

**Thesis title:**

**CULTIVATING THE [NEW] COUNTRY: DISCLOSING THROUGH CURATORSHIP THE CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL OF THE AUSTRALIAN REGIONAL ART MUSEUM.**

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**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**11 March 2005**

## **SYNOPSIS**

This study utilising a “theory into practice” methodology, interrogates the phenomena of the Australian Regional Art Museum and establishes that curatorship, as a defined visual art practice can sustain the art museum as a viable cultural institution in contemporary regional Australia. It employs a case study of a new model art museum and the curation of selected collections-based exhibitions.

## **THESIS CONSTRUCTION:**

This doctoral study is comprised of five (5) interrelated parts and should be read in the following sequence:

**Part 1:** The written thesis

**Part 2:** The DVD / CD (Chapter 7, the final chapter of the thesis) that contains:

- User instructions and Introduction
- A four- minute audiovisual presentation on curatorship titled:  
*The Art of Exhibiting Ideas.*
- A 35- minute audiovisual documentary exploring the exhibition  
*Pride of Place: the CS Energy Gift & City of Ipswich Collection*  
This exhibition was shown at Global Arts Link Ipswich from 23 July  
- 29 August 1999.

**This exhibition was curated by Craig C Douglas.**

- A 35- minute audiovisual documentary exploring the exhibition  
*Engage - Collected Works: City of Ipswich & the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University.* This exhibition was show at Global Arts Link Ipswich from 28 November 2000 - 4 February 2001.

**This exhibition was curated by Craig C. Douglas**

- Images – folders of images that are of general support to the thesis

**Part 3:** A catalogue that supported the exhibition - *Pride of Place: The CS Energy Gift & City of Ipswich Collection*, Global Arts Link Ipswich 23 July -29 August 1999.

**Part 4:** A booklet entitled: *Global Arts Link Ipswich: a new model visual arts museum for Australia.* This booklet was published in 1998 as both a public relations document and vision statement for the forthcoming new public art museum Global Arts Link Ipswich that was launched on May 15, 1999.

**Part 5:** A 140 page publication entitled: *Exploring Culture & Community for the 21st Century: Global Arts Link Ipswich - a new model for public art museums*. This publication is not a catalogue but an anthology of over forty commissioned original essays by a lively mix of local, national and international artist, writers, community members, historians and scholars. Visually complementing, these essays are supported by more than 170 colour reproductions of artwork chosen from Global Arts Link's inaugural exhibition *People, Places, Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich*, and selected works from the City of Ipswich and other collections.

**This publication was project managed by Craig Douglas.**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many supportive colleagues, friends and family, have made the research and development of the thesis possible. I acknowledge their contribution and thank them wholeheartedly for their generosity and nurture. Their names are as follows:

### **Queensland College of Art and Griffith University Staff**

Professor Mostyn Bramely-Moore, Associate Professor Anna Haebich, Dr Robyn Trotter, Dr Ian Woodward, Dr Prudence Ahrens, Dr Glenda Carriere, Dr Maree Cunnington, Sue Jarvis, Marianne Mitchell, Art Theory colleagues and Administration staff.

### **Global Arts Link (1999- 2002), Ipswich City Council staff**

Louise Denoon (Foundation Director), Greg Roberts (Foundation Director-Ipswich Arts Foundation) Sharon Ford, Tim Lynch and GAL staff.

### **Family, friends and colleagues**

Mary Douglas, Victoria Hayes (deceased), Currie, Anna Grega, Julie Foster Burley, Alice-Ann Boylan, Beverly Parrish, Robert Vallis, Harry's Collar – Alex Shaw and Simon Turner, Museum and Gallery Services Queensland, Bendigo Art Gallery and staff of selected regional galleries throughout Australia.

Craig Douglas

11 March 2005

## **STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP**

This work has never been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and to the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself. Similarly, to the best of my knowledge and belief, my role in collaborative or jointly authored publications submitted here has been fully and accurately described.

**Craig Douglas**

**11 March 2005**

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

**GAL** Global Arts Link Ipswich

**Pride of Place** Pride of Place: CS Energy Gift & City of Ipswich Collection

**Engage** Engage: Collected works – City of Ipswich & Queensland College of Art, Griffith University

### **Exploring Culture & Community**

Exploring Culture & Community for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:  
Global Arts Link Ipswich – A New Model for Public Art  
Museums

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*Pride of Place: The CS Energy Gift & City of Ipswich Collection*, presented by the Ipswich Arts Foundation and Global Arts Link in partnership with CS Energy Swanbank

**(Exhibition catalogue)**

Douglas, C. C. (1998) *Global Arts Link Ipswich: a new model visual arts museum for Australia*, Global Arts Link Ipswich - Ipswich City Council.

**(Promotions booklet)**

Douglas, C.C. (1999) (ed) *Exploring Culture & Community for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Global Arts Link Ipswich - a new model for public art museums*, Global Arts Link, Ipswich, Global Arts Link, Ipswich.

**(Anthology)**

## INTRODUCTION

It has been observed that art in the modern sense of the word has fabricated, sustained and transformed the world. Collections of objects, moreover, have been framed, opposed and transformed through many discursive practices including history, art history, anthropology and ethnography – “all of which are grounded in the epistemological principles, categories and assumptions of museology” (Preziosi and Farago 2004: 4). In recent years, these observations have been complimented by definitions that suggest art museums are:

Performances pedagogical and political in nature – whose practitioners [curators] are centrally invested in the activity of making the visible legible, thereby personifying objects as the representations of their makers, simultaneously objectifying the people who made them and, in a second order reality that is part of the same historical continuum, objectifying the people who view made objects in their recontextualized museum settings. (Preziosi and Farago 2004: 5)

While curatorship is primarily responsible for the art museum being described as a performance, Australian regional art museum curatorship, as an integrated discipline, evokes other descriptors and interconnected relationships with the culture and communities of a region and beyond. These evocations can be described as: history and memory, traditional and new museology, the visual arts, their interrelated disciplines and industries, sociology, government and its instrumentalities and the cultural industries. In its purest museological form, curatorship engages artwork and art collections.

### **The thesis: Its structure and methodology**

It is the liminal zone of the regional art museum – the space of one reality that reveals another - that two *exhibitions Pride of Place* (23 July to 29 August, 1999) and *Engage* (28 November 2000 to 4 February 2001), together with the publication *Exploring Culture & Community* were developed. As a doctoral student at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane and a

guest curator at Global Arts Link (GAL) Ipswich between 1998 and 2001, I curated these exhibitions. An anthology of 42 essays, which I project managed and edited for GAL was published in May 1999 to coincide with the opening of the gallery.

Both the exhibitions and the anthology contribute to this doctoral thesis and are acknowledged as practice. This practice - curating and writing, specific to the regional art gallery and as a museological craft worthy of investigation - is examined in Chapter 6 of this thesis. *Pride of Place* and *Engage* could not have been curated without acknowledging the history of museology, and the ever-changing cultural and social climate of historical and contemporary Australia, or without understanding the vicissitudes of community and public art collections in regional locations.

By adopting a theory into practice model, this thesis poses and attempts to answer in the affirmative the question of whether curatorship as a defined visual arts practice, sustains the regional art museum as a viable and relevant cultural institution in contemporary Australia. This question presupposes that the Australian public regional art gallery/ museum has the potential, through its core business of exhibition curation, to significantly affect, both culturally, and in an economic sense, the regional environment in which it operates. In addition the thesis employs a broad ranging social and cultural studies framework through which to interrogate the art museum and its functions.

To demonstrate unequivocally and substantiate that curatorship can sustain the regional art gallery, the thesis investigates, the art museum within the context of a white Australian cultural history. The ebbs and flows of culture, community, nation and identity have affected, and continue to affect, this cultural institution. Neither a contemporary regional gallery such as GAL nor the curatorship that occurs within it can be read in isolation, but need to be understood in context.

Five studies configured as thesis chapters provide contextual insights. Regional gallery curatorship, as exemplified by the exhibitions - *Pride of Place* and *Engage*, sees GAL as a newly established “regional gallery with innovative

solutions to grow and sustain audiences, which is committed to the communities of Ipswich. The thesis is structured as follows:

- **Chapter 1** - explores the beginnings of the modern Art Museum as a selective history
- **Chapter 2** - looks at the emergence of the Australian regional public art gallery.
- **Chapter 3** - engages the proposition: “Cultivating the Country: Regionalism and the Public Art Gallery”.
- **Chapter 4** - examines ‘Framing the Regional Public Art Gallery or Museum’.
- **Chapter 5** - looks into the future and is titled “Towards the New Museology, Australia and a Century of Change”.
- **Chapter 6** - provides an analysis and description of the two exhibitions I curated: *Pride of Place* and *Engage*, together with an examination of the book *Exploring Culture & Community*, I project managed for GAL.
- **Chapter 7** - the final chapter of the thesis is represented as a DVD, which contains two 40-minute audiovisual presentations, which explore the curatorial rationale for both *Pride of Place* and *Engage*. In addition the DVD contains an interactive game and a video titled *Art, Performance & Energy* commissioned by myself, GAL and Energex Swanbank to extend the exhibition’s public program supporting *Pride of Place* exhibition. The DVD also contains a number of folders that contain reproductions of other selected regional gallery exhibitions, together with a photo essay of selected regional art galleries throughout Australia.

Collectively, these chapters provide a selective history of the museum, and its affiliates in Australian from white settlement to the present. Early examples of transplanted museological practice as it developed in the colonies are counterbalanced against an understanding of Australia’s first cultural institutions originating as they did in a context of colonial regionalism. The contemporary regional gallery is best represented through the frameworks of modernity and postmodernism and their local global consequences.

## **Cultural anthropology and the regional art museum**

Some time around 1862, an unknown artist painted a view of the town of Ipswich in Queensland from Limetstone Hill. This oil painting, trading in the nineteenth century picture-making conventions of the panorama, the topographic and the idealised landscape is “quintessentially a product of British taste”(Kirker, in Douglas 1999: 108). Today this picture is housed in the City of Ipswich Collection at Global Arts Link Ipswich (GAL). This picture is in part an ideal, a construction, an engagement with the picturesque - a technique of fanciful interpretation and topographical fact that combine to form a visual record on a particular location in colonial Queensland. While the contemporary museum visitor may view this artwork as historically quaint, a snapshot of a time long since past, this painting is representative of a regional community and in the geographical sense of place.

Community is not an entity, although in common parlance community and place stand for one another. Community has come to mean “a set of shared social meanings which are constantly created and mutated through the actions and interactions of its members and through their interaction with the wider society” (Kelly 1984: 50). The respected cultural theorist Raymond Williams writes about community as a network of relationships - literally our way of life. He ascertains that the process of communication is in fact the process of community.

Bernard Smith, the eminent Australian art historian, also implies a particular understanding of community when he argues that from around 1885 onwards, the pioneer artists of Australian landscape painting – Roberts, Streeton and others - shaped and formed their ideas about what Australia was or could be by employing the metaphor of painting landscape. Their ideals – a community of common thought - represented a quest by these artists for a higher form of landscape painting, subject matter which could convey symbolic values. While conservative and misunderstood as provincial, this community of like-minded thinkers was also deeply radical. Sometimes their paintings can be misread as isolationist and ignorant. After all, they were developed with a conscious and aesthetic conservatism that held steadfast to certain aspects of British painting.

Their rejection of many aspects of modernism set up what Peter Fuller (1984) calls an “antipodean aesthetic”— a purely Australian view and, by implication, a regionalist perspective.

While it appears more European than antipodean, the painting *View of Ipswich from Limestone Hill* c 1862, heralds provincialism and the regional as essential ways to understand the burgeoning “Australianness” of the late nineteenth century. This painting, in being representative of a place and a time, also implies a network of relationships - a community. Regional communities were the lifeblood of the Australian economy until the 1950s. Ipswich in South-east Queensland was no exception. It was a regional city that contributed coal, wool and railways – the raw materials and labour that underpinned Australia as a nation.

*View of Ipswich* remains a constant reminder of continuous and ever-changing regional and rural Australia. Today, while the economic might of the regions fluctuates and their peripheral circumstances seem precarious, regional communities can still be referred to as composites and microclimates synonymous with the ideal of Nation.

As a repository of artworks and a provider of a public service, the contemporary regional art museum is an institution well positioned to reflect upon the culture that is regional and rural Australia. Housed in regional art museums, art collections contain many visual stories primarily about Australia that assist a town and a region to define itself and its citizenry.

What, then, do people expect to find when they visit any regional art museum in Australia? A smug and ill-considered answer would be “the visual arts”. This answer is only partly correct however. The answer to this question lies in *who* is asking it. A visitor or tourist to a region or town in which an art museum or gallery is located would have a particular set of expectations in posing such a question. These expectations may relate to the particularity of the region or town itself, the history of the place including that of the art museum, or the uniqueness of the museum’s art collection. The local resident, while appreciative of the fact that the regional art museum or gallery houses an art collection, and is a

significant player in the cultural life of the community, may be more interested in engaging with artworks in the museum that have come from elsewhere. Between these two sets of expectations lies the space where curatorship as a defined visual arts practice can sustain the contemporary art museum in regional Australia.

The commonality between the visitor-tourist and the local resident's expectations rests with a desire or need (if only subconsciously) of individuals to encounter something that will enrich their lives on a very personal level, to engage them in experiences, enable them to look at things, do things and gain knowledge. While all art museum visitors have a wish to experience the genuine and unique visual art object, it is the context in which the object is displayed that can provide a powerful transformational experience for the museum visitor. Apart from the object itself, the art museum's principal means of eliciting a visitor's interest and engagement is through the exhibition.

The metaphor of the frame can be usefully employed to define the regional gallery. Frames surround artworks and contain them. They define the artwork giving it authority through formal presentation. The frame can also act as a barrier freezing the ideas and expectations of the artist and stopping them from escape. Outside the frame, the ever - changing dynamics of the contemporary world exist. In metaphorical terms, the regional gallery becomes the frame in which the artworks - the museum's collection, its exhibitions and its enterprise exist. The immediate and intimate relationship that a regional art museum can have with the communities it serves also sits within the defining frame.

The traditional art museum has enjoyed a privileged cultural position. Its authority is guaranteed by its symbiotic relationship with art history, the academic discipline of museology and curatorship, as well as its symbolic relationship with the nation-state and the public good. The regional art museum holds this authority, but it has been mediated, reframed or reshaped by the immediacy of community. As a consequence, art museum curatorship is viable and relevant if it can privilege the narratives of community and elevate them into the realm of shared visual experiences mediated through the museum's authority. It is in the

act of sharing and engaging with the visual that regional communities can value their own worth.

The regional art museum and its curatorship are only sustainable if they find their place between the community, the environment and the cultural economy of place. To make the art museum an indispensable force in the culture and communities of regional and rural Australia, it needs to embrace its classical definition and truly become a place of the muses, a location for reflection, and a respite from living in complex social systems. In doing this it would always acknowledge the local as relevant, honour the artist as storyteller and provocateur, and accept the power of place and the significance of everyday lives.

Culture, like community, is inextricably linked to the art museum. As a term and idea *culture* is problematic. It is a sociological construction. The world has meaning for us because of the shared experiences, beliefs, customs and values of the group that inhabits it with us. This collection of shared beliefs and customs is what we have come to call *culture*. There are many ways that *culture* can be considered. This study employs an ecological approach, which defines *culture* as an adaptation, a social mechanism enabling individuals to survive. Within this context, learning can be viewed as the process by which a society shapes the minds of individuals “enabling them to meet the imperatives of the culture” (Falk and Dierking 2000: 39).

Modelling is also a frequently observed social interaction in museums. Spend time watching visitors in art museums and you will recognise the social nature of their experiences. An even closer examination reveals that much of the social interaction is a way for the museum visitor to connect and find meaning. Much of this learning is through social behaviour - people interacting with each other and with the objects on display.

As people young or old, in groups or alone, engage with artworks and exhibitions, they bring their ‘sense of self’- their experiences, assumptions, emotions and values, their socio-cultural background, to the experiential process:

This socio-cultural mediation either direct or indirectly, plays a critical role in personalising the art museum experience for visitors, facilitating their efforts to learn and find meaning from art museums (Falk and Dierking 2000: 93).

As the socio-cultural researcher Leinhardt states ( 2000: 1):

Museums are our pre-eminent institutions for learning. They are where our society gathers and preserves visible records of social, scientific and artistic accomplishments; where the society supports scholarship that extends knowledge; and to which people of all ages turn to build understandings of culture, history, society and science.

In twenty-first century regional Australia, the public art museum is not only a pre-eminent institution for learning, it is one of the few cultural institutions based in regional Australia to gather and preserve visible records and artistic accomplishments of particular communities. As a socio-cultural product of and about a community, the regional art museum or gallery has a significant role to play in how a town or a region understands itself. The regional art museum represents a community of practice that assists individuals to know place and appreciate the local, assisted by the visual arts.

Museum staff – volunteers, exhibition designers, education officers, curators and their directors - individually and collectively influence the visitor experience. They do this primarily through the mechanism of *the exhibition* – a physical construction of objects, sequenced in particular ways. Exhibitions can affect the museum visitor in three interconnected contexts: the personal, the social and the physical. The museum, its exhibition and the visitor enter into an interactive experience. It is in this zone of interaction where curatorship occurs. Here stories are told, arguments are staged and meaning is acquired. A form of cultural or social anthropology, experiential learning and the shaping of knowledge coalesce at this point.

Contemporary art museum curatorship is a political act with consequences. Curatorship is about assemblage, a construction of objects presented as a narrative, a defence or a proposition, an exhibition of ideas.

Unlike their historical antecedents – ‘keepers of collections’ - today’s art curators, especially those located in a regional art gallery, while sometimes responsible for a civic art collection, are also multi-skilled practitioners, alchemists and social workers.

Different from their metropolitan-based counterparts, who engage with a broad cross-section of different publics – city-based office workers, students, senior citizen, families and tourists - the diversity of a city population, the regional art museum curator has an immediate responsibility to a *complete* population located in town and/or a district. It is the immediacy of these communities, their singularity, the intimacy of ‘living as a local’ that differentiates, city and regional art museum curators. Their curatorship, if effective and meaningful, should reflect and embrace the local and its sense of place.

The regional gallery curator must know the demography of a particular regional or rural location. That knowledge, a form of cultural anthropology, allows the curator to consider the socio-cultural aspects of a community and use this information sensitively and strategically to inform the curatorial process, and ultimately the regional art museum’s exhibitions.

Most regional art museums-galleries as there are most commonly know - house art collections and in some circumstance the art collection has defined the regional gallery. For example, the Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong Art Galleries are acknowledged for their substantial collections of British, European and colonial Australian art. Tamworth City Gallery in central New South Wales is known for its fibre and textile collection and its Fibre Textile Biennial. Mildura is famous for its Sculpture and Triennial, Wagga Wagga for its glass collection and, as recently as February 2005, Artspace Mackay, in central Queensland, announced it would become the centre for the artist book.

The art collections held by regional art museums have, in the main, been assembled through opportunistic exchange with collectors or donors, city or municipal officials, or by the taste and influence of individuals. No Australian regional art museums have substantial acquisition budgets, and hence they have been dependent on largesse and benefaction to develop their collections.

Cultural benefaction - that is, mutual benefits gained by both the giver (the donor) and receiver (the art museum and collection) - are numerous and varied in regional and rural Australia. For example, Ballarat Fine Art Gallery (founded in 1884) and Bendigo Art Gallery (founded as 1887), the two oldest regional art museums in Australia, were established by benefaction. As early as 1889, and less than two years after the Bendigo Art Gallery opened, the Honourable W. Winter-Irving MLC purchased the oil painting *Forgiven* c 1888 (a high Victorian painting about family values) circa 1888 by George Kilburne from the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1889 for the Sandhurst Fine Art Public Gallery Collection, later known as the Bendigo Art Gallery Collection. This picture was an important component of the Collection for over a century. (*A Primrose from England: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Narratives from the Collection of Bendigo Art Gallery*) - exhibition catalogue 2002.

