME: In the 1970s. Then, in the 1990s, I wanted to register it as a domain, and I found out that Urban Archeology is a salvage firm in New York. It is also written Urban underscore Archeology, exactly the way I write it... I just use it.

ML: What you propose via this name is a different kind of consciousness, not just referencing art itself, but placing many different activities as part of a cultural ecology.

ME: It's a conversation.

ML: You are specifically invoking archeology, implying a desire to look beyond the present, and, as in archeology, we never get the entire picture, we assemble the fragments. So you already alert us to the fact that even if you look at all the things you already have and know, you still only get a partial view.

ME: The tip of an iceberg.

ML: Now everyone is into archiving because of the digital technologies and also increased interest in personal archives. Many institutions are turning their archives into revenue streams. Under these conditions, the consequences for heritage and culture are very different.

ME: While we've been talking, I have gone to every record, and this is the first one. And it is really significant, but it's not the first piece of art that I've bought, but I've come to this, it's the first one. This is the [Ken] Whisson *Blue Tourer* that was sold for \$36,000.

ML: And who was the auctioneer?

ME: Andrew Shapiro from Phillips and Company, the London art dealer. But then he went on to create Shapiro Auctions in Sydney.

ML: Do you have photographs of yourself with the artists? Or ones you might've taken from the show that you curated at the IMA? I know Richard Stringer has documented everything.



ME: He documented every installation without the people.

ML: Totally deserted environment. His architectural interest has obviously overridden any desire for creating a social document.

ME: Because he trained as an architect. We met early on because we both won a prize in a national letterhead competition. I won first prize for a letterhead for my father's business called Bayside Demolition, and he won third prize for his letterhead when he started his architectural [business]. So we've been friends since.

ML: Shall we return to your graphic design work for IMA?

ME: We are looking at one of my blogs, ephemeral-male. My energies go into the blogs now, as I slowly add my histories and focus on elements in my collection that might be of interest to a wider design public.

ML: And what about the documentation of your other creative works, including art?

ME: No I haven't done my own artworks CV ... I've got that here as the residue. Dianne Byrne, the historian and the person in charge of the State Library [of Queensland artworks collection], is coming one day and we will deal with that. Doug Hall wanted to buy my whole artist archive.

Conversation with Malcolm Enright