The Ipswich City Council in Queensland received gifts of fourteen paintings from individuals and local societies in the 1950s for the prime purpose of building a local art collection and establishing a public art gallery. This collection and gallery became symbols of civic pride and of Ipswich's cultural sophistication and maturity as a regional city. Some 47 years later, in 1998, the City of Ipswich Collection then numbering some 2000 objects was to benefit again from a generous gift: – a group of 73 contemporary Australian artworks dating from 1984. This time a power company located at Swanbank in the Ipswich region developed a strategy to link the company's image with the visual arts, the local regional art museum, and its civic art collection. This example of benefaction was a strategic move by CS Energy Swanbank to gain market share and connect itself with the local community of Ipswich. Almost half a century separates these two events. Today the City of Ipswich collection can be understood from a number of interrelated perspectives:

The first revolves around the implicit, individual and psychic reasons why [the collection] was formed. The second contains explicit statements about how and why [the museum visitor] while engaging with the collection or its component parts [as part of an exhibition comes to understand the world

and in so doing develops a set of values they] attach to this understanding. (Pearce 1992: 119)

A third perspective involves the expectations a regional community has of a public art collection and the art museum or gallery that houses and displays it.

With a public art collection and gallery came the expectations of the council and the citizens of Ipswich. These expectations were built upon the aspirations of a rural city in the shadow of a capital city (Brisbane) to establish cultural significance (Douglas 1999: 2 - 5). The establishment of this small art collection and a gallery for Ipswich was a strategy by the council, in collusion with civic leaders and commercial operators in central Ipswich, to develop a truly civil society. While these fourteen paintings symbolised new “cultural possibilities” for Ipswich, the collection indirectly referenced the taste and aesthetic influence of its benefactors. A number of the artworks in the collection depicted Southeast Queensland scenes familiar to local residents. For example, Robert Campbell’s watercolour, *Glasshouse Mountains*, c1949 (undated) (Douglas 1999: xviii) provided a panoramic view of the Sunshine Coast hinterland, while others depicted local events and personalities. Other works acknowledged a quintessential Australia based on the nineteenth century construct of “Australia as landscape”. *Castle Hill*, a watercolour c1945 by William Bustard (Douglas 1999: 3) and *White Gums*, a watercolour and gouache, c1949 by Indigenous painter Albert Manatjira (Douglas 1999: 42) are examples of this one-dimensional reading of Australia. As an establishment collection, these fourteen artworks provided the City of Ipswich and its residents who visited the gallery with an implied connection to the broader remit of Australian art, and to history, both local and national, through the albeit limited and clichéd visual references to Australian culture.

In 1998, with the establishment of Global Arts Link Ipswich, the aspirations of the funding partners - the Ipswich Council and the Queensland government - were also about civic pride and sustaining a civil society. However, the team of professionals who developed this new-model art museum held that, for GAL to be a contemporary public regional art museum, it must become “a people’s

place” (Douglas 1999: 5). The needs of the community were paramount: if GAL was to be an effective contributor and community player, it needed to head and hear the voice of individuals and the communities of Ipswich.

Swanbank’s gift to GAL and Ipswich in 1998 provided the art museum with an opportunity to curate an exhibition within the context of a civic art collection, Australian art history and local public interests.

The exhibition *Pride of Place: The CS Energy Gift & the City of Ipswich Collection* curated by myself (a guest curator and doctoral researcher at Global Arts Link Ipswich from 1997 to 2001), was shown at GAL from 23 July to 29 August, 1999 and provided the art museum and CS Energy Swanbank with an exhibition event that contextualised the gift and was relevant to the local community. GAL’s new- model art museum status was based on its relevance and accessibility to Ipswich residents. In establishing itself GAL had created and utilised mechanisms (morning tea forums, curatorium reference groups, volunteer gallery guides, specialised gallery spaces dedicated to children, Indigenous citizens and local artists, internet access, and touch screen interactive technology) to support its quest to connect to the community’.

A second exhibition which I curated entitled, *Engage: Collected Works - City of Ipswich and Queensland College of Art Griffith University* (28 November 2000 - 4 February 2001) extended on GAL’s inaugural exhibition *People, Places and Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich* (15 May -18 July 1999) in promoting the significance of Ipswich and the art collection.

The *Engage* exhibition, while embracing the local as an audience development strategy, was an opportunity to increase the profile of the City of Ipswich Art Collection in a broader regional context of public art collections in Southeast Queensland. *Engage* linked the Ipswich Collection with the Queensland College of Art Collection, Griffith University. Both public art collections are located in the same geographical region i.e. Southeast Queensland. This exhibition employed the new museological techniques of inventive interpretation, traditional art collection categorisation, Australian art history, and the narrative as audience development strategies and new ways for

the museum visitor to experience the visual. This exhibition also explored the idea that art collecting and visual culture in general can assist the museum visitor know a place.

Both *Pride* and *Engage* signalled that GAL had abandoned passive viewing experiences, the hallmarks of an outdated form of curatorship. The curator was motivated by a conscious decision to address the art museum visitor's needs and their relationship to the visual arts and social history. Both exhibitions provided examples of curatorship that solidified the City of Ipswich Collection's position as a community resource, an organic and ever-changing visual and social archive and asset. While this collection and its subsequent exhibitions developed from it contributed to Ipswich's cultural sphere, the collection could also be considered in purely financial terms. Local governments, in their respective policy documents usually refer to art collections from this perspective only.

Both exhibitions, *Pride* and *Engage*, embraced the shift in museological practice known as 'the New Museology' (Vergo 1989). This shift occurred in the late 1980s in Britain. This new practice places the interpretation of the museum object in relation to the museum visitor's experience and world-view. Embracing these principles Global Arts Link Ipswich developed a philosophy and vision that privileged the museum visitor, acknowledged their cultural context and, in doing so, provided a way to frame the role this regional art museum could play in the community and culture of Ipswich.

In art museums, meanings generally arise from the direct interpretation of the collection, and are influenced by display and design. It must be remembered "collections are the artistic creation of self out of self, part of the connection of past and present and the hope of a future". (Pearce 1992: 136) They are immensely complex bodies of material evidence, an archive of the past situated in the present. Thus my task as guest curator at GAL was to bring into focus the City of Ipswich Collection, cultivate new ways of "seeing" this regionally based art collection, and uncover its cultural worth at a local and a national level.

Inherent in the curatorial process, and fundamental to the tasks of assemblage, exhibition and interpretation, a number of questions were raised by the curator and answered by the museum visitor through the process of engagement. Does this exhibition have relevance and, if so. To whom and why? Does the City of Ipswich Art Collection provide clues to interrogating “Australianness”? Can this exhibition, through its own formal conventions and morphology (its organisational structure) provide a meta-narrative of “nation”? Do the exhibitions and the City of Ipswich Art Collection reflect and embrace the idea of community and the communities of Ipswich in particular? These questions required answers if the exhibition was to be a meaningful experience for both locals and tourists alike.

Both exhibitions attracted substantial visitor numbers. The *Pride* exhibition attracted 3800 museum visitors over a 37-day period while the *Engage* exhibition; on display for a 66 day exhibition period saw over 6500 museum visitors attend (Denoon 1999b, 2001). No other formal visitor evaluation measures were employed by GAL to ascertain the quality of visitor experiences. Constant monitoring of both exhibitions by volunteers provided anecdotal evidence to suggest museum visitors saw both exhibitions as engaging and relevant. During the *Pride* exhibition, daily volunteer floor talks attracted on average 40 visitors, while the performances focus on a different artwork on each of the six Sundays of the exhibition attracted on average 50 to 60 participants. The *Engage* exhibition’s audience development game - favourite artwork of the week - attracted over 60 people a day to register their vote by placing a red dot on a designated label next to their chosen artwork. A tally board in the foyer to the museum recorded the favourite works for each week of the exhibition. The written statements provided by a wide variety of invited museum visitors and placed next to selected artworks throughout the exhibition gave visitors other ways into reading the artworks separate from the authorial voice of the museum. High exhibition attendance numbers, repeat visits, coverage in the local newspaper, plus positive comment by all 40 volunteers at GAL who worked with the exhibitions suggested that both exhibitions provided intellectual ways to

understand the importance of a civic art collection and acknowledge its relevance as a education tool to teach Australian history, art appreciation and the diversity inherent in Ipswich's local culture and the wider nation.

As Douglas Worts contends:

The relevancy of art museum operations needs to be judged by assessing outcomes in community ... Very little focus is placed on understanding the quality of visitor experiences or on the needs/wants of those who do not tend to visit ... It art museums want to move towards being relevant in a changing society, they will need to create mechanisms for relating to the larger population in meaningful ways" (cited in Xanthoudaki, Tickle and Sekules 2003: 217).

Both *Pride* and *Engage* laid out new knowledge in the temporal three-dimensional space of GAL's galleries. Both exhibitions can be considered as meta-narratives of our age and of our contemporary world, and can be read at a local, national or even global level. The objects in both exhibitions can be read "as embracing a continuing real and metonymic relationship to their own time and place and a metaphorical relationship to their original context" (Pearce 1992: 141).

The question remains: how do the collection and collecting practices in art museums and regional art museums, such as GAL's truly reflect the cultural realities of Australian society? Art museums still believe in the primacy of the art object. They see their outcomes in terms of exhibitions. What regional art museums need to do is engage their audiences in reflective and participatory practices. What is still difficult for the art museum and its curator is to stretch the museum visitors view beyond the local while celebrating its dominance.

My contention is that Australian rural and regional communities have cultural needs that are not being addressed by the existing strategies employed by their cultural institutions, especially regional art museums. Throughout the last two decades of the twentieth century, regional art museums - like their metropolitan counterparts - have been preoccupied with building, preserving, exhibiting, collecting objects and marketing the gallery and art and collection,

without always being aware of the cultural needs of the immediate communities  
the art museum serves.

## CHAPTER 1

### BEGINNINGS: A SELECTIVE HISTORY OF THE MODERN ART MUSEUM

We live in a world in which virtually anything can be exhibited *in* a museum; and virtually anything can be made to function as a museum. It is now often difficult to distinguish museum practices from those of some forms of entertainment, such as tourism, department stores, shopping, the art market, and even art practice. In such a complex and confused world, the question of representation is a multifaceted one. The institution that is the contemporary museum stands at the intersection of a wide variety of social, cultural, scientific and political developments. However, the distinctiveness of the museum as an institution, and of museology as a practice, has come to be acknowledged as a mode of representation that deploys and disseminates knowledge.

The 'idea of the museum', as we understand museums today, has a history of just over two hundred years. As Germain Bazin states in his publication entitled *The Museum Age* (1967)

To write a history of the museum is to give account of the evolution of two concepts: that of the Museum and that of Time ... which passes and that of time that endures. The burden of time increased when humanity became conscious of individual destiny – of secular destiny – holding itself responsible for its own actions ... Cycle time was a profound conception of the Greeks ... ( Carbonell 2004: 18).

In considering the history of the museum, and in particular the art museum, it is important to state that the public museum as we understand it in early twenty-first century terms acquired its modern form during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries:

The process of its formation was as complex as it was protracted, involving, most obviously and immediately, a transformation of the practices of earlier collecting institutions and the creative adaptation of aspects of other new institutions – the international exhibition and the department store, for example – which developed alongside the museum. (Bennett 1995: 19)

The history of the museum, whether read as a development process or as an evolved form, cannot be fully understood unless it is considered through a more generalist understanding of culture and state governance. Social reform agendas were crucial to eighteenth and nineteenth century social order and state governance of the populace. In the “science of police which was formulated during this period Foucault has argued, it was the family [unit] that typically served as a model for a form of government ”(Bennett 1995: 18). The home and family can thus be read as models for and linchpins between social administration, culture (the manners, morals, habits and beliefs of subordinate classes) and reform and regulation as both responsibilities and understandings of government control. Public utilities – libraries, museums, and public lectures - were regarded as government-condoned apparatuses to provide a public good, self-improvement for individuals and hence control over the masses. Patrick Colquhoun, writing in 1806, referred to “recreation [as] necessary to Civilised Society [stating] all Public Exhibitions should be rendered subservient to improvement of morals, and to the means of infusing into the minds [of the working class] a love of the Constitution, and a reverence and respect for the Laws ...” (Bennett 1995: 19).

George Brown Goode, in his 1895 publication *Principles of Museum Administration* wrote about the role of the museum as a “passionate reformer” and about “ the modern Museum idea” (Bennett 1995: 19). The idea of the museum as an institution to assist the workingman to choose a life characterised by moral restraint (as opposed to the proclivities of sex and imbibing to excess in the ale-house) was also supported and encouraged by cultural reformers such as Henry Cole and John Ruskin. In nineteenth century colonialist Australia, cultural reformation - as influenced by Cole and Ruskin - was played out through the establishment of museums such as the Melbourne Museum and the Sydney and Melbourne Expositions.

In regional Australia during the mid - to late 1800s, in towns such as Bendigo and Ballarat, good government was evidenced by the establishment of civic buildings such as art museums and town halls. During the Victorian gold

rush, social disorder and gold fever supported the alehouse and brothel. The art museum or gallery and the town hall, became symbols for growth and prosperity managed by the city or town fathers. As Foucault puts it: “the finality of government resides in the things it manages and in the pursuit of the perfection and intensification of the processes which it directs” (Bennett 1995: 22). The instruments of government (such as the art gallery, town hall and library) became tuned to both the government of the state, or town, and the government of ‘the self’. Nineteenth century Australian regional art museums, like their English counterparts, can be understood as new spaces of representation, places where new contexts for the display of valued civic objects (such as paintings acquired in the development of a civic fine art collection) could also be harnessed for social purposes.

The nineteenth century museum can be considered from a Gramscian perspective as forming a part of a new set of relationships between the state and its citizenry. Gramsci (1971: 247) argues that the state could be conceived as an educator, and that museums are represented as instruments of ruling-class hegemony.

Today, the idea of the contemporary public museum continues to play a central and important role in the way Western culture is defined and understood. The concept of the museum has been labelled a ‘rational myth’ - an institution constructed around and driven by a persistent, powerful, applied and shared set of beliefs. As early as the nineteenth century, with the establishment of significant art museums in Australia (the National Gallery of Victoria and the Art Gallery of New South Wales), there was concern that the museum destroyed the life of history and culture instead of preserving it. This concern was based around the question of authenticity. It was implied that “the museum endangers artistic and cultural authenticity by removing artworks and artefacts from their original locations and placing them in galleries” (Maleuvre 1999: 1). This concern still holds some currency. The issues - loss of context, loss of cultural meaning, destruction of a direct connection with life and the promotion of an aesthetically alienated mode of observation - have been raised in museographic discourse. In

particular, the regional art gallery is a site where these issues are still highly contested and debated in Australia.

In general, the contemporary museum reflects developments in post-industrial and post-modern society. A number of theoreticians have commented on a crisis in the contemporary museum. And the reality is that, since the eighteenth century, when the first public museums appeared in Europe, politics and social change have made this institution one that, if it were to survive and be relevant, would forever be in change or crisis mode.

In 1920s New York, Lillie Bliss, Mary Sullivan and Abby Rockefeller keenly felt that crisis. By 1929, the modernist white box envisaged by Alfred Barr as the Museum of Modern Art, New York and considered “a laboratory, in its experiments, the public [being] invited to participate” (Schubert 2000: 45) had changed the role and function of the twentieth century art museum forever. Until Barr, art museums principally collected and exhibited painting and sculpture - the fine art disciplines. Barr, in an unprecedented move, introduced new mediums – including photography, architecture, industrial design and film - to the art museum. Contemporary visual culture came inside the museum, allowing for a twentieth century society to permeate what was fast becoming a relic of an undemocratic era. There was no European precedent. Barr revolutionised collecting policy, exhibition development and publications.

After World War II the art museum, in international terms, become eclipsed by the performing arts. Post-war reconstruction and economic recovery led to the emergence of a mass tourism market into the 1970s and 1980s. The interdisciplinary Pompidou Centre in Paris opened in the 1970s with its library, and the gallery coexisted with the other elements. This arts centre allowed for information and entertainment to become connected to a new understanding of culture:

This concept expanded the reach of the art museum towards a whole new audience that had so far taken no interest and dismissed the institution as stuffy and irrelevant to modern life ...The Pompidou exhibitions

[emphasised] a pan-European dialogue and an interdisciplinary cross-fertilisation ... (Schubert 2000: 59)

Different concepts of art history could now exist in the art museum. The processes of self-analysis and critique established in the 1960s, and explored by cultural theorists such as Clifford (1988), Jameson (1990), Lyotard (1986), heralded the emergence of postmodern cultural and demographic changes. Museums began to view their collections and temporary exhibitions as vehicles where the viewer and the curator could enter into dialogues. The audience and its needs became fundamental to the new museum. It is becoming common for museums to readily assess the effectiveness of their exhibitions and displays through visitor evaluation (Pearce 1991). The Powerhouse Museum in Sydney is one such museum, with a dedicated visitor evaluation department.

The 1960s also saw the demise of the frame-and-plinth approach to curating and displaying exhibitions. This resulted in a permanent shift in the role of the curator. From this decade on, artists worried about the museum's canonising power responded in definite ways - for example, Thomas Struth's photographs of museum interiors and visitors (1990), Beuy's "Darmstadt Block" (1970) and Broodthaers' "Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles" (1968) considered the historicising power of the museum in the form of mock museology.

The museum building boom of the 1980s and 1990s saw the introduction of yet another curatorial shift - to a more qualitative understand of display. Exhibitions moved from static to more dynamic models. New meanings were gleaned from art collections and artworks, with interpretation replacing absolute truths. Today, curatorship within the art museum is in continuous revisionist mode. In the last twenty years, two modes of presentation have become dominant: "the ahistorical" installation and the monographic display (Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairn 1996).

The "ahistorical" approach eschews chronology and evolution, taking works of art out of their cultural and historical contexts. It has been suggested that this form of curating is elitist by stealth, dealing in obfuscation instead of

information. (Szeemann, Fuchs and Hoet in the 1970s and 1980s were arguable exponents of this form).

“Ahistorical” curating is driving museum audiences away. For the layperson, and in particular the audience in regional and rural Australia, this form of curatorship is anathema to the civic role of the local museum. Whereas monographic installations current in most museums - exemplified by *Pride of Place: the CS Energy Gift & the City of Ipswich Collection and Engage Collected Works: City of Ipswich Collection & Queensland College of Art Griffith University*, (curated by Craig Douglas as guest curator and doctoral researcher at Global Arts Link Ipswich from 1998 to 2002) seem appropriate to today’s new museological charter. That charter embraces and is characteristic of the New Museology (Vergo 1989), in that it is committed to developing new audiences and sustaining existing ones through lifelong learning opportunities.

With the international surge of exhibitions and collections based on notions of group or collective identity, the role I took as curator at Ipswich was that of a cultural broker for Global Arts Link Ipswich, rather than the role of arbiter which was the defining attribute of the traditional curator. The role of broker implies:

exchanging the authority of curatorial arbitrage for the purportedly more neutral role that embraces group ethnicity and identity [or a community’s sense of place]. Curators who act as cultural brokers are not limited to discriminating artistic excellence ... the cultural broker function appears to have radically shifted the focus and field of action of contemporary art curators. (Ramirez, in Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairn 1996: 22 - 23)

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, exhibitions have become the medium through which most art becomes known. In the political economy of art and the museum exhibitions are the primary sites of exchange where signification is constructed, maintained and occasionally deconstructed:

Part spectacle, part socio-historical event, part structuring device, exhibitions – especially exhibitions of contemporary art – establish and

administer the cultural meaning of art (Greenberg, Ferguson, and Nairn 1999: n.p.).

But, while exhibitions are an important mechanism to enquire about, “their histories, their structures and their socio-political implications are only starting to be written about and theorized. What work has been done is partial.” (Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairn 1999: n.p.). It is difficult to think about exhibitions without deferring to what Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff (1994) refer to as “museum culture”.

Exhibitions and museums have a symbiotic relationship. Their mutual benefits are provided by and through curatorship and the role of the curator. That role is different in different museums. Traditionally, the term “curator” was defined as a keeper of the collection, a specialist in an academic discipline or field of knowledge relevant to the collection. In today’s public art museums the curator’s principal responsibilities branch out to all parts of the museum, including the care, development and use of all objects, material and specimens that belong to a collection. In a traditional museum, the curator’s duties also include the acquisition of artworks for the museum’s collection. But, as the modern museum evolved throughout the twentieth century the contemporary curator - as guardian of the collection - acquired an additional and even more exacting role of curator of temporary exhibitions.

Realising a set of ideas by incorporating objects, images, text and multimedia in a particular physical structure, the temporary exhibition has become the core business of today’s museum. What to curate is a question that has a contemporary currency. The answers lie in a myriad of criteria the museum uses to measure relevance and success - the most obvious of these being attendance and the least understood or examined being the curatorial premise. While museums have been called “safe places for un-safe ideas” the last three decades have seen some remarkable curatorship of exhibitions.

The blockbuster art exhibition is one type. It is defined by Elsen (1984) as “a large scale loan exhibition that people who normally don’t go to museums will stand in line for hours to see” Elsen points out that this type of exhibition “offers

the museum visitor a dramatic lesson in arts power to still move us intellectually and emotionally ... Blockbusters [also] mean crowds and that means business.” (1984:1) The exhibition as politic, or social justice messenger is another significant trend that has emerged more recently.

Fred Wilson’s 1992 *Mining the Museum* reinstallation of the permanent collection of the Maryland Historical Society, and Joseph Kosuth’s *The Play of the Unmentionable* at the Brooklyn Art Museum in 1991, are dramatic lessons in the power of art and the curator/artist. Both of these exhibitions drew from collections. In both cases the artists (Wilson and Kosuth) acted as guest curators and the creators of site-specific installations:

This approach is a two-way process in which museums offer contemporary artists challenging alternative venues and contexts to the white box environment, while artists provide the museum with a means of reanimating their collections and attracting new audiences (Putnam 2001: 31 - 32).

More importantly, both these exhibitions utilised collections to interrogate social injustices, institutional bias and censorship. *Mining the Museum* was Wilson’s “first formal museum intervention questioning institutional biases, presentation techniques and accepted versions of cultural history” (Berger 2001: 155). *The Play of the Unmentionable* allowed Kosuth to develop an installation for the Grand Lobby of the Brooklyn Museum, which comprised his selection and display of works from the Museum’s collection. The exhibition was based largely around the theme of censorship, as illustrated by works from various cultures throughout history (Putnam 2001: 33).

Public art collections controlled and manipulated by traditional museum principles and methods of ordering - classifying, displaying, archiving and exhibiting - provide particular ways of knowing collections. For the museum visitor, viewing “the aesthetic object” itself – a painting, a drawing, a sculpture or an original print - allows them to appreciate the maker’s individuality, skill and dexterity. A more insightful reading of “the art object” can reveal multiple possibilities.

In 1989, Peter Vergo edited *The New Museology*. The aim of this book was to induce a more reflective and critical attitude towards the wide range of activities in which museums engage. Vergo's main contribution to this publication was an essay entitled "The reticent object" (Vergo 1989: 41 - 59). In this essay, he raises his concern about the making of various kinds of exhibitions - and not always in museums. He observes that there continues to be a tradition of what he calls unreflective exhibition-making. At best these exhibitions draw in "the punters" and at worst they have little sophistication, nothing to define the curator's goals or justify the expenditure, intellectual and physical effort that goes into their displays.

Exhibitions are created for a multitude of reasons. Some may be celebratory, such as the Australian Bicentennial Authority's 1988 *The Face of Australia* touring exhibitions. Others acknowledge an artist's or a group contribution to society - for example, *Escape Artists: Modernists in the Tropics*, curated by Gavin Wilson for the Cairns Regional Gallery in 1998. There are exhibitions, which are expressions of a nation's cultural or political aspirations, an example being *The Great Australian Art Exhibition* curated by the Art Gallery of South Australia in 1988/89. The reasons for exhibition-making are endless and should not be meaningless and mere showmanship.

But no artwork or intelligently curated exhibition is fixed or one-dimensional. There are multiple readings and interruptions to consider. Within the museum context, reading the visual resides with two people: the curator and the museum visitor. The curator collects and assembles the material culture - the evidence (objects). These objects are integral to both a physical space - the display or physical exhibition - and the intellect - a virtual zone where the curator's curatorial premise, argument or intent is formed and provides the museum visitor with a prescribed way of engaging the exhibition. Much has been written about "interpreting objects and exhibitions" (Pearce 1992, Hooper-Greenhill 2000, Vergo 1989) within and outside the museum. It is the interpretation and engagement with ideas generated from and about objects that supports the New Museology.

An artwork's provenance connects it to the wider world. This history of its ownership, together with an understanding of how it came to be made, is intrinsic to another reading of the artwork. By placing disparate objects next to each other, the curator sets up dialogues between artworks and new readings occur. It is "the experiential" – the reading (which includes the physical act of viewing together with the world experience each museum visitor brings to that viewing) - that forms a bond between the artist-maker, the curator and the museum visitor. A simpler way to understand the principles in question is to consider communication theory. *A sender* (the artist) *transmits* (the exhibition informed by the curator) *messages* (interpretation process) to *a receiver* (the museum visitor). The distinctiveness of objects - their "auration" (Benjamin 1936, Duchamp 1919) - gives museums a market edge. In an era when images and experiences are mediated, the museum is one of few places where one can engage with the unique.

The zone outside the museum has also become an increasingly significant site for constructing, experiencing and appreciating exhibitions. The temporary and the ephemeral exhibition type - such as *Strand Ephemera* (2001), developed by Perc Tucker Regional Gallery Townsville as an outdoor sculpture and installation exhibition, or *Sculpture by the Sea* at Bondi, where site-specific sculpture blends seamlessly with tourism and beach culture - is often dismissed "as popular" and of a different calibre to the apparent permanency of exhibitions and displays housed within the museum. But both of these events attracted thousands of visitors, many of whom had never entered a gallery or museum.

In recent years, there has been discussion about the reform in the purpose, staging or documentation of exhibitions. The French and the French Canadians have theorised about exhibitions, framing their inquiries in semiotic, post-structuralist and sociological terms. Anglo-American and some Australian writers e, g (Genocchio 2001; Jose 1999; and Wilson 1998) have focused on the politics of exclusion and questions of alterity. German writers have concentrated on documenting histories of avant-garde exhibitions, while the Dutch engage with the hypothetical and the historical: "Writing about exhibitions rather than the

works of art within them can be seen as a crisis in criticism and its languages.”(Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairn 1999: n.p.) As more contemporary writers from various disciplines – curators, artists, academics and interested laypersons - write about art exhibitions in particular, their cultural and political imperatives are becoming better understood. Exhibitions can be powerful transformers, catalysts for change, or they can reinforce the status quo. Art exhibition events such as the Asia Pacific Triennial (APT), curated by the Queensland Art Gallery (1993 - 1999) can be read both as cultural exchanges and as occasions for international diplomacy and the visual arts to coexist.

In the last decade in Australia, regional gallery curatorship has provided some examples of noteworthy exhibitions and their power to change the nation’s perspective. In the Queensland regional gallery network alone, a number of exhibitions could be placed in this category. *Native Title Business* curated by Joan Winter (2002-3) is “a meeting ground between Australia’s two very different cultures, [an opportunity] to promote understanding and reconciliation on native title in Australia” (Douglas 2002: 20). *Brighted Paradise: Colonial Visions of Northern Australia*, curated by the Rockhampton Art Gallery (2001) was a one-venue exhibition that concentrated on responses to northern Australia by colonial artists of European descent. This exhibition brought to light over 2000 artworks by 211 artists held in both Australian collections and five internationally recognised museums. The significance of the project is that it allowed the Rockhampton Art Gallery an opportunity to research a largely unexplored body of work. In 1998, the Cairns Regional Gallery invited Torres Strait Island-born Tom Mosby to curate *Ilan Pasin: This is our way Torres Strait Art*, the first comprehensive survey of Torres Islander art in Australia:

Cairns Regional Gallery had the opportunity to assist the government, community and artists of the Torres Strait in revealing an amazing culture, which has evolved over centuries, and which is unique to [the] region [of Far North Queensland]. (McRobbie (1998) cited in *Ilan Pasin: This is our way Torres Strait Art* - Cairns Regional Gallery exhibition catalogue 1998: 11)

### **Global Arts Link Ipswich: a new model for a regional public art museum**

In May 1999, Global Art Link (GAL) Ipswich, a new public art museum, opened in Ipswich, a regional city located in Southeast Queensland, 45 kilometres west of Brisbane. This regional art museum became a pivotal organisation is assisting the people of Ipswich to acknowledge the worth of this regional city, understand its historical significance, and envisage a future where the multiplicity of the community could be celebrated.

Three days before the art museum's official opening, Sue Smith, the art critic for the *Courier-Mail* newspaper, wrote:

VITAL LINK IN A CULTURAL JOURNEY Ipswich is better known for producing rugby league legends than for its experimental approach to cultural programming. All eyes in Ipswich, the city 50km west of Brisbane, are on an eclectic cultural centre now receiving its finishing touches.

The art world is even more intrigued by Ipswich's experimental approach to cultural programming, which will integrate art gallery and social history museum functions GAL is not limiting itself to just the usual art gallery exhibits of traditional and contemporary art (though the opening programme of exhibitions, featuring modern art and English paintings by Constable and Gainsborough, borrowed from its English sister city, Ipswich, is noteworthy. Some of the art world has been sceptical about the breadth of GAL's interests, fearing its focus on popular culture and local history would be to the detriment of its role as an art gallery. Louise Denoon [GAL's foundation director] dismisses the criticisms, pointing out that museums today must strive as Ipswich has done, to address the diversity and interests of their local communities. "It's not about lowering standards, but about going on a journey together," Denoon says. "Artists and art organisations often have low expectations of community and vice versa. But we want to raise everyone's expectations by bringing together the skills of the museum with the experiences of the community". (Smith, cited in *Courier-Mail* 12 May 1999: 59).

GAL's blend of social history, popular culture and new technology was a strategy employed by the museum's Director, the Ipswich Arts Foundation Development Director, the Doctoral Researcher and committed staff to reclaim the Ipswich community. The museum's plan, manifest in the museum's inaugural publication and devolved through a considered exhibitions and public program, was to begin a dialogue with the people. Allowing their stories to be told and the museum to bring stories from elsewhere to Ipswich, the new model art gallery was trading in relevance.

GAL's inaugural exhibition *People, Places and Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich* (May 16 – July 19, 1999) and its complimentary publication. *Exploring Culture & Community for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Global Arts Link Ipswich - A New Model for Public Art Museums*, could be explained as a blueprint for cultural trading in the Ipswich and Southeast Queensland region. This publication provided a definitive cultural and social document of Ipswich then and now. It became Global Arts Link's five-year exhibition planner, a bank of a community's complexities that required visual investigation. The publication is an environmental scan of a particular Australian region and city in historical and contemporary times. *Exploring Culture & Community* became a tangible, living document of a way of thinking about, regional communities and their relationship to the visual arts and the local art museum.

Subsequently, the exhibitions that were curated by Global Arts Link from 1999 to 2002 acknowledged *People, Places and Pastimes* as a seminal moment, when the communities of Ipswich and beyond understood the power of the visual arts and the local public art museum to symbolically unify them and inform a sense of place. In regional Australia, the art gallery or museum, in concert with artists, regional arts bodies, citizenry and the policy-makers of local government, have all experienced and/or contributed to the power of exhibitions. They realise their potential and ability to ignite issues about, and nurture, identity and a sense of place.

In all discussions about place, the concept is both abstract and specific:

If art is defined as 'universal', and form is routinely favoured over content, then artists are encouraged to transcend their immediate locals. But if content is considered the prime component of art, and lived experience is seen as a prime material, then regionalism is not a limitation but an advantage - a welcome base that need not exclude outside influences but shifts them through a local filter. Good regional art has both roots and reach. (Lippard 1997: 37)

*The Box Room* installation exemplifies a particular sense of place where local industry and artists such as Geoff Bonney and Peter Widmer joined to affect an artwork with strong local significance plus the monumentality of public art. *The Box Room* was 252 colourful painted bins stacked into 4.5 metre high walls that became the central iconographic art installation of the 2000 Shepparton Arts Festival:

This impressive installation was sited on the foreshore of Shepparton's Victoria Lake Park, beside Wyndham Street (Goulburn Valley Highway) allowing high visibility for the local and passing traffic. *The Box Room* presented certain regional dualities. Bins of both the competing local canning companies, Ardmona and SPC, were used as the work's building blocks. (Arts Victoria 2001: n.p.).

In the exhibition *Celebrating the Exquisite Corps*, the Bendigo Art Gallery e fostered a sense of regional community among artist who worked together to create the drawings. *Exquisite Corpse* embraced by the Dadaists is a game of folded paper that involves several people composing a drawing collectively: "In 2000 Bendigo Art Gallery initiated a state-wide version of this game resulting in an acclaimed exhibition that utilised an historical concept to create a relevant body of contemporary Australian work." (Arts Victoria 2001 n.p.)

As Duncan (1995: 8) contends:

art museums belong to the realm of secular knowledge; because of their status as preservers of a community's cultural memory...To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of the community and its highest values and truths. Those who are best prepared to perform

its ritual – those who are able to respond to its various cues – are also those whose identities (social, sexual, racial, etc) the museum ritual most fully confirms.

The Australian regional public art museum or gallery (the terms “museum” and “gallery” are interchangeably used in common parlance) is framed by its physical, cultural, historical and social interconnections in addition to its immediate and intimate relationship with the communities it serves. Objects housed in these art galleries are staged or framed to be read in a variety of ways, including those that privilege their aesthetic significance. “But however they are framed, museum objects function as diagnostic devices and modular measures for making sense of all possible worlds and their subjects. (Preziosi and Farago 2004: 4)

Like all museums, the regional gallery is a cultural artefact that houses artefacts. This cultural institution serves as a theatre, an encyclopaedia and a laboratory simultaneously, stimulating all manner of casual and teleological relationships. In its ability to make the visible legible, the regional gallery engages in:

personifying objects as the representation of their makers, simultaneously objectifying the people who make them and, in a second order reality that is part of the same historical continuum, objectifying the people who view made objects in their recontextualized museum settings. (Preziosi and Farago 2004: 5)

Art museum collections are object-rich. Here the personified object can reveal its secrets and associative connections with history, place, cultural production, taste, cultural diplomacy and economic power. Any museum art collection – such as the City of Ipswich Art Collection housed at Global Arts Link Ipswich is made possible by dismembering another context and reassembling a new museological whole. The fragments of the other are always held ready for release or reacquaintance. Individual and collective memory is held in collections of art. The memory of the maker – his or her inspiration, a trace of a place, an idea, a thought about a time, a circumstance that enabled the art object to materialize - is held within the physicality of collections. The provenance of the artwork provides yet another set of memories – things that speak of other things.

Collective memory is held within collections as they manifest as archives. Derrida, in investigating the mechanisms of the “patriarchive” (memory held within a collection), states:

The question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past. It is not the question of a concept dealing with the past that might *already* be at our disposal, an *archivable concept of the archive*. It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow (Preziosi and Farago 2004: 110).

This evocative statement by Derrida is essential knowledge worthy of mining when art collections are curated into exhibitions. The exhibitions - *Pride of Place: The CS Energy Gift & the City of Ipswich Collection and Engage Collected Works: City of Ipswich Collection & Queensland College of Art Griffith University*, became an opportunity for me as curator, to narrate and construct, through traditional museum display methods, new ways of understanding the City of Ipswich Collection.

### **The role of regional galleries**

The formation of Mechanics Institutes and Art Societies in the colonies suggests that a percentage of the populace was alive to ideas of education and how the arts could contribute to the public good. While the museum was beginning to emerge in nineteenth century Australia, as a credential of a nation coming of age, it was the regional art museum, located outside the metropolitan spheres of influence, that was slow to give up its potential.

Defined by its physical location in country towns, rural hamlets and coastal cities, the regional gallery has been marginalised and elevated simultaneously by its perceived peripheral circumstance. Trading under the pseudonym of the parochial or the local, a significant relationship has been established between the regional art galleries, the visual arts in Australia and Australian culture. In more recent times, this relationship has spread to the international cultural diplomacy arena, where the global and the local interact. Phrases like “cultivating the

country” imply that the regional gallery’s role, in concert with other cultural or arts organisations and government, is one of assisting individuals, as members of communities. To better understand themselves.

The regional gallery is a player in the new economy, where building and sustaining regional and rural communities – “building capacity” as it is known, - allows for community development and a preservation of place, or a sense of place to be nurtured. The regional gallery as a micro-economy commonly connected to local government can be labelled “an economic activity multiplier”. In economic-base theory, the multiplier is an estimate of the number of times a dollar generated in the community changes hands within a community before it leaks out of that community (Americans for the Arts at [www.artsusa.org](http://www.artsusa.org)).

But, while the new economy’s imperatives are in part finance-based, its primary focus is on the opportunities the regional gallery can produce to “value add”, or contribute to a knowledge economy where the local is valued and understood in tandem with a museum visitor’s personal growth requirements. Terms such as “lifelong learning” have been used in recent years to explain the museum’s potential to be an ever-present source of learning for museum visitors throughout their lives:

Alongside learning, the two biggest challenges that museums and galleries need to address in their community are social inclusion and cultural diversity. This means aiming for the widest possible access to collections and knowledge, and outreach/audience development ...  
(*re:source* 2004: 43)

Because many regional art galleries are located in areas of social deprivation, they are ideally placed to play an important role in community regeneration. Global Arts Link Ipswich is a prime example of a regional gallery whose informed neutrality allowed it to develop ‘non-judgmental’ programs. Regional galleries are political, social and moralising tools of authority, “they promote respect for all peoples without discrimination. They can promote understanding, tolerance and friendship encouraging those who feel they are on the fringes to play a full part in community life.” (*re:source* 2004: 44) The art

museum, in developing new curatorial methods with tangible outcomes, has the opportunity to become a linchpin whereby the individuality of a community - be it Ipswich, Geraldton, or Horsham - is celebrated locally, and valued nationally. It could be said that, through a 'new form of curatorship' a new country is being cultivated.

There is also the economic potential of cultural tourism, where the regional art gallery is not only a tourist destination, but also a key partner in sculpting out an identity for a town or region. It is the hard-won cultural policy battles that implicate the regional gallery - those that speak of cultural industry strategies being positioned to integrate with social and economic development and environmental strategies: "This allows communities to adapt to change and respond to the challenge of creating a sustainable future for themselves."

(Arts Queensland 2001: 2) Such battles have, as ideals, been negotiated at and through all three levels of government in Australia.

The rhetoric of sustainability embraced by the progressive regional gallery, through the principles and practices of New Museology, has allowed it to shrug off the mantle of tradition and become a vital link in shaping and sustaining communities. Audience and art collection development strategies lure the locals to connect with each other in fundamental ways. Education as lifelong learning, self-actualisation as realised in volunteerism, entertainment and the ability of each museum visitor to delight in "the pride of place" they experience when they visit or revisit their town or district's public art collection are characteristics of the new art museum. When describing the difference between regional galleries and other art museums, it is the intimacy or immediacy with their communities, how the gallery responds to its' unique pulse, which is the essential difference.

## **CHAPTER 2:**

### **THE EMERGENCE OF THE AUSTRALIAN REGIONAL PUBLIC ART GALLERY.**

#### **From colonial beginnings to the New Museology: An overview of the Museum in Australia.**

Contemporary museums are attempting to challenge the dominant view of the museum as a site of power by encouraging informed dialogue, and hence new relations between museums and communities. Labelled the 'New Museology', with advocates such as Karp et al. (1992), Vergo (1989) and Weil (1990) it focuses on the political dimension of museum work with the centrality of community at the heart of the museum enterprise. "It is a position which is succinctly summarised by Viv Szekeres (1995), Director of the Migration Museum in Adelaide, who claims that her museum strives to make 'a place for all of us.'(Witcomb 2003: 79). In his publication *Culture: A reformer's Science* (1998), Tony Bennett insists that while the New Museology grapples with the inherent opposition of the museum and community, museums still shape and regulate the population in "ways that reflect the genesis of cultural politics from within the processes of government" (Bennett 1998: 195). While Bennett articulates the role of the museum as civic reformer, he sees curators as "cultural technicians", professionals working within government rather than opposed to it. Using the Bennett model, museum and art gallery curatorship should be viewed as producing a culture that supports the political principles underpinning the very notions of representation (Witcomb 2003: 80). Bennett also understands that museum or art gallery curatorship is involved in the processes of cultural production as well as representation.

The new museological climate in which a number of contemporary Australian regional art galleries or museums operate sits between the hegemonic nineteenth century public museum model as an instrument of government, and a late twentieth century institution that clearly recognise its particular cultural frameworks as well as those of its audience. To interrogate, and hence

understand, the cultural and economic development potential of the Australian regional art museum or gallery, an exploratory overview of the history of the museum in Australia from its colonial beginnings to its contemporary circumstances is required. Since white settlement, the growth of museums in Australia has been phenomenal. But museum development can't be read in isolation. Museums are accompanied by and interconnected with other cultural institutions. In the nineteenth century, it was with Mechanics' Institutes and Art Societies. In the twentieth century museums became emblematic of modernity (Bourdieu & Darbel 1991; Horne 1984; West 1988). In Australia, museum practices have also contributed to and been informed by the way how Australian art history has been framed, and how Australia's past has been sculptured by the curatorial and administrative practices inherent in museology. To this end, contemporary regional art museum curatorship - the focus of this study - is a product of the past being repositioned in the present.

In the sense that they were established as public institutions, museums in Australia were 'born modern': no revolutions, either intellectual or political were required to break down the doors. But they were unquestionably also creatures of their times and of the class of their creators – open to the public, free to all. (Anderson & Reeves 1994: 5)

When the English settled Australia at the end of the eighteenth, century interest in the scientific and classification was at its pinnacle. It is not surprising that the earliest "exports" from Australia were specimens of flora and fauna destined for major museums and some wealthy collectors in Britain and Europe. For over 60 years, this export trade continued unabated. As early as 1821, some 33 years after European settlement, a group of scientific men in New South Wales established the Philosophical Society, one of the aims of which was to establish a museum of natural history. A small public notice in the *Sydney Gazette* on 6 February 1830 advised of the establishment of a collection and museum. The notice stated:

The public are not generally aware that a beautiful Collection of Australian Curiosities, the property of Government, is deposited in the Old Post Office. This Museums under the Superintendence of Mr Holmes, who, between the hours of ten and three, politely shows the same to any respectable individuals who may think fit to call. (Anderson & Reeves 1994: 4)

Nearing the middle years of the nineteenth century, and with the establishment of the Australian Museum in Sydney (1830) and similar institutions in Victoria and South Australia, a consciousness of Australia as an entity was being formed. This change was evident not only in natural history museums, but also in the representation of Australia by European visual artists, born and trained in Europe, now resident in the colonies. Louis Buvelot, the Swiss-born painter, is an excellent example of a European “eye and sensibility” who translated the Australian countryside into what would be classified by the start of the next century as, iconic and quintessential painted landscapes of Australia.

Throughout the early years of the colony, suspicion about the worth of Australian flora, fauna and its Indigenous origins were rife.

“For at least the first 60 years, Australian scientists cheerfully and uncritically dispatched the most interesting specimens to the country most of them still called home.” (Hale 1956: vii, 2-3; Strahan 1979: 1 -3) Controversy regarding the development of the first public museum - the Australian Museum in Sydney - is clear evidence of a move towards classifying specimens here in Australia. Until this time, classification of specimens had taken place in Britain and Europe. Most of the flora and fauna sent overseas was then held, and continues to be held, in foreign museums.

It is important to note that all Australia’s early museums, while founded by government were developed at the instigation of wealthy men, first with an interest in science and later with pretensions to art and other cultural pursuits. Inspiration was provided by such men such as George Drury, whose 1897 bequest to the Bendigo Art Gallery (the second oldest regional art gallery in the country, established in 1887) to build a court gallery afforded this regional

Victorian goldfields' town its first public art gallery. As Smith (1945: 86-87) has noted, "colonial governments, which were struggling to establish cities, roads, and later schools, seldom had much to spare for museums, which most people continued to see as peripheral to the twin tasks of commercial development and nation building." As a result, attempts to bolster museum funding, from colonial times to the present, have stressed their institutions' economic and cultural and scientific benefits, be they museums of art, history or science.

However great the loss of important scientific material was in the first half century after white invasion, a worldwide fascination for all things "antipodean" encouraged the development of museums in Australia and ensured taxonomic collecting of flora and fauna specimens. No such interest developed in the material culture of Australian Aborigines however. Lacking the analytical framework that was to develop with anthropology in the twentieth century, the nineteenth century scientists were principally interested in the Darwinian - inspired study of the physical characteristics of Indigenous people. A physical manifestation of this study was that of Truganninni, the reputed "last" Aboriginal Tasmanian, whose skeletal remains were still on display at the National Museum of Victoria in the 1950s. Recent repatriation policies and processes, driven in part by social justice principles, Indigenous rights and ethical contemporary museological practices have seen many skeletal and secret sacred objects returned to Indigenous communities. In the closing years of the nineteenth century ethnographers started to see the value in different Indigenous groups. Notions about the "primitive" began to change, and systematic collecting of Aboriginal cultural heritage began in earnest. In this time frame, the communities of northern and western Australia provided a rich source for museums in South Australia and Victoria in particular. It is far to say that Australian social history museums' first engagement with regional Australia can be best understood as an appointment with indignity.

Australia in the late nineteenth century saw the growth of two other museum types: the art museum, progressive from the late 1860s; and the science and technology museum, principally in Melbourne and Sydney. Art

museums had been established in all six Australian colonies by 1895. The Tasmanian Art Gallery and Museum was founded around 1829 with its buildings opening in 1863. Australia's first public art gallery, the National Gallery of Victoria, was opened as part of the Melbourne Public Library in 1861, with a collection of statues, bas-reliefs and paintings. The Art Gallery of New South Wales was officially established in 1874 and the National Gallery of South Australia in 1879. The Art Gallery of Western Australia opened in 1895 with the purchase of the nucleus of the art collection by the Perth Museum. In the same year, the National Gallery of Queensland opened under the direction of Godfrey Rivers, an artist and teacher (McCulloch 1984: 392). During the preparations for the opening of Canberra – Australia's new national capital - in 1927, a Commonwealth Cabinet paper suggested the establishment of a National Museum. It would take until 11 March 2001 for this proposition to become a reality, however.

Technology and art museums have particular associations with the emergence of Australian nationalism and a strong industrial economy - legacies in part from Expositions in Sydney and Melbourne in the last half of the nineteenth century. By the early 1900s, these types of museum would become synonymous with a modern Australia. Nineteenth century art museums saw their *raison d'être* as improving and guiding public taste and education, ideals imported from Europe. Technology museums such as Sydney's Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (The Powerhouse), and Melbourne's Science Museum (a campus museum of the Melbourne Museum) saw their roles as similar to that of their British and American counterparts. These museums asserted the need for a mechanically literate and quiescent working class to be introduced to technology and schooled in part by the museum (Davison 1988; Kusamitsu 1980; Perry 1972: 2-3).

In 1933, a report sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation pointed out the ongoing deficits within Australian museums, but also acknowledged their growth in numbers throughout the country (Markham and Richards 1933: 7). In the main, civic-minded individuals fostered this growth. Museums in general, and art

museums in particular through their display of iconographic landscape painting, contributed to the constructions inherent in national identity building (White 1981). Landscape painting abounds in public regional art gallery collections throughout the nation. Paintings such as -Thomas Clark's *Muntham* c1860, (see the Australian Bicentennial Authority's *Face of Australia: The Land-The Past* catalogue 1988:16), a painting of a quintessential Australian homestead, now in the collection of the City of Hamilton Art Gallery in regional Victoria, and *Spirit of the Bushfire* 1900 by Sydney Long (see the Australian Bicentennial Authority's *Face of Australia: The Land-The Past* catalogue 1988: 31), a watercolour located in the Ballarat Art Gallery collection attest to this fixation with the land (Australian Bicentennial Authority 1988: 16 - 31). These works, and hundreds similar, provided an ever-present connection - albeit illusory at times - with the construct called Australia. Contemporary regional public art museums continue to be involved in the making of public meaning. Similar to other museums, during the twentieth century and early years of the twenty-first century, they have increasingly become sites of contested identity.

Bernard Smith has identified the 1944 exhibition *One Hundred and Fifty Years of Australian Painting* that opened at the School of Arts in Wagga Wagga New South Wales on 10 October as a moment in modern Australia's relationship with the regional art museum. This was the first travelling exhibition curated by the Art Gallery of New South Wales to tour regional New South Wales. In 1939, the New South Wales Art Gallery mounted *the Herald Weekly Times Exhibition of Modern Art*, an event that bought examples of European modernist visual art to Sydney. Five years on, the history of Australian art distilled from the Art Gallery of New South Wales collection and containing a hint of modern Australian visual arts travelled to six regional towns. Art museums such as the Art Gallery of New South Wales, while showing examples of "international modernism", employed museological structures similar to other public art galleries relying on "exhibitory narratives" (Lewi in Giebelhausen 2003: 57) of place. Even today, visitors to this art museum – especially evident in the colonial galleries "are guided through a structured sequence of visual displays" (Lewi, in Giebelhausen

2003: 57). As many commentators have noted, the nineteenth century art museum became an all-pervasive force in representing the very visibility of culture (Lewi, in Giebelhausen 2003: 57).

The New Museology has captured the wider modern fascination with the presentation of “realness” and the authenticity of events, places and artefacts. Peter Vergo coined this term in the late 1980s to describe the “radical re-examination of the role of museums”. (Vergo 1989: 3) Embraced to greater or lesser degrees by curators and art museum administrators alike, it has moved the focus from the object held in trust by the museum to the museum visitor. The art museum’s role, in concert with the museum visitor, is to devise ways in which objects - the material cultural holdings of the art museum - can be interpreted. This new way of thinking about the role and functions of the museum has shifted this institution’s power to take real things from the world and arrange them in “narrativised spatial orders” (Lewi in Giebelhausen 2003: 57) and contact zones: (Clifford 1997: 192).

This term for Clifford becomes a means of opening up the meanings of both colonial and post-colonial museological encounters ... The focus is in cross-cultural experiences. Clifford also focuses on the temporal meaning of “contact” pointing out how colonial experiences are ongoing ones with repercussions in the present”. (Witcomb 2003: 88-89)

The New Museology has introduced multicultural collecting policies, community access and, where appropriate, community advisory groups sometimes called “curatoriums” to mediate between the art museum and the communities it serves. Consequently, the culture of museums and art museums has changed. Gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, indignity and custodianship rather than ownership, mark a new language for many museums. Since the early 1980s, the monolithic institutions, in embracing change, have had to recognise that, while they house major collections, they form part of what has been labelled by the Cultural Ministers Council “the Distributed National Collection”.

The Australian regional gallery, like its city-based counterparts, the state and territory galleries and art museums, is also a significant contributor to the

Distributed National Collection a term coined the Cultural Ministers Council. Often overlooked in debates about Australian culture, this regionally based cultural institution has a 200year history dating back to 1884. Regional art galleries are located in every state and territory throughout this country. They both affect and reflect the communities they serve. Often these galleries are sites of “discontinuity, threshold, limit and transformation” (Crimp 1993: 47). Their hybridity affords them a comfortable seat as cultural players in ‘the new economy’ of regional Australia. The official cultural life of a town or region can focus in part on their ‘local’ icon status.

Sanctioned by local government, this gallery type - along with the civic or town hall, library and entertainment centre - becomes a meeting place a location where community pride and ideologies often clash. Regional galleries can be mechanisms of transformation, allowing a variety of arts practices to work in concert with other disciplines to effect change. These galleries are unashamedly local and parochial. They embrace the problematic provincialism that clearly distinguishes them from city-based public art museums. They are major contributors to the microeconomics of their regions, and are best interrogated through an engagement with collections, public programs and curatorship - their major service delivery functions.

As Sharon Macdonald rightly contends:

Museums occupy an intriguingly paradoxically place in global culture ... Bound up with much that is heralded to be nearing its end – stability and permanence, authenticity, grand narratives, the nation–state, and even history itself - their numbers are growing at an unprecedented rate.” (1999: 1)

But as numbers grow, there exists a tension. Frequently posed questions regarding whom museums are for and what their role should be offer insights into museums in a critical age. For museum professions, the statement “the truth is, we do not know any more what a museum institution is” (Sola 1992: 106) suggests that the ‘white-box cube’ - the modernist art museum, the space that didn’t allow the outside world to come in is in crisis. Modernist gallery spaces are

about “the condition of appearing out of time, or beyond time ... Art exists here in a kind of eternity of display ... this eternity gives the gallery a limbo-like status.” (McEvelley, in O’Doherty 1986: 7). Modernism’s white cube was a transitional device that attempted to bleach out the past and simultaneously control the future. This metaphysical space, a liminal zone, creates hostility – a key coordinate of modernism. The New Museology has opened up the art museum to diverse communities. Exhibitions such as *The People’s Show* exhibitions at many provincial museums in Britain, “to which local people were invited to bring and display their own collections -Smartie tops, teddy bears, beer mats” (Macdonald 1999: 2) have democratised the museum.

Today, a museum visit can take place without leaving home. Museums employ new media, new techniques of interactivity. From the home computer, you can do a virtual tour of galleries and museums around the world. Alongside the insecurity about the museum, is “a diffusion of the museum beyond its walls, a ‘museumification’ of ever more aspects of culture, and a claiming of the museum by ever more sectors of society” (Macdonald 1999: 2).

Communities living and working in regional Australia are keen examples of a sector of contemporary society who embrace their local public galleries in particular ways. They act as key cultural and social loci. They negotiate a nexus between cultural production and consumption, between experts and lay knowledge, through an engagement with and “lure of the local” (Lippard 1994).

### **The contemporary art museum’s precursor: Mechanics Institutes in Australia**

The power of local enthusiasts is fundamental to the history of the Mechanics’ Institute. In Australia, Mechanics Institutes along, with Art Societies, acknowledged the lure of the local - a need by residents of a town or district to make their town more educated and more cosmopolitan.

The concept of these Institutes stemmed from the ideas of John Anderson (1726–96) of Glasgow and Dr George Birkbeck (1776-1840) of Yorkshire. Anderson wanted to divert the search for scientific knowledge into research

benefiting Industry. Birkberk advocated universal education, similar to the benefits acquired from the museum.

The Mechanics' Institute movement in the colonies from the late 1820s to the 1850s was by far the most significant development of in the history of Australia's earliest cultural institutions. The first Institute was founded in Hobart in 1827, just four years after George Birkbeck had initiated the movement in Glasgow and three years after the establishment of an Institute in London (Smith 1975: 95). Considering the fact that the colony of Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) had been settled in 1803, establishing such centres within the first two decades of the colony was significant. In theory, the Mechanics Institutes were established to assist artisans and working men to "improve themselves in their leisure hours through the gaining of useful knowledge which would be made available through a library and lectures given by experts" (Galbally 1992:11).

Today, through their various audience development and public programs, all Australian public art galleries provide continuous opportunities to improve our understandings about what artists may be attempting to say as well as gain useful knowledge. As a public utility, the art contemporary gallery/museum is in the business of lifelong education. Public galleries dependent on their budgets and personnel have virtually become forms of community centres. At any one time, visitors to the art gallery or museum can be engaged in a diverse range of activities from listening to a floor talk, reading a catalogue, attending a formal lecture, browsing in the book or gift shop, having coffee, meeting friends or playing with children and the museum's interactive games. People assemble in public galleries. Their secular character affords them a safe zone status, a place to meet and engage with (at times) un-safe ideas. Mechanics Institutes were colonial community centres; their respectable British character had particular appeal in a society tainted by convictism. While their foundations were based on technology and scientific discovery, their lending libraries provided a respectable leisure activity that was sorely needed in the colonies.

As Strecker (2002) so rightly points out, the Van Diemen's Land Mechanics School of Arts primarily offered instruction in the liberal arts.

Gradually the Institute was taken over by a range of aesthetic issues. Benjamin Duterrau, an early arrival in the colony, delivered a lecture at the Institute “on the importance of cultivating the fine arts in the development of colonial society” (Strecker 2002 : 101). Duterrau compared Plato’s School of Athens as represented by Raphael with the Hobart base Institute when he stated “the School at Hobart Town may do as much in proportion for our little happy community, as the School of Athens has done for the wider world” (Strecker, 2002: 102). While this may appear overly optimistic, there was a genuine belief by Duterrau and others, namely Governor Sir John and Lady Franklin, who had a classical Greek inspired temple built at Acanthe, New Town that the arts and sciences could and should be fostered in the colony. In so doing, it was believed they would help to grow the colony intellectually out of its depraved convict beginnings.

Early examples of regional galleries such as those at Bendigo and Ballarat were established in part “to grow the colony intellectually”. Contemporary galleries such as Global Arts Link Ipswich (GAL), Artspace Mackay in Central Queensland, Hazelhurst at Gymea, south of Sydney, or Bunbury Regional Art Gallery in Western Australia would *all* acknowledge the importance of providing the communities they serve with an intellectual as well as a leisure experience.

With the departure of the Franklins, the Hobart Institute went into decline, to be eclipsed by a second Institute being established in Launceston in 1842. In 1848, John West, a congregational minister and one of the founders of the Launceston Institute, delivered a lecture entitled ‘The Fine Arts in their Intellectual and Social Relation’ to acknowledge the first loan exhibition in Launceston. In the lecture, West “explored the role of art in the history of human evolution, describing the intellectual and moral power of art” (Strecker 2002: 102). West justified the role of art within colonial society on moral grounds, and used the history understandably of European art as an aspirational model. Strecker (2002) astutely observes that these Institutes rarely offered lectures that promoted a specific utilitarian view of the fine arts as a way of improving standards in local manufacturing and the trades. It is interesting to note that

contemporary Australian galleries, both city and regionally based, have not until recently embraced what is now labelled “design” exhibitions. Museums of Applied Arts such as the Powerhouse in Sydney and the Queensland Museum have supported this brief. Kevin Murray’s (1995) ‘craft design’ exhibition could have been one of the first to reconsider trades as craft and design form, connected to the applied arts, yet displaying particular sensibilities. The 2003 National Museum touring exhibition on trades was a benchmark exhibition exploring the fine art/craft/trade divide.

In 1994, the Ipswich Regional Art Gallery (the precursor to Global Arts Link Ipswich established in 1999) mounted *Place Product* an exhibition that investigated the history of ceramics in the Ipswich area. The exhibition was guest curated by Susan Ostling, an academic from Griffith University. Three artists – Rod Bamford, Maree Bracker and Toni Warburton - “ worked with bricks as basic building blocks because bricks in Ipswich had a continuous link with the past. They were the first products manufactured from Ipswich clay in the 1860s ...”(Ostling 1994: 2) According to Ostling: “Situating a local history study in an art gallery is an interesting exercise. In many ways it allows history to be thought of differently.”(1994: 2) This exhibition was an engagement in social history and memory, the utilitarian, the industrial, the scientific, commerce, commodification and the particularity that is Ipswich as place. While its postmodern intent engaged notions of transformation, this exhibition can be clearly read as a product of a neo-colonial curatorship where new readings of colonial industrial and scientific practises are examined within an art museum context. The ideals of the Mechanics Institute - evidence of skilled labour and the pursuit of knowledge by a working class, were the inherent principles conveyed in this exhibition.

Of the 43 lectures delivered in 1841 at the Sydney Mechanics’ School of Arts established in 1833 three were on “Principles of Drawing” by John Skinner Prout, and four on “Principles of Taste” by John Rae (Riley, in Candy and Laurent 1994: 213). In addition to organising lectures on art and drawing classes, the Institutes sometimes collected and displayed art as an adjunct to their instructional programs. According to Strecker (2002), the collections varied

significantly, but among the finest art objects to be collected by the Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts was a set of drawings by Albert Durer. The Slade Professor John Ruskin, who took a keen interest in the development of the Institute, had sent these works to the colony (Izey 2000).

Bernard Smith, in his 1975 publication *Documents on Art and Taste in Australia: The Colonial Period 1770-1914*, suggests that, despite their strong presence in the nineteenth century, Mechanics' Institutes were absorbed as dance halls and snooker pools in country Australia. In the cities, they were mostly forgotten or absorbed into other systems, as is the case in Brisbane. The Mechanics Institute renamed the School of Arts is located Ann Street, the site of the first structured drawing classes in the colony provided by a local artist of note, Joseph Augustus Clarke. It became the foundation on which technical and tertiary visual art education and training began in Queensland. The Queensland College of Art, Griffith University can trace its history in both instruction (teaching) and its collection to the School of Arts and Joseph Augustus Clarke, as a drawing instructor there in 1881. (Douglas 1995). The Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts today remains committed to its initial aim of delivering cultural and educational programs to the public. A number of town halls in regional and rural Australia often blended the role played by the Mechanics' Institutes and School of Arts, with local governance, as is the case in Ipswich, Queensland, where the town hall, established in 1862, became the central location for all that was civic, educational, and entertaining in Ipswich for more than a century. This nineteenth century Town Hall housed fine art exhibitions. It was the location where Henry Lawson gave a lanternslide talk to Ipswich Grammar School pupils (captured as one of the thousands of stories that can be accessed from the permanent interactive displays located in GAL's Hall of Time gallery space) and it was there touring troupes such as the Magnet Brothers performed their acrobatic feats.

While the Australian working class was the focus for the establishment of Mechanics' Institutes or School of Arts, the colony also housed in places like Adelaide and Brisbane middle-class aspirants and arbiters of taste such as Thomas Wilson, an English solicitor and art collector. Wilson was an early

advocate of the British Museum as the preferred model of cultural institution, and his articles on the fine arts in the *Adelaide Magazine (1843-46)* include a lecture on “The Print Room of the British Museum” (Strecker 2002: 103).

As Bennett states in *Culture A Reformer's Science* (1998: 149):

In Australia and America where, for related nationalist reasons, art – as primarily European in its associations – had never suggested itself as quite so useful a civic resource as nature, the power for civic good that was attributed to art nonetheless remained a continuing influence: in the programs of the various Schools of art and Mechanics' Institutes that had been established in most Australian towns of any size (see Candy and Laurent 1994) as well as, in the American context, in the educational programs which institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art began to organise from the 1870s.

Bennett claims that, during the last half of the nineteenth century, art museums were tending to act as “social marker institution for the urban middle classes and by and large, had vacated the field of popular instruction “(1998: 149). By the end of the nineteenth century, established regional art galleries such as Bendigo and Ballarat, because of their symbolic connections with city growth and prestige, certainly acted as social maker institutes but, unlike their city-based counterparts, they formed a small coterie of public institutions - schools, Mechanics' Institutes, church guilds - as the only places in a town or a region where universal education principles were enacted.

Similar to its antecedents – the Mechanics' Institute - the colonial regional art gallery was a telling example of an architecture without real precedent, without much demand regarding physical and historical context, but with significant public, social and educational obligations to the basic levels of a meaningful existence and the formation of identity in an emerging culture. For almost a century, failure on the part of the regional public art gallery to move beyond its platitudinous social marker concerns and its traditional museological practices, limited these cultural institutions from making truly significant educational and leisure/entertainment contributions to their developing rural and

regional towns. It would require informed social and cultural policy at federal and state government levels to trickle down to local government for change to occur. The establishment of the Australia Council for the Arts in the early 1970s heralded such change. The New Museology, current since the late 1990s, together with informed community development action, has seen the regional gallery become integral to a community's social fabric and identity. Australian regional art gallery history, sitting alongside that of Mechanics' Institutes and Art Societies, speaks about the development of Australian cultural institutions, and national identity, making. But, more than any other cultural institution, the regional gallery has become synonymous with the identity of place, and also the identity that a people or groups have *with* place. Colonialists had to "take possession" of a place, to create meaning. The creation of meaning is organic and ever-changing. Regional galleries, if they are vital and connected to their communities, are sites where meaning about place and the local is constructed.

### **Art Societies and the Art Museum: A promotion of the fine arts**

While the history of Mechanics Institutes is important in developing a succinct understanding of the foundations of the contemporary Australian public art gallery, the formation and development of Art Societies were also important contributors. Unlike the Mechanics' Institutes, the Art Societies were devoted exclusively to promoting the fine arts in the colonies. Also based on British models, these societies organised lectures, *conversazione*, and annual exhibitions:

The three exhibitions organised by Sydney's Fine Art Society, consisting mostly of loan works by local artists such as Conrad Martens, John Skinner Prout, George French Angus, Frederick Garling, Samuel Thomas Gill, and Marshall Claxton, were held at the Australian Library in Bent Street in 1847, at the Barrack Square in 1849 and the Mechanics' School of Arts in 1857. By contrast, the recently established South Australian Society of arts included imported works of art rather than local works in its first exhibition in 1857. (Strecker 2002: 104)

In 1856, the Victorian Fine arts Society was formed its aim being “to advance the cause of Fine Arts in Australia” (Strecker 2002: 104). Many of the committee members including Eugene von Guerard, from Vienna, and Nicholas Chevalier from London, were lured to the country by gold rush fever. The Society’s objectives were to hold annual exhibitions, organise an art union, and establish a collection of pictures and a library. The Society was short-lived, but it was through the original *conversazione* that established the Society that the leading art critic and member of the committee, James Smith, proposed the establishment of a National Art Gallery

“The imperial models of such an institution were the British Museum and the National Gallery in London ” (Galbally 1992: 10),

One of the prime advocates for a National Gallery was Redmond Barry, an Anglo-Irish supreme Court Judge who arrived in Melbourne in 1839, and who became the Judge at the infamous Ned Kelly trial some decades later. In two lectures delivered at the Mechanics’ Institute in 1847, Barry:

talked about the universal qualities of the fine arts and their centrality to the development of a civilised community. He argued for the widest possible base for community participation in cultural activities. Barry’s firm belief in the educational purpose of public cultural institutions demonstrated his commitment to progressive nineteenth-century ideas about collective urban idealism. (Galbally 1995: 87)

Barry’s beliefs were not dissimilar to those expressed by George Brown Goode in elaborating his view of the museums as “passionate reformers”. Goode used this phrase to refer to “the modern Museum idea” in his influential *Principles of Museum Administration* in 1895. While the “idea” had an international currency, even in colonial Australia, through the efforts and ideals of influential citizens such as Judge Barry, the role of the museum and the art gallery as “cultural reformers” had been canvassed by Sir Henry Cole and John Ruskin since the mid-nineteenth century. For Cole, the museum would assist the workingman to *choose* a life characterised by moral restraint as preferable to the temptations of the brothel and the alehouse. Cole stated in 1884:

If you wish to vanquish Drunkenness and the Devil ... give him music in which he may take his part, show him pictures of beauty ... open all museums of Science and Art ... let the working man get his refreshment there in company with his wife and children .... The Museum will certainly lead him to wisdom and gentleness, and to Heaven .... (Cole in Bennett 1995: 21)

Judge Barry became the President of the Board of Trustees to establish a National Gallery in Melbourne. The gallery was formally established in 1869 and a National Gallery School of Art in 1870. The collection policy, and subsequently the collection were modelled on London's National Gallery Collection, with Sir Charles Eastlake, Director of the National Gallery in London and President of the Royal Academy providing, on request, a selection of eleven contemporary British, European and American pictures to represent the foundation of an national art collection. During the second half of the nineteenth century, international and inter-colonial exhibitions were an important contributing factor in the formation of the first public art collections in Australia, and created a real public interest in the visual arts. Exhibitions became important "tools in the imperialising process" (Smith 1998: 43).

By the end of the nineteenth century, public galleries had been established in what were to become the capital cities of Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart and Perth. The precise date on which the Art Gallery of New South Wales was founded is debatable. Which event constitutes a formal foundation - the birth of an art society from whose activities and members the Gallery emerged, the government vote of funds towards the formation of a public collection or the provision of a physical home for this collection? Each of these events occurred quite separately. Administratively, however, the Gallery owes its genesis to the New South Wales Academy of Art.

The first *Conversazione* or artistic *soirée* of the New South Wales Academy of Art took place on 7 August 1871. The meeting discussed the Franco-Prussian war and the 1870s revolution in Paris, and resolved that the colony of New South Wales needed to carry the touch for the arts and culture,

since war torn Europe was in chaos. Cultural idealism became only one factor in the development of the Gallery. A building was erected with great speed between August and November 1879 on what are presently Hyde Park and the Botanic Gardens. It was built of iron and timber and contained nine moderately sized galleries. At the close of the Sydney International Exhibition on 20 September, Lord Loftus officially opened the Annex as the “Art Gallery of New South Wales”. Subsequently it moved to its present position on Art Gallery Road.

The Art Gallery's impressive collection of late nineteenth century Australian art is due largely to the tradition, begun in 1875, of acquiring local contemporary paintings:

One of the first decisions made by the Trustees, when entrusted with the initial vote of £500, was to commission the watercolour Apsley Falls from Conrad Martens, the most respected artist in the colony. The bulk of the first grant of £500, however, did not go on local works but towards the purchase of English watercolours. In London, Nicholas Chevalier and Colin Smith bought six landscapes, all by late Victorian artists now largely forgotten. For the second vote of £500 a single oil painting was acquired, Ford Madox Brown's *Chaucer at the Court of Edward III*. The European collections were initially based on a policy of acquiring contemporary British and Continental art on the recommendations of art advisers in London and Paris. (Art Gallery of New South Wales website, July 2004)

There had always been rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne. From the 1850s, the Victorian colony had shown an interest in the visual arts, with a gallery established in 1861. In addition, the gold rush in Victoria (1850) was responsible for the establishment of the first regional public art galleries in Ballarat (1884) and Bendigo (1887). It was through the establishment of cultural institutions such as art galleries and museums that the colonies took on the aesthetic universalities of British imperialism and culture. These establishments embraced a Eurocentric view of art history and its value systems. It is telling that the imported constructs of art history are still observed on display in all Australian public art galleries today.

It is important to dwell on the nineteenth century for a little longer because while Cole and Ruskin were championing the museum and the art gallery for their social reformist role, the museum, from the mid-nineteenth century, can be viewed as “a technology of behaviour management, served to organise new types of social cohesion precisely through the new forms of both differentiating and aligning populations it brought into being” (Bennett 1990: 48). Bennett argues that the English museum and art gallery offered an art and cultural resource that was enlisted in the service of governing, a strategy for the working-class population to ‘choose’ a moral and industrious course of life for themselves as a matter of personal responsibility or self-regulation (Bennett 1994:30).

At this juncture, it is important to consider the growth of museums and art galleries in pre-Federation Australia from a perspective of art, power and government. While local citizens such as Redmond Barry used the art museum and its collection as a vehicle for social cohesion, reform, education and enlightenment, the international exhibitions, fashioned after London’s Great Exhibition of 1851 and evidenced in Melbourne at Australia’s first exhibition building completed in 1854 (to show the Victorian exhibits being sent overseas to the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1855), were another means whereby the English governance of culture was transferred into the colony. Australia held its first International Exhibition in 1879 in Sydney and a second in Melbourne in 1888. This Centennial International Exhibition celebrated the colony’s first 100 years of white settlement. International exhibitions have legacies that can be measured in terms of buildings - the Exhibition Buildings located next to Melbourne Museum being an example - but more importantly, they stimulated the development of museum building in this country. A direct legacy of the 1879 Sydney International Exhibition was the Museum of Applied Arts and Science, known today as “The Powerhouse”. Just as the 1851 Great Exhibition in London affected museum development in Britain, Australian-based international exhibitions also stimulated the development of museums. These museums would become firmly connected to Australia’s national identity-building and assist in place-making.

The public art museum in colonial Australia can be read as a site where art, power and governance coalesce. Jones (1982) writes:

Two major stratagems can be detected in this christianising and ‘civilising’ activity [for the poor]. The first was to use legislation to create a physical and institutional environment [the art museum] in which undesirable working-class habits and attitudes would be deterred, while private philanthropy could undertake the active propagation of a new code. (Jones, in Bennett, Martin & Waites 1982: 98).

### **Art history in Australia: Curatorship’s framer**

Over the last 30 years, a number of Australian-based writers (Stewart 1974; B. Smith 1975; T. Smith 1983; Sayers 1998) have written about the institutional origins of art history in Australia. As Strecker (2002) notes there has been a tendency to reconstruct art history’s history in Australia, a twentieth century phenomenon linked to the establishment and development of art history departments in Australian universities. If one posits a definition of “art history as research in the history of art” (Strecker 2002: 100) then the origins of art history in Australia can be found in the nineteenth century. This century in Australia saw the emergence of a range of cultural institutions faithful to the ideal of extending public knowledge about art: “From the 1830s to the 1880s art institutions, artists’ societies and public art museums flourished in four of the six colonies”. (Strecker 2002: 100)

Hobart, Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne established various cultural institutions during this period. Brisbane established a public art gallery in 1895. While these institutions can now be considered, in postcolonial terms, as merely a form of cultural imperialism, which developed in all the British colonies, they reinforced the centre, periphery construct central to an understanding of imperialism. As Strecker (2002: 100) so rightly points out, “these institutions where the first manifestations of antipodean culture combining imperial models with the unique local situation of colonial culture’.

Strecker (2002) clearly acknowledges the fact that Australia's first cultural institutions originated in a context of colonial regionalism, and that this set a prototype of fierce regional competition between cultural institutions that survives to the present day. In considering the current competition between the three state galleries of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, all three cultural institutions would acknowledge the importance of each gallery's history and each gallery's strategic plan to secure individuality as well as their unashamed niche market positions in the competitive twenty-first century cultural environment. Through the curatorship of successive Asia Pacific Triennials, the Queensland Art Gallery has aligned itself with the scholarship and interrogation of visual culture from the Asia Pacific region. Curatorship and management of the *Sydney Biennale*, *Perspecta* and *Archibald Prize* exhibitions, blending the local and the international - a significant feature of postmodern museum practices - has reinforced the Art Gallery of New South Wales' position in the globalisation of contemporary art, while, the National Gallery of Victoria's, (NGV) ongoing employment of the term "national" in the gallery's full title, acknowledges its status as the oldest Australian art museum. The title subsequently implies a national perspective regarding visual arts and culture. The NGV's position is reinforced by the gallery's endowment of the once enormous Fenton Bequest, which made the National Gallery of Victoria one of the most richly endowed galleries in the British Empire. The recent decision to place the Gallery's Australian Art Collection at Federation Square has privileged this collection into a single building. It provides cultural and international tourists with a one-stop shop. The Ian Potter Centre NVG at Federation Square, Melbourne is a far cry from the colony's obsession with a public gallery that housed only imported European visual arts.

In 1829, the Scottish Presbyterian Minister John McGarvie, writing on the state of fine art in New South Wales' stated:

The fine arts may seem a misnomer for foul arts, when applied to this Colony. Nevertheless, it gives us pleasure to undeceive the patrons of so preposterous a sentiment. Forty years is a period in which Britons can

work wonders. The Muses and Graces are not inimical to our southern clime; and we have no doubt that they will take up their residence amongst us. (McGarvie, in B. Smith 1975: 65)

McGarvie's observation, while appearing overstated, supports John Lhotsky 1839 article entitled "Australia, in Its Historical Evolution". (Lhotsky in Smith 1975: 71-6). Both authors measure the development of art and taste in the colonies against the quality of imported works. These observations privileged imported artwork over the locally produced article. This attitude pervaded colonial culture and has resonances today in a various aspects of Australian society. It has a contemporary manifestation in the Australian regional public art gallery. This cultural institution had its beginnings in colonial Australia but, unlike its state gallery contemporaries, the regional gallery is constantly in a state of tension, where privileging the imported over the local artwork or practices has its limitations and liabilities. As a postcolonial public cultural organization, the regional gallery's genesis is that of a public utility charged with public education, but it carries the scars of its peripheral circumstances in history, geography and national significance. Regional art gallery colonial collections such as those at Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong were acquired primarily as examples of European good taste and values.

The 2002, touring exhibition *A Primrose from England: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Narratives from the Collection of the Bendigo Art Gallery* is a contemporary example of a contemporary regional art gallery's commitment to its collection, and the history of that institution. The exhibition focused on a selection of Victorian narrative paintings and sculpture from the permanent collection. The exhibition highlighted nineteenth century allegorical tales, stories of sentimentality, nostalgia with poetic and literary overtones, themes of love, duty, forgiveness, death and human tragedy. A large proportion of the exhibition comprised early acquisitions that reflect, the taste and attitudes of the colonial period.

Following the discovery of gold and the wealth that it generated, Bendigo took on the hallmarks of a Victorian city. The exhibition explored the transplanting

of social and cultural ideals along with elements of the English lifestyle in order to cultivate a newfound land. In the 1880s, the Art Galleries of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia were keen to collect paintings with subject-matter reminiscent of Britain and Europe. Sir Charles Eastlake, a trustee of the National Gallery, London, had been employed as 'a spotter' – to identify artworks suitable for selected Australian public art galleries. The Bendigo Art Gallery was keen to provide the burgeoning city with examples of Victorian moral painting.

The oil painting *A Primrose from England* by Edward Hopley exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1855, was the focus of this exhibition:

The painting conveys a richly layered narrative on the dual themes of immigration and colonization. Hopley was inspired by the reports of an actual event ... of the transportation of a primrose from the home country to Melbourne - to the profound excitement of the colonial populace. (Brimacombe 2002: 46).

Hopley's depiction of the event is accurate, revealing that homesickness and nostalgia preoccupied colonial society:

The artist has captured a true impression of the cross section of social classes and types that populated the colonies... As well as engaging with the trend for an art inspired by the public awareness of the waves of emigration that gathered momentum during the nineteenth century, Hopley's painting is a prime example of how Victorian narrative artists were influenced by the ideology that linked physiognomy to character and class (Brimacombe 2002: 46).

While Hopley's picture became the centrepiece for this contemporary exhibition, it is important to note that the picture was once owned by George Lansell, a famous mining magnate who at one time displayed this work in Fortuna, his Bendigo residence. The Lansell family gifted *A Primrose from England* in 1964 to the Bendigo Art Gallery Collection. As an exhibition, *Primrose*, while reinforcing the colonial predisposition for all things English or European, offers the contemporary art museum visitor an understanding of the richness of just one regional art gallery collection.

The Australian Bicentennial Authority (ABA) 1988 touring exhibition projects, *The Face of Australia: The Land the Past, The Land the Present, The People the Past and the People the Present* which toured regional Australian art museums during 1988 and 1989, provided further examples of regional art gallery curatorship. Sponsored by the Rothmans Foundation, three curators from regional art museums - David Hansen from Mt Gambier in South Australia; Margaret Rich; the Director of the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery and Peter Timms, Executive Officer of the Regional Galleries Association of New South Wales had an opportunity to curate four travelling exhibitions celebrating 200 years of white settlement and art collecting. The four exhibitions were shown together at the City of Ballarat Fine Art Gallery from July to August 1988 before touring to ten other regional art museums throughout the country. In a Forward to the catalogue for each exhibition, the then Prime Minister R.J.L. Hawke stated:

*The Face of Australia ... is a stimulating survey of the way art affects and /or reflects perceptions of our physical and social environment. It also serves, most importantly, to focus attention on the source of the exhibition: a network of almost one hundred regional galleries spread across Australia. The exhibition recognises the diversity of our regional galleries ... Taken together, regional galleries contain what is arguably a definitive collection of Australian art. (ABA *The Face of Australia* exhibition catalogues 1988).*

This exhibition was remarkable in a number of ways. It was the first major exhibition project of regional artworks that contribute to the National Distributed Collection:

The enormous wealth of the regional collections [had] never been brought to the nation's attention before [1988] ... and the exhibition[s] pose [d] both unfamiliar works and works which reflect [the] collecting specialisations (for example Ararat – textiles, Shepparton – ceramics ... (Sarah in ABA *The Face of Australia* exhibition catalogues 1988).

Art history in regional Australia has been and continues to be, assiduously developed through the collection of artworks located in public art galleries.

Evidenced by *the Face of Australia* exhibitions, regional art collections individually and collectively speak about “the Australian geographic and social environment ... the dynamic and expressive combination of images and styles within the framework of ‘national identity’ (Sarah in ABA *The Face of Australia* exhibition catalogues 1988).

### **Formation of an Australian past and articulating the present**

In 1933, the Museums Association of London published *A Report on the Museums and Art Galleries of Australia*. It was commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and prepared by British museologists Markham and Richards. The report was damning in that it suggested Australian museums were poorly funded in comparison with their British, European, American and even New Zealand counterparts. Their growth was haphazard due to state rivalries, with no national museum service. Markham and Richards (1933) were also astonished to find an almost total lack of interest in either collecting or exhibiting historical materials. Outside of Vaucluse House in Sydney and Parliament House Canberra, the National Gallery of Victoria was the only location where nineteenth century furniture was on display: “In no museums were there reproductions of the buildings occupied by the earlier settlers, one of the most notable gaps in the whole of the existing museum collections.” (Markham and Richards 1933: 441)

In posing the question of why this should be so, the answer is somewhat multi-dimensional. Firstly, museum curators had been recruited from mainly geology and biology. No historians were appointed to these positions. In nineteenth century Australia, the range of museums was commensurate with European and American counterparts. The Macleay Museum at the University of Sydney had developed a significant archaeology focus, but collectively Australian museums had amnesia when it came to Australian history. It took until after World War I for Australia to begin to develop a “public historical sphere” (Bennett 1995: 136). While the Place Vendome in Paris and Nelson’s Column in Trafalgar Square, and their equivalents in many European towns and cities, memorialised not only wars, but also military heroes and freedom fighters, relatively, few

Australian examples considered nationalism through public monuments. With the savage depletion of Australian manhood post-1918, however the phenomena of the war memorial encouraged a form of nationalism to surface by default of grief. Frank Williams of Ipswich Queensland is an example of a stonemason whose business was in the design and construction of War Memorials:

In the years between 1917 and 1932, [Williams and Co] supplied fifteen memorials to World War I, mostly in the Moreton and Brisbane Valley regions ... Williams was inventive in his use of local materials and pioneered the use of Ulam marble from Rockhampton for monumental work. (McKay, in Douglas 1999: 55).

Bennett (1995) suggests heritage legislation in Australia was slow to develop, and it certainly wasn't visible until the Australia Council of National Trust was developed in 1965. Australian history was a vexed question during the 1880s and 1890s. During this time, many social commentators argued that there was little or no history in Australia worthy of commemorating or preserving. During this time-frame the nation's past was being played out in pictures. By the 1890s, the National Gallery of Victoria and the Art Gallery of New South Wales had both acquired artwork executed by Australian-based artists. A work by Tom Roberts entitled *Shearing the Rams* was acquired by the New South Wales Gallery, while William Strutt's *Black Thursday*, a monument painting of bushfire was acquired for the State Library of Victoria. Nationalism was being played out through landscape and some history paintings. Both of these paintings employed the tropes of place, and event to imply nation. Isabel McBryde suggests that: "what was lacking in colonial Australia at this time was not real historical events but a mould through which such events might be cast into representations that would be consistent with the largely Euro centric lexicons of nationalism and history"(McBryde 1985: 8 - 9). Galipoli, "a symbol of the nation's entrance into Real History" (Ross 1985: 15) was possibly the event that galvanised Australia into understanding that it had a history and a notion of its nation state-sovereignty.

Nicos Poulantzas has argued that the modern state “establishes a unique relationship between time and space, between history and territory, in organising the unity of nation in the form of a ‘*historicity of a territory and territorialisation of a history*’ (Poulantzas, in *Bennett 1995: 141*). The historicisation of the territory and the territorialisation of history are played out in the contemporary art gallery /museum context. Indigenous and migrant communities now play a part in the nation’s unfolding unity. The land and nature seem to “loom out of a immemorial past“ (Anderson 1983: 19).

*Blak Insight*, a recent exhibition of Indigenous art from the collection of the Queensland Art Gallery, which was on display in the Queensland Art Gallery from July to October 2004, is a perfect example of the historical and the territorial conflated. Works by Tracey Moffatt interrogate a regional Australia where the history and circumstances of an imaged rural location place are displayed in concert with Ken Thiaday’s tribal headdresses. Time and space, history and territory are (within the confines of the Queensland Art Gallery Collection and the curatorial premise the curator has engaged) played out as constructs of Aboriginality and native. In this exhibition, nation is implied through the margins and the periphery – locations where Australian Indigenous peoples have been placed within the predominant white nation-state.

With the election of the Whitlam Labor government in 1972, the government appointed the Hope Committee to inquire into the establishment of a National Estate. In 1974, the Piggott Committee inquiry into museums and the national collection was established. This committee recommended the establishment of a Museum of Australia and suggested that a Gallery of Aboriginal Australia be incorporated within the museum. The same committee noted that interest in local and municipal museums during the 1960s, in particular, made it possible for new museum types, such as Sovereign Hill and Timbertown, to emerge. Bennett (1995) has noted the major state and national institutions subjected these dispersed local initiatives to a strongly unifying centripetal tendency during the lead-up to the Bicentennial year. He claims that the 1988 Australian Bicentennial Authority provided museum and heritage project

funding for museums such as the Bicentennial Historical Museum at Landsborough, 30 kilometres north of Brisbane, and the Cooe Park Bicentennial Local History Museum at Gilgandra, as well as the Stockman's Hall of Fame in Longreach in western Queensland. Such regional museums were where complemented by the opening of state institutions such as the new Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. At a national level the opening of the Maritime Museum at Darling Harbour in Sydney and the travelling Australian Bicentennial Exhibition implied a unity and coherence from the local museum to its flagship national counterpart.

While I agree with Bennett that the Bicentennial galvanised and unified a disparate pre-1980s museum sector as a component part of the Australian cultural landscape, its effects are somewhat problematic to analyse coherently. While local history or social history museums were embraced in the Bicentennial push to create new and imagined understandings of what this "Australia was, is and can be" the local regional galleries throughout Australia were providing, collectively and individually, other understandings of the local, place and histories that contribute to national identity. Well-established regional art museums such as the Ballarat and Bendigo Art Galleries, founded in the gold rush fever that swept regional and rural Victoria in the second half of the nineteenth century, provided 1980s Australia with well-established civic art collections that not only referred to various Australian pasts or histories, local and national in perspective, but also locally constructed, tangible images of land, place and people imagined and factually correct.

The travelling Bicentennial Exhibition selected artworks from these and other regional civic art collections to present a smorgasbord of images, as four interconnected exhibitions under the title *The Face of Australia* toured the country. This exhibition project provided strong evidence that the visual arts were and remain one of the most significant schemas through which the articulation of nation and national identities is constructed. Regional gallery collections are a fertile arena in which ideas about the local, the national, and the international and "the other" intersects.

While serving a particular place, the regional art gallery has the responsibility of a civic collection that is broader than its local remit. GAL a new-model regional art museum opened in May 1999, and its inaugural exhibition *People, Places and Pastimes: challenging perspectives of Ipswich* (May to July 1999), complemented by the publication *Exploring Culture and Community for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Global Arts Link Ipswich: a new model for public art museums* are pertinent examples of a local art collection -the City of Ipswich Collection - and a regional gallery's use of the exhibition and the book to interrogate the place that is Ipswich and its place in the nation.

### **Lineage and the Australian regional public art gallery**

The genesis of the nineteenth century Australian public art gallery is derived from an amalgam of influences. While European in scope, the direct influences can be understood from immediate English examples. These examples include more than museums. The Exposition is also a primary force in the shaping of the museum in colonial Australia. The British Museum, founded in 1759, principally as semi-public reference collection of books and manuscripts, the National Gallery, London, established in 1823, and the Natural History Museum in South Kensington opened as a direct outcome of the Great Exposition of 1851 (Hooper-Greenhill 1992) are museum models that were appropriated into colonial Australia. Since the 1830s, these and other various models of public utilities were transplanted, distilled and appear in numerous amalgamated forms in the Australian context.

From this lineage, the Australian "state" gallery model was established. This hybridised model found in each state and territory was driven by imperatives of civic pride and a vocal still growing small business cohort, together with *nouveau riche*, landed squattocracy interests and a local intelligentsia similar to those found in the English and European circumstances. This art gallery model was established in rural Australia by the 1880s. While nineteenth century Australia became the site for hybridised and reconditioned and transplanted civic

cultural utilities, the ideals of English regionalism did not transit to Australian in quite the same way as the public art gallery model.

Regionalism is quintessential to Britain and Europe. The national psyche of nation states in Europe embraces regional difference. Language, accent, cuisine, customs, folklore and architecture, are some of the features of the local that accumulate to create nations such as England. Colonial Australia, as a predominately white European society imposing its will and might on Indigenous peoples, saw regionalism from a settler perspective. Australian towns grew out of the confluence of transportation nodes, sites for food and industry, communication networks, growth of population, and discovery - all imperatives of a young and economically secure nation. The old adage that Australia grew out of the primary industries of wheat, wool, beef and mining was a stark reality until the election of Whitlam Labor government in 1972.

### **The regional public art gallery in nineteenth century Australia: Ballarat and Bendigo transplanted models**

Built in 1884, the Ballarat Fine Art Gallery in Victoria is Australia's oldest regional gallery. Since 1895, this gallery has housed the Eureka Flag, an important historical relic, symbolising this country's only armed rebellion that lasted just six days in 1854 on the Victoria goldfields.

While regional towns like Ballarat and Bendigo were established by the gold fever of the late nineteenth century, the civic galleries that were established in these centres were founded by the civic leaders of the time on an understanding that, for a town to be truly prosperous, the local economy had to be augmented by a cultural economy. The regional art galleries of Ballarat and Bendigo were able to provide physical spaces – galleries where taste, enlightenment, sensibility and protocols cohabited, symbols of a cultural economy in action - albeit within the confines of one cultural institution. The growing prosperity of settler Australia is evident in the physicality of these galleries, both in terms of their architecture and art collections. Collecting art became one measure of a town's sophistication and prosperity.

The Bendigo Art Gallery, while acknowledged today for its splendid nineteenth century collections displayed in colourful Victorian courts, is an example of Victorian benefaction and civic pride. The collection holds works by Alfred Sisley, complimented by works by contemporaries such as Daubigny or Pierre Puvis de Chavannes. The collection has excellent examples of what has been labelled “Victorian sentimental” painting. Pictures such as *Homeless* by Thomas Kennington (1890) illustrate the plight of a mother and her young son, homeless and unwell on the streets of London. “The decorative arts of English eighteenth and nineteenth century silver, porcelain, glass and furniture also have their riches, crowned by the magnificent *Meissen Vase* with golden, painted scenes, encrusted with flowers, fruit and figures.” (Thomas 1990: 9).

Bendigo as 1850s goldfield town is well represented in the collection, with a large and varied group of works. Through their works, artists such as S.T. Gill - the most popular artists of the Victorian goldfields - Ludwig Becker, a German artist who scrupulously and in minute detail recorded the ongoing, ever- evolving goldfields life and landscape, provide this regional city collection with both a topographical and romantic currency. Recorded history, together with a sense of place and “the local” are captured in this collection. Bendigo’s art collection, together with the physical environment that is the gallery, provides one of the earliest Australian examples of regionalism in the visual arts. Within the constructed “Today”, this colonial collection displayed in gallery courts blends Victorian taste and sensibility with a cultural tourist experience. Here yester-year meets nowadays. Bendigo’s heritage arts collection and Victorian galleries are carefully blended with a contemporary art collection orchestrated by the 1990s architectural vision of Melbourne-based architect Kastalides.

The transplantation of the European art gallery model to colonial Australia did not embrace models such as that developed by John Ruskin (1819-1900), the renowned Victorian critic, and art historian. It is important to note that Ruskin was once an adviser to the National Gallery of Victoria. Ruskin provides us with an interesting English regional museum model, established in 1871. It was designed to serve Ruskin’s utopian community - the Guild of St George in the

country near Sheffield, a major regional centre noted for its steel industry and a large community of metalsmiths. While this museum collection was eccentric in character, "its craft and visual art focus embraced the local flora and fauna, in addition to historic metalcrafts."(Morley 1984: 72-73) The community in which the museum was established never proposed the museum, Ruskin had designed a museum based entirely on the needs of a regional art community, in this case metalsmiths. The museum embraced a sense of place and community while celebrating regionalism. It is curious to speculate why the National Gallery of Victoria did not further investigate the Guild of St George museum model. It is important to note that, by 1871, Ruskin was more than middle-aged.

While some Victorians may have been aware of the Guild, the impetus in Australia during the Victorian age was to build significant city-based collections. At this time, Australia was focused on metropolitan economies and their cultural landscapes. The regions were seen as primary producers and by default not requiring of art galleries.

### CHAPTER 3:

## CULTIVATING THE COUNTRY: REGIONALISM AND THE PUBLIC ART GALLERY. LIVING WITH THE ARTS IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

In 1987, the Regional Galleries Association of New South Wales received a grant from the New South Wales Bicentennial Council to coordinate a series of exhibitions:

one in each member gallery - on the theme of contemporary art and life in the state. These exhibitions opened together on Wednesday, 8 June 1988. The majority had a strong local focus ... on regionalism ...”

(Timms & Christine 1988: 2)

As well as the grant for the exhibition project, the Bicentennial Council also provided funds for a related publication. A number of meetings were held in regional galleries across the state, and a consensus reached by the collective that this publication “should explore and illustrate the special relationship that a regional gallery has to its community” (Timms & Christine 1988: 2). In 1988, Peter Timms and Robyn Christie edited *Cultivating the Country: Living with the arts in regional Australia*, a seminal text that considered a raft of issues around the regional gallery, its place and significance in the cultural landscape of regional Australia. This publication was the first of its kind: individual regional galleries had previously published catalogues and ‘room brochures’, but this publication explored the individual and collective impact of regional galleries across New South Wales.

In the introduction to this anthology, Timms states:

Strictly by definition, regional galleries are at least partly funded by their communities, allow regular access, employ qualified staff and are not for profit. In other words, they provide a genuine public service; but the ways in which they serve their publics vary greatly from one gallery to another and their roles are constantly changing (1988: 2).

The publication can also be read as a photo essay of individual and communities at work. It presented “an aspect of country life that we do not often

see because it does not fit any comfortable and simplistic stereotypes. (There is hardly a bush hat or a kangaroo to be seen.)” (1988: 4). Nine writers provide various readings of the regional art gallery in context. Mary Rose Liverani and Peter Skrzynecki develop overviews of regional environments; Bernard Smith provides an historical perspective in writing about the New South Wales Country Art Exhibition Scheme in the 1940s while Daniel Thomas considers how the galleries in regional 1980s Australia, can maintain the core value commitments of museology - collecting and scholarship. John Mc Donald, Michael Bogle and Robyn Williams examine various aspects of regionalism and its centre-margin dialogue. Beatrice Faust examines the often-vexed relationship between local government and the regional gallery.

*Cultivating the Country: Living with the arts in regional Australia* articulates the faces and voices of ordinary people who become visible and audible through art, photography and journalism. As much as it is about the Australian regional public art gallery, its focus is largely on regionalism. The book is a search for the primal spatial and spiritual structure of the country as identified and articulated through the visual arts. In the art world, the conservative 1950s saw regionalism denigrated and dismissed, in part because of its political associations with conservative government - in particular the Australian Country Party – and also due to its narrative optimism, which could be traced back to the golden summers of the Heidelberg School.

While regional public art galleries have been present in the Australian cultural landscape since the establishment of the first gallery in Ballarat in 1884, the 1980s witnessed the largest growth in the sector with the establishment of over twenty galleries throughout regional and rural Australia (Regional Galleries Association of Queensland 1988: 40). Often as a result of funding tied to the Bicentennial celebrations, the growth of regional galleries in the 1980s established a trend, which continued with slightly less vigour in the 1990s and into the new century. This growth implies the importance of this institution as a key player in Australian culture: “Culture is usually understood to be what defines place and its meaning to people. But place equally defines culture.” (Lippard

1997: 11) The complexity, diversity and contradictions that are *Place* are articulated through the regional art gallery's programs.

### **Taking art to the country**

On 10 October 1944 an exhibition titled *One Hundred and Fifty Years of Australian Painting* opened at the School of Arts Wagga Wagga in New South Wales. It contained colonial, art together with a broad survey of contemporary artists, including women. This was the first travelling exhibition from the Art Gallery of New South Wales. It included both works from the gallery's collection and borrowed works. To Bernard Smith's (1988) knowledge, it was the first touring exhibition of original artworks to be shown in country Australia. The nine-month exhibition tour included towns such as Newcastle, Gosford, Goulburn, Bathurst, Orange and Dubbo. This tour was the start of the New South Wales country art scheme that emerged between 1944 and 1948. William McKell, the then Premier of the state and a member of New South Wales Labor, was interested in the scheme's success. Sydney Ure Smith was a champion of the schemes' and stated in his various radio broadcasts that "art must be brought to the people" (Smith 1988: 36). Between 1944 and July 1945, six other separate exhibitions were shown in 39 country towns, with some 57000 visitors attending. Exhibitions were usually arranged on chronological academic museological principles. They would begin with historical pictures and conclude with the contemporary.

At the Wagga Wagga exhibition opening Premier McKell stated: "one of our post-war aims in education will be to develop an interest in art by the average citizen. I believe that the post war period will bring adjustments in our educational system, and in these changes art will become an important subject. It is vital that the growing children in country towns have the advantage of an art gallery." (Smith, in Timms and Christie 1988: 44). Another aim of the scheme was to develop local regional art galleries. With Bernard Smith's relocation to London in the late 1940s, the Country Art Exhibition Scheme floundered; it struggled throughout the early 1950s and ceased in 1954. The Art Gallery of New South

Wales didn't curate or provide another travelling exhibition to regional New South Wales until 1968 (see Smith, in Timms and Christie 1988: 46).

### **Defining the Australian regional public art gallery**

The twentieth century Australian regional gallery, while paying homage to its British and European antecedents, has been indirectly, shaped and formed by a number of forces and ideologies. It has found its place in contemporary Australia through its persistent engagement with “the object”, the mechanisms of interpretation, and the museum visitor. This art museum “type” is framed in the physicality of place and memory. Its processes have responded and been receptive to social, cultural and economic policy as driven by the three tiers of government. It continues to be open to the vagaries of international modernism, the parochial and the provincial, cultural tourism, social capital and the community capacity - building ideals of contemporary democracy and its postcolonial condition.

The 1990 Australia Council *Stretching the Edges Report* became an important publication for contemporary Australian museums, and for regional galleries in particular. As they approached the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century, this report provided some future directions. It contained resolutions from the Extending Parameters Research three-day forum held at the Queensland Art Gallery from 21 February 1990. At the forum, decision-makers from the arts/museum community explored ways in which art museums and public galleries could better serve communities into the future. The forum brought together a diverse group of people – 50 people invited from large and small galleries and museums, from tertiary institutions, and, from community arts. They ranged from directors and curators of large institutions to artists and writers. The aim of this forum was to:

Consider “extending the parameters” or the barriers, either real or perceived, of art museums, regional galleries, contemporary art spaces, craft council galleries, galleries in tertiary institutions, community galleries, social history museums and libraries. (Australia Council 1990: 3).

In the forum session entitled “ The Changing Role of Art Museums and Public Galleries: Finding the Poetry of Everyday”, Donald Horne identified: The presence of two wicked principles ... one was German: the belief expressed in the museum program of Munich and Berlin, that, as ‘temples of art’, these museums should be initiatory places of reverence. The other was French: the development in the Musee Napoleon of a classificatory system that meant that paintings should be hung chronologically, in national schools. (1990: 7).

Throughout his paper, Horne continued to insist that both these positions were outmoded. He called for publicly funded museums, which continued with these outdated processes, to explain to their funding authorities “what methods [the museum] will adopt to assist intellectual access among its visitors. What Horne was suggesting by this question was that by placing art in “a recognisable relation to observable life” (1990: 7), people could learn to look at objects in their own lives and become more confident in looking generally.

This integrational approach has been one of the hallmarks of the New Museology (1989). It champions the fact that the museum can’t be “all things to all people”. What the museum can be, however, is a facilitator or a conduit, where the memories, histories and particular social value systems of communities are explored, through an engagement with visual art object. The regional gallery is well positioned to consider community. Ellen Jose, in her essay “Community – who are we? A Torres Islander Perspective “(in Douglas 1999: 22) defines community with reference to the *Macquarie Dictionary* definition as “a social group of any size, whose members reside in a specific locality, share government and have a cultural and historic heritage” (Jose in Douglas 1999:20). Jose contends that: “Indigenous culture in not a static museum piece, it twists and turns, it adopts and discards in the race for survival.” (Jose, in Douglas1999: 20). This observation is true of any community, including Indigenous peoples. It is in representing the twists and turns of a community’s organic nature that the regional art gallery is relevant.

The growth of regional galleries, or art museums as they are sometimes defined, has been phenomenal - especially during the period 1980–2002. More regional art galleries have been established in the last 30 years than in the entire white history of this country (Anderson 1998: 42). However, patterns of development differ between states. In Queensland alone, during this period, over 20 regional galleries were established. Today, throughout Australia, in advance of 150 contemporary regional galleries (considering the variables of budget, staffing, facilities, physical space and collections, coupled with the strategic vision and drive of individuals) provide non-metropolitan based Australians with significant cultural resources.

These cultural sites afford a variety of indispensable services for the immediate communities they serve. Most house important visual art collections, and each one of them are in the business of transformation. Their essential service is 'curatorship'. Seen as the 'powerhouse' of any gallery or art museum, meaningful curatorial practice can assist in shaping modern communities.

The art gallery or museum in regional Australia is a complex cultural institution worthy of examination. With a 200-year history this institution has made significant contributions to the cultural and social landscape of non-metropolitan Australia, mainly through the microclimates that are country towns and cities:

Each year regional galleries motivate an estimated 2.4 million Australians to view the work of around 11900 Australian artists. Collectively, regional galleries play a crucial role in developing the nation's cultural psyche by promoting, both access to and appreciation of, a diverse range of visual arts forms. (Thiele 2001: 15)

The visual arts have become a mechanism to initiate and stimulate community dialogue and debate about a wide range of social, political and cultural issues.

Like other public art galleries, Australia's cultural and social history frames and affects the regional art gallery. At the First Australian Regional Galleries Summit, held at Cairns in September 1997, "where 140 delegates came together for three days of discussion, networking and camaraderie" (Foster-Burley, in

Anderson 1998: 5) Rene Sutherland, the then Director of Dubbo Regional Gallery attempted to define the Australian regional gallery. She stated:

There are a number of different dimensions that we must consider if we are to really understand the concept of a regional art gallery – in a way that will give our institutions a common thread with which we can unite and create a strong national profile (Anderson 1998:13).

Sutherland's paper suggested that the summit consider two ways to understand the notion of "regional gallery", one that focused on geographic regions, the other on cultural regions:

This distinction might also be understood as a distinction between galleries serving a geographically defined community for example a region defined by local government boundaries and those serving a cultural community a country town with a broad based demographic. (Anderson 1998: 13)

At the small-group discussion that occurred later that day it was acknowledged that the term "regional gallery" was "already burdened with the baggage of history, and the conflicting perceptions of what actually signifies (different groups - general public, local communities, art worlds, museum professionals – were each seen to have different responses to the term)." (Anderson 1998: 13) While the title "regional gallery" proved difficult for the summit delegates to define, an examination of the participating institutions that attended the summit reveals, "that not all include the word 'regional' in their name, nor do they all use the word 'gallery'. For some the exhibition of visual art is just one component of a range of activities undertaken." (Anderson 1998: 37). For example, GAL Ipswich, which opened in May 1999 but was in development from mid-1997 deliberately, omitted the title gallery or museum from its name.

The Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS) publication *Museums 1995: Art Museums, Museums and Public Galleries in Australia* published in July 1996, notes that the National Culture Leisure Statistical Framework includes museums and art museums in one industry sector. While this report clearly differentiates museums from art museums, the sub-sector of "regional art museums" is not

based on location or even self-definition, but on staffing numbers – “regional art museums” are those with fewer than 30 staff. Significantly these data omit volunteer-run institutions. (Anderson 1998: 37). Clearly, there are different types of regional art galleries. Some such as Bendigo, Ballarat, and Geelong, have substantial art collections established in the nineteenth century, while others have small or no collections and are depend on a core group of staff supported by committed volunteers. Caloundra Regional Art Gallery on Queensland’s Sunshine Coast is an example of a recently established small-sized municipal gallery with a full-time paid director supported only by volunteers.

In continuing to grapple with definitions, the summit delegates realised that management structures also helped to define the gallery. An examination of the 1995 ABS report (this report was used by the 1997 summit for its currency of facts) notes that 44 per cent of regional gallery income is provided by Local Government. In the 1980s, local government introduced new expectations in relation to income diversification, tendering, contracting out and the commercialisation of many gallery activities under the broader rubric and context of national competition policy and the mechanisms for accountability. As local government structures change, so there is tension between the professional and career expectations of gallery staff and the authority that employs them. It appears that Local Government sees gallery staff as public servants, while the staff see themselves as professional curators, education officers, gallery directors and registrars – museum professionals affecting the cultural sector.

“From 17-20 April 2001, around 110 regional and public gallery personnel, representing 56 Australian and New Zealand galleries, met in Mildura, Victoria, for the second National Regional Galleries Summit [entitled Dissolving Distance.” (Thiele 2001: 15) At a second conference, issues raised at the first Summit – audience development, technology, collection management and community - were further explored. While larger metropolitan art museums have a broad range of staff performing specific duties and developing different programs for different segments of the audience, minimal regional gallery staff numbers means that each staff member performs a diverse range of duties. Audience

development is restricted by capacity. Tensions exist between the regional gallery's remit to its local audience and to its potential tourist population.

Should regional galleries be trying to do anything at once – from developing nationally significant art collections and marketing their programs to tourists, as well as providing special services to schools and particular groups within the local community? (Anderson 1998: 38)

This question echoed through discussions at both the First and Second Summits. Clearly, these relatively small organisations have to prioritise. In a rural and regional locality where the gallery visitor is paramount, there are identifiable linkages between rural and regional community development and the arts that must continue to be fostered.

The regional gallery needs to fully comprehend its community's development plan. Community development and the regional gallery's program are inextricably connected. With isolation and distance the glue that holds regional and rural communities – towns, cities, shires and districts together, for the gallery to be truly meaningful and inextricably connected, it has to be involved in local initiatives. Ross Lake is Director of *Tasco Inland*, a corporation located in Mildura. Lake presented a paper entitled "The Galleries' Role in the Social and Economic Development of Rural and Regional Communities" at the Dissolving Distance Summit. He spoke with conviction about the economic benefits that curatorship can bring to a district or town. Lake cited the national and internationally considered visual arts and science-inspired *Mildura Palimpsest #4* project, managed by the Mildura Arts Centre, that ran simultaneously with the Dissolving Distance Summit. *Palimpsest* was in its fourth year in 2001, its heritage being the amalgam of over 40 years of "Sculpture at Mildura" (Sturgeon 1985), together with a commitment to place:

The regional gallery network is one of the last vestiges of government patronage, where a concept like *Palimpsest* can grow organically, driven by artists who have ownership and input into what they exhibit and the future direction of the project ... *Palimpsest* is uncurated, inclusive, artist driven, collaborative, experimental and cross-disciplinary. It gives public

voice to private thoughts. (Fetling, in *Mildura Palimpsest # 4* exhibition catalogue, April 2001: 119)

More particularly, and since its inception *Palimpsest* has been accompanied by a national, metropolitan and regional groundswell:

of interest in what is happening out here in the hinterlands, to social and economic communities, to the environmental and in the bodies politic, be they managerial, monitoring structures or policy development think tanks ... *Palimpsest* behaves like a catalyst which acts on an already extant but inactivated and diffuse body of knowledge, general concern and perhaps harder to define spiritual yearning within community.

(Orchard, in *Mildura Palimpsest # 4* exhibition catalogue, April 2001: 117).

Clearly, regional galleries have the capacity to bring economic and intellectual wealth in from outside communities. In cultural tourism terms, they can value add to a local economy, creating community pride and a cooperative community spirit, essential to the well-being of any rural or regional community “where the stress is on working together towards a common goal and the focus is on positive results” (Lake, in Thiele 2001: 36). In regional and rural Australia, “a diffusion of the museum beyond its walls” (Macdonald 1999: 2) has seen:

cultural/artistic solutions to larger community problems such as youth development, inner city revitalisation (as is the case with Global Arts Link Ipswich as a new model art museum being housed in the converted Ipswich Old Town Hall in an attempt by the Ipswich City Council to revitalise a flagging central business district) and cultural tourism (Lake, in Thiele 2001: 36).

To fully comprehend the contemporary regional art gallery in all its complexities, a core function of the gallery - the curating of exhibitions - needs to be interrogated. Regional art gallery curatorship, unlike curatorship in larger city-based art museums, has to affect an intimacy with the community. By intimacy, I also mean immediacy of communication. Appreciating a pride in a particular place, a willingness to hear the voice of the gallery visitor often a

resident of the community and understanding a community's spirit are attributes fundamental to professional, healthy and fruitful regional art museum practice.

The regional art museum, while effecting a connection with a particular community and its people also has antecedents, which shape its contemporary form. Mechanics Institutes, or Schools of Art as they are called in Queensland, together with Art Societies are the precursors of art galleries in Australia. Strecker (2002) writes that Australia's first cultural institutions originated in the context of colonial regionalism. Today's public art museums, and in particular regional art galleries, acknowledge that legacy even in their present postmodern circumstances. In international diplomacy and cultural terms, regional galleries can be seen at the periphery of Australia as an off-centre nation. Australia's current relationship with Asian countries provides a different set of circumstances through which to consider the regional art gallery. As a colonising devise, the origins of art history in Australia are important in an examination of the contemporary art gallery and how it engages with the world. A negation of these and other antecedent's means, the regional gallery cannot fully be contemplated. Contemporary curatorship and the regional art gallery only "makes sense" if the *New Museology* acknowledges past cultural practices in shaping new ones.

In an attempt to frame the regional gallery or museum as a cultural tourist destination, as well as build and sustain community pride in what was an economically depressed period - the 1970s, a number of regional galleries began to focus of developing specialist visual art collections. Variously initiated by pressures of inheritance, aberrations of sponsorship, economic necessity and /or curatorial territorialism, these special collections have provided succour in relation to scholarly curatorship, professional development and "a good excuse" against well-meaning individuals who want to donate inappropriate items to the collection. Specialist collections can also legitimate the regional gallery within the broader museums network. To have a collection that is not only specialist, but also worthy of borrowing from, allows regional galleries a position at the table of significance.

In New South Wales, galleries such as Tamworth and Wagga Wagga have specialised their collection focus. Wagga Wagga is known for the permanent and specialist National Art Glass Collection. This collection of studio glass comprises 300 pieces. It has been inspired through local industry visual arts (glass) production, and supported by a 'City of Glass Vision' (ABC Radio National *Radio Eye* Program – *City of Glass* 16/09/01) fostered by the local council and some individuals. The vision is to be a centre for excellence in contemporary glass in Australia. Tamworth Regional Art Gallery specialises in fibre and textiles. In Victoria, Shepparton Regional Gallery has a focus on ceramics, housing over 3000 pieces of ceramic work, predominately collected during the 1970s and 1980s. Apart from the significant Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong art collections, the oldest regional gallery in Australia, Mildura, from 1961 engaged with sculpture, staging sculpture prizes, exhibitions and triennials into the late 1990s. In Queensland, Toowoomba Art Gallery houses the Lionel Lindsay Art Gallery and Bolton Library, a collection of books and artworks "gathered by Mr Bolton [a transport operator who admired the early explores, writers and artists and Australian Bush life] between 1950 and 1973". Noosa Regional Gallery instigated *The Floating Land: International Site specific Art Laboratory on Water* from December 2 - 15, 2001. This project moved outside the gallery and encouraged artist to go beyond making artwork and connect in site-specific ways with the Noosa environment and community. No permanent artworks are collected via this process. The environment becomes the collection and the artist, as interventionist or facilitator, connects to the broader palette of waterways. While this is a carefully orchestrated project, the gallery becomes, in the process of promoting artist as provocateur, an agent for change.

While this sample is selective, it is representative of the diversity of collections and temporary art making activities that reference collecting or complement static fixed collections. Each regional gallery is individual in its history, its exhibition spaces, personnel, policies, programs and collections. But similarities occur across this divergent cultural landscape when a new model of curatorship, situated under the broad banner of New Museology is employed.

This new model places the audience, the community at the centre of the regional gallery's operations. Hooper-Greenhill (2000) argues that, in order to produce polysemic exhibitions, curators art gallery or museum need to recognise the existence of multiple "interpretative communities" ... "In taking this idea to the museum, Hooper-Greenhill is arguing for the need to contextualize and relativise, both the interpretative community of the museum itself and those of the audience it hopes to attract." (Witcomb 2003: 92)

It could be argued that the specialist glass collection in Wagga Wagga is somewhat of an imposition or contrivance. The Wagga Wagga region has no tradition of glass-making. The idea came from a need to both encourage cultural tourists to the area and create a national profile for Wagga Wagga in the visual arts. While no state gallery, or the Powerhouse nor the National Gallery claims a particular glass speciality, those collections hold excellent examples of glass, both historical and contemporary in scope. Wagga Wagga saw an opportunity to position its gallery and collect studio art glass. In parity terms, this collection is equal to the state and national gallery holdings, but unique in its specificity of studio glass. Yet imposing a specialist collection on a community neglects the local cultural memory – or spirit of place - and can therefore be problematic. Ararat's Miniature Textile Collection and Newcastle's Ceramic Collection are excellent examples of particular collecting practices. Alternatively, Tamworth's fibre collection, and the Tamworth Fibre Textile Biennial touring exhibition the gallery curates, was initially developed to complement the significant numbers of fibre and textile artists who live in the New England region.

While many Australian regional galleries do support and encourage local artists, GAL Ipswich has a focus gallery exclusively for showcasing local artist work. Located in a central space of the social history gallery – *The Hall of Time*, - this area privileges the local and in this way implies a "contact zone" (Clifford 1997: 188- 219) where a museum engages in "an ongoing historical, political moral relationship – a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull with the communities it serves" (Clifford 1997: 192). Hazelhurst Gallery and Art Centre, which opened in January 2000, is located at Gynea in Sutherland Shire south of

Sydney. "Set amid landscaped gardens, the comprehensive series of exhibition space, workshops, teaching and artists studios and theatre lectures now provides a creative art resource for the entire southern Sydney region." (Bell 2002: 400) In addition to the community-inspired spaces, Hazelhurst houses a public gallery and in the grounds, the original Hazelhurst cottage, available for use as an artist-in-residence or writers space. This art centre embraces a community arts paradigm while providing fine art curatorship. It allows for the cohabitation of two cultural policy- inspired processes: community arts, where power rests with the individual, and curatorship - where material culture is shaped by the authority of the museum to coexist.

### **Parochialism and the provincialism problem**

While a number of contemporary cultural theorists engage with globalism under the broader banner of cosmopolitanism, regionalism and "the problem of the parochial" have taken on new meanings and contexts. Framing devices in current usage, such as "intranational" – which refers to rural and regional zones within the context of a country and "supranational" – which refers to a country or region being part of a broader region, for example Australia and its zonal relationship to East Asia suggest, that regionalism as a term and a construct must be reconsidered. These terms also imply borders, boundaries and crossings. It is interesting to dwell for a moment on the definition of parochialism. The term is somewhat problematic, as there is no definitive definition. The term comes from the word 'parish' and as a consequence the relationship between church and the state. In modern parlance, parochialism implies a cultural cringe and an element of the sentimental (like going home to visit the family). But, while there are negative connotations associated with the use of the word, it must be noted that most people are committed to parochialism, as it is fundamental to family, sporting clubs, suburbs and small towns.

Megan Morris (2004) suggests that there is a comfort in understanding one's 'turf'. This understanding is grounded in the familiar - the local customs and cultures. For Morris, parochialism can be understood as "just living in particular

circumstances” (Morris 2004). But, while parochialism can be examined through these frameworks, the borders and boundaries previously mentioned are only understood through interdependencies. The distinctive character of one neighbourhood is only distinctive because of the differences found in the adjacent neighbourhood. Borderlines define neighbourhoods. The periphery in regional Australia terms is only understood by its interdependency with the centre or the city.

The so-called, “second tier cities” - such as Brisbane and Perth in Australia, Manchester and Liverpool in England, or Detroit and Denver in the United States, - commonly referred to in this way by contemporary geographers because they don’t possess the cultural and economic capital of first tier cities such as Paris, London and New York. While geography, population, historical circumstances and the economy may define these cities, they are places of contradiction. The parochial and the local are played out here: “New York’s most typical local (i.e. regional) characteristic might be the totality of its self-contradiction as a possible culture. Membership in this culture is paradoxically secured in alienation from it.” (Smith 1984: 48). Like provincialism, parochialism can be read as an attitude of subservience. Both parochial and the provincial frame the existence of the regional gallery and its curatorship potential. While the gallery’s curatorial activities sit within the neighbourhood of introspection and periphery, this is a rich zone for engaging the particularity of a place and a people. The publication *Culture and Community for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Global Arts Link Ipswich - a new model for public art museums*, explores the particularity of Ipswich as a town region or shire in Southeast Queensland. Here, history and memory, the specifics of place both physical and social are explored. This publication became a blueprint of possibilities for GAL which commissioned it for its opening in 1999. This anthology of 46 essays became in part the content of GAL Ipswich’s five-year plan of exhibition and public programs to be developed by this new regional art museum in the period 1999 to 2005.

## **The provincialism problem**

Since Terry Smith engaged with the “the Provincialism Problem” in his 1984 article by the same title, Australia and its relationship to the world has changed. The terms “regionalism” and “the parochial” have been used, in a cavalier fashion, to denigrate and label the regions in Australia as inconsequential and derivative. “Provincialism” as a term is interchangeable with “regionalism”. Leaving geography aside, a complex set of ideas associated with inhabiting a region or locale takes on its own multi-dimensional values. Smith has argued that, “far from encouraging innocent art of naïve purity, untainted by ‘too much history and too much thinking’, provincialism, in fact, produces highly self-conscious art obsessed with the problem of what its identity should be.” (Smith, in Taylor 1984: 47) It seems that a particular quality of experience - possibly what Lucy Lippard (1997) refers to as the *Lure of the Local* - is at play here. Place and geography have long fuelled what could be considered a half-formed understanding of regionalism. But, most significantly, “a region, like a community, is subjectively defined, delineated by those who live there, not by those who study it, as in Wendell Berry’s description of regionalism as ‘local life aware of itself’ (Lippard 1997: 35).

Stories, or the narrative, could be considered better mechanisms or strategies employed by local artists when they attempt to uncover ‘regionalist truths’. Being far away (geographically speaking), consciously removed from the centre - be it New York, London, Sydney or Melbourne, - allows some rural and regionally based artists to develop clichéd images of country – bad landscapes that could be labelled “a taste for rhetorical devices, [and] a concern for style over content” (McDonald, in Timms and Christie (1988: 52). Regional art does not always have to exist in the country. It can be art that is made anywhere. The guiding principle that governs its making is that the artists in question don’t pay homage to prevailing aesthetic fashions and philosophies. In a contemporary world mediated by mass communication and consumer capitalism, “first-order experiences, [possible experiences of place, or a spirit of place] traditional art-

forms and patterns of behaviour are being rapidly broken down” (McDonald, in Timms and Christie 1988: 52).

But, while the “Australiacentric” centre-versus-periphery debates have been a constant since white Australia, settlement, both colonial white Australia and its subsequent contemporary equivalent can be considered peripheral. Modernism’s European and American focus always afforded Australia a marginal position. Geographic isolation and, to a large degree, mass communication impediments left Australian artists and cultural consumers to experience Modernism through the mediated reproduced image. It took Australia almost the first half of the twentieth century to come face to face with painted Modernism. And this encounter came in the form of the *Herald Exhibition* mounted at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1939. For the first time, Australians could experience Modernism first hand. Closer to our own time, the Queensland Art Gallery’s Asia Pacific Triennials (APT) (1993, 1996, 1999) were developed both as an international cultural and a diplomatic strategy. In its neo-colonial terms, this strategy acknowledges Australia’s position as a country of 20 million people located in the southern Pacific and on the periphery of the Asian region. The Queensland Art Gallery employed a brokered cultural colonial imperialism, not too dissimilar to that evidenced in the Australian Expositions of the nineteenth century. The APT was an attempt by one state art gallery supported by a state government to move the country’s cultural and diplomatic position from the margins to the centre of the Asian mindset. A tangible outcome of this strategy can be measured in the number of APT works that have been acquired for the Queensland Art Gallery’s collection since 1990. Further outcomes of this strategy include the addition of the Gallery of Modern Art in 2006, securing the Queensland Art Gallery’s national position as the pre-eminent collector and exhibitor of contemporary “Asian” visual art. The marginal position that Brisbane possessed in relation to Sydney and Melbourne has been reassessed since Expo ’88 and the APT.

Issues around, Australian regionalism and the visual arts have also been played out in other international circumstances. In 1984, *Australian Visions*

selected by Diane Waldman for New York's Guggenheim Museum, and *Perspecta 1988*, the Art Gallery of New South Wales' signature exhibition that surveyed trends in contemporary Australian art, was toured to West Germany. Both exhibitions gave their respective European and North American audiences certain insights, possibly the most striking being that Australian art was not that dissimilar from that of Europe and the United States. Whether or not the respective curators encouraged these audience attitudes can't be substantiated. What is certain is that Australia, as a Western democracy in isolation from the Northern Hemisphere, would, in international diplomacy terms, want to be read as equal to, in artistic and philosophical terms, as the cities and countries showing the exhibitions. Somehow because of Australia's geographical location, size of population and place in general world affairs, this country is always understood as regional.

It could also be argued that international blockbuster exhibitions regarding particular countries, artists or visual art movements have exhausted audiences. While the recent French Impressionist exhibition, from the D'Orsay Museum in Paris, was on display at the National Gallery of Victoria International (NGVI) (from July – September 2004) at its refurbished St Kilda Road site, *Art Now 2004* – a survey of contemporary young Australian art filled the Ian Potter Centre of Australian Art and the Centre for the Moving Image at Federation Square, Melbourne. The National Gallery of Victoria's administration strategy was obviously to timetable the international and local together. While both exhibitions would claim to be successful, in visitor number terms the Impressionists clearly out-weighed Australian art. Demographic target marketing was also employed by the gallery at this time to attract a new audience – the elusive 18- to 35-year-old market, possibly the target market for *Art Now 2004*. The NGVI understood that the painterly realism of Impressionism was comforting and agreeable to most age groups. While we could say that these two exhibitions, running simultaneously, secured new audiences and sustained others their impact on Australian regionalism and the visual arts was only subliminal. On the other hand, *Art Now 2004* explored how cultural identities lead a hybridised existence in contemporary

Australia. In this survey of what is now, the technology of paint and canvas are partnered with film, video, installation and the virtual, constructing a new lexicon about street culture.

## **Regionalism**

The history of regionalism in Australia has “evolved through three stages: from problem to policy to problematic, from a negative lack through a positive advantage to a puzzling uncertainty” (Smith (1999 -2000) cited in Trotter 2001: 337). As Trotter states: “ from the colonial period decentralisation has been seen as a problem. Early responses saw the establishment of the Decentralisation Leagues in the 1880s. The 1920s saw regional development programs initiated as a response to regional issues.” (Trotter 2001:337).

The Whitlam government saw regionalism as a federal government responsibility and established government policy to embrace the problem. Policy has been articulated through various government quango programs, including the Australia Council and the state based respective Arts Councils, and more recently through Regional Arts Australia. Throughout the 1980s, “ the problem” was largely submerged with culture and the regions articulated in two majors ways: the import model of touring Arts Council programs such as those of the Queensland Arts Council; and the export model where visual art objects located in regional art collections were identified (by the Bicentennial Authority in 1988) to form a number of national touring exhibitions. The four interconnected *Face of Australia* exhibitions celebrated and showcased what the Cultural Ministers Council identified as the National Distributed Collection, as well as providing a particular framework through which a national identity emerged. Almost by default, the worth, distinction and/or significance of regional art collections was noted. In 2001, the Heritage Collections Council published *Significance: A Guide to Accessing the Significance of Cultural Heritage Objects and Collections*. As the Heritage Council is a joint initiative of the Commonwealth government, the state and territory governments in partnership with the museum sector, this acknowledges the importance of “the material cultural object” in regional

Australia. The 2001 publication cites regional examples such as the *Cobb & Co Coach* no.100, c1890 in the Cobb &Co Museum, Toowoomba, Queensland, and *The See Poy Children in Edwardian Dress* c1907-10, an oil painting on cotton canvas on plywood by an unknown Chinese artist in the collection of the Innisfail and District Historical Society” (Commonwealth Government of Australia (2001: 34-55) as significant to a construction of national identity.

Defining regionalism is problematic. It has been argued that there is no such thing as regionalism in our homogenised, peripatetic, electronic culture (Lippard 1997: 36). Regionalism cannot only be defined by geography, however: “It is also a state of mind ... [or] a singular position ... [It] is a series of positions and strategies, adopted at best as a means of empowerment, and at worse an excuse” (Ravenswood, in Trotter 2001: 335). To live and work in a non-metropolitan setting (rural and regional Australia) acknowledges an existence that is different from that of the metropolis. While the core-periphery debate clearly identifies the city as a rich, multi-dimension environment for its citizens, the rural and regional setting implies a singularity, a limitation. Synergies and cross-fertilisation are about the dynamics of the city.

Harvey’s (1996) premise that “social constructions of space and time come out of the experiences of ‘material survival’, the processes of social reproduction and the ‘cultural, metaphorical and intellectual skills’ that humans accrue” (1996: 211-12) has particular implications for regional culture. If as Bennett, Emmison and Frow (1999) point out in their study cultural “restrictions” are more likely to be non-metropolitan based, then ‘material survival’, – that is, manually working hard to secure a living off and from the land - is fundamental to regionalism. As George Kimble points out, regions do not ‘exist in reality, [they] cannot be directly perceived, have no constant characteristics or clear boundaries” (Kimble 1951, cited in Gilbert 1960: 158, also cited in Trotter 2001: 335). Extending on this observation, Terry Smith has defined regionalism as “a description of a particular set of conditions of cultural creativity, potentiality and obligation, in which valuing occurs primarily (but not exclusively) with reference to place”. (Smith cited in Trotter 2001: 335).

GAL's inaugural exhibition *People, Places and Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich*, mounted in May 1999 played out a particular form of regionalism as both a social construction of space and time, together with a particular set of conditions – that is, the history, circumstance and contemporary dynamic of the town and region of Ipswich. While Ipswich as a regional town, 45 kilometres west of Brisbane with a population of 135000 residents, sits in the shadow of Brisbane, the capital of Queensland with a population of approximately 1 million citizens, the imperative for GAL when it opened was to articulate, through its exhibitions and public programs structure, a particular sense of identity that is Ipswich. This imperative was driven by the art museum itself as a strategy, and supported by the Ipswich City Council as a way of legitimating the new art museum to Ipswich residents. GAL understood that the way to immediately connect with the population as a whole was not to just “talk-up” the new art museum, but to utilise the sub-themes of the exhibition - people and community, a sense of place, living culture, and the home gallery, - as tangible exhibition evidence of Ipswich's cultural and social wealth and its uniqueness. The exhibition, acknowledged the working classes of Ipswich, the skills they mastered, and their traditions. This exhibition, while focusing on the Anglo heritage, which established Ipswich in the mid- nineteenth century, was keen to claim contemporary Ipswich as multicultural and constantly evolving. A social construction of time and place was played out in this exhibition. *People, Places and Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich*, valued place while exploring ‘the state of mind’ that was and is Ipswich. This exhibition together with the premise on which GAL was founded simultaneously, embraced and interrogated the local and the global. Global Arts link Ipswich as a name of a new art museum reinforced this strategy. This art museum was keen, through its programming (exhibitions, audience development initiatives, public programming and IT web support) and through its name – Global Arts Link to connect to the globe. Using the museum's inaugural publication, *Exploring Culture and Community for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; Global Arts Link Ipswich – A New Model for Public Art Museums*, regional values were explored, evidencing the new

relationships between the economy of the local, the state and society. The regionalism found in both the idea and philosophy of GAL Ipswich can be understood as a form of what Castells 1999 labels an internal “regionalisation” - a systematic attribute of the information/global economy.

Ipswich as a regional and cultural economy contributes to a collective national Australian identity, and to a global information economy, through its web presence as a museum site and a virtual connector to Ipswich City Council, the Local Government Association and other organisations and systems. As Bogle (1988) has rightly pointed out “regionalism is a vehicle for enhancing access, empowering the local, restoring ‘a sense of community’ and encouraging a holistic approach to art and culture” (Bogle 1988 in Trotter 2001: 336). GAL Ipswich developed the exhibition, People, Places and Pastimes and the publication Exploring Culture as tools of empowerment. Ipswich, as a city in the process of reinventing itself, as a shadow of its former self as the only location in Queensland for coal mining, wool and railways, needed GAL and its programs as one mechanism to assist in restoring, on a more formal civic level, “a sense of community”.

GAL Ipswich and its programs should be read not in singularity, but as complementary to Ipswich and the Queensland State Government’s strategies and community programs. Ipswich City Council and GAL were, and still are, in collusion in “a form of ‘glocalisation’ where local government looks to a global ‘terms of reference’ to establish policies and practices” (Borja and Castells 1997: 124). GAL, as a cultural institution and department of Ipswich City Council, also saw its role in establishing in Council and the community at large an understanding of how a local art museum could launch new terms of reference that both reflected and assisted the local municipality to understand its complexity as a physical space and concept.

### **Regionalism and the visual arts in Australia**

Donald Kuspit, writing about regionalism in 1984, provides some understandings about art and regionalism that are relevant to our time: “The first is an attention to

region as a literal place rather than a spiritual ideal or a psyche home, and secondly an assumption that a regional style is necessarily derivative – an ‘inflection’ – of a cosmopolitan style”. (Bogle, in Timms and Christie 1988: 48)

Region as a literal place has been played out by a myriad of Australian-based artists. The 1961 exhibition of contemporary art at London’s Whitechapel Gallery curated by Bryan Robertson engages an “antipodean’s” rhetoric. The bush, outback and an implied spirit of the land provided subject-matter for artists such as Nolan, Drysdale and Boyd whose works were included in this exhibition. The exotic circumstance of periphery, allowed Australia to be understood through this exhibition as “other”. Also, it must be acknowledged that this mid-twentieth century exhibition like, *Perspecta 87*, was provincial in its assumptions. In most “Australian” touring exhibitions, except for Indigenous visual art toured overseas, the clichés of land and place have been fully explored. This can possibly be explained by the fact that, until the early 1980s, artists and curators, who were white and predominately Anglo European in sensibility, produced all exported touring Australian exhibitions.

Bernard Smith’s comments in “The Myth of Isolation” a chapter in *The Antipodean Manifesto – Essays in Art and History*, (Smith 1976 a) insists that white Australia has always embraced the academic heritage of Western art. Since white settlement, visual artists have explored and exported ‘Australianness’ in many forms and ways. Aboriginal culture, grounded in a spiritual understanding of both place and peoples, could be considered the only truly regional culture that produces objects that the West labels art. Kuspit’s second point about a regional style as an inflection of a cosmopolitan style is completely unfounded here. While Indigenous Australian art is indisputably geographical, its cosmopolitan values and style are informed by the art market and the seemingly unsatisfiable thirst for Australian Indigenous art on the international art scene. In this context, cosmopolitan centres - New York, Berlin and Paris - could see Australian Indigenous art as art, not only from another place, but also as regional and authentic.

Since the onset of Modernism, globalisation and the local have coexisted. There are infinite examples in the early part of the twentieth century to support this statement. Walter Gropius's Bauhaus and the School at Ulm were regionally inspired. By this I imply that a cohort of individuals working together in close proximity and cohabiting the same physical environments produced ideas that were manifested into tangible designed objects. The circumstances of Weimar Germany forced the Bauhaus to use the isolation of a regional German environment as an incubator. It was the economies of this "form follows function" philosophy that infected the modern world, allowing Modernist design to take on a global remit.

Early twenty-first century globalisation, driven by new technologies and improved telecommunications poses even greater problems when regionalism is considered: "When the centre is floating the regions may be seen as no longer so fixed in their isolated orbits." (Bogle, in Timms and Christie 1988: 56)

### **Contemporary Regionalism and Australian Culture**

Australian geographical location in relationship to the world has afforded it a form of cultural insularity. Since white settlement by imperial Britain, the filmic "dream factories" of the United States have had a significant influence on Australian cultural values and institutions. Rowe (in Bennett and Carter 2001: 46) argues, "that in the field of cultural production, a forceful culturally nationalist current runs through institutional discourse" (Hayward 1992; Breen 1993; Walker 1996). Turner (1994) supports this statement when he writes about a strong, confident and non-derivative national culture. On the other hand Docker (1991) supports the position that local culture is conservative and staid without outside influence, "and that local audiences should be allowed to choose their cultural fare without the patrician imposition of edifying texts" (Rowe, in Bennett and Carter 2001: 46). It has always been asserted (Rowe 1998) that the wealth of contemporary nations is dependent on free exchange of financial and cultural capital. Global changes are omnipresent. Lash and Urry (1994: 123) make a case that cultural industries (and regional galleries in concert could be labelled a particular cultural

industry sector) are not derivatives of major trends, but are models of contemporary economic exchange engaged in acquiring intellectual property rights.

The Australian regional gallery sector deals in intellectual property, whereby artists, supported by the “public trust”, inherent in contemporary museological practices and arts administration, display their artworks. Many contemporary cultural commentators have alerted us to the increase in commercialisation of culture. Television, the music industry and sport are key players in commercialisation. Public art museums or galleries, including those labelled as regional, have been buffeted by consumer choice and are less and less supported by government subsidy and regulation. It has been suggested that commercialisation is often linked to the economic and political forces of globalisation. There is a tension in Australia, like most nations, between those who champion a national culture in all its regulated forms and those who see globalisation as liberating. In the museum and art gallery sector, digitisation is the process that breaks down geographical borders, allowing for the free trade of visual objects to occur. The role of the state in protective Australian culture is in question. Citizenship, cultural rights and responsibilities are being reconsidered. The regional art gallery, like other cultural institutions, survives in a new era of uncertainty.

The virtue of culture is no longer an argument when cultural institutions present their budgets to government. As Stevenson (2000) has argued, “as an industry sector, the arts are required to generate economic and symbolic wealth and contribute to the national prosperity.” While the federal and state governments have supported the pitch for Australian culture to be vital, dynamic and diverse, it also has to be policy-driven. Cultural tourism strategies subscribed to and employed by all three tiers of government see promotion and survival as co-dependent - characteristics of regional survival and economic revival. For example, the Queensland Heritage Trails Network connects with Heritage Tourism to provide regional Queensland with sustainable micro-economies. Regional galleries are vital contributors to micro-economies. GAL is

one example where this newly established art museum, located in a heritage listed town hall, became the impetus for and symbol of central business district renewal.

Since Paul Keating's *Creative Nation*, Australian cultural industries have been reasoned by the three tiers of government as both economically significant and at different times necessary for the health and progress of this democracy. They are aligned to the public good. Regional art galleries have been interrogated from both perspectives. In rural and regional Australia, expansionism has seen expression in a significant number of regional galleries either established or redeveloped during the 1990s. During this decade, Cairns Regional Art Gallery opened in 1996. Bendigo Art Gallery reshaped its identity with new buildings and programs in 1997, and Ipswich Regional Art Gallery re-established itself in 1999 as Global Arts Link in Ipswich. All three galleries are pertinent examples of expansionism, cultural tourism and a cultural policy -driven renaissance of the regions.

The Keating Labor government can be seen as a marker or signpost for change, where Australia started to see itself as an international nation and cultural exporter. *Creative Nation* was a true cultural policy, which embraced the notion that culture is much broader than the arts, that cultural activities can be positively valued. While culture is often considered as a "whole of life" concern for both individuals and nations, Rowe (2001: 7) argues that culture is unevenly and unequally distributed across increasingly differentiated publics in Australia. The regional gallery and its public play out particular scenarios in relation to country Australia. In acknowledging Nigel Calder's opinion that cities are more concerned with the past and that the great changes typically occur on the periphery (Calder cited in Trotter 2001: 338), regionalists in supporting this proposition, would suggest that; regional cultural development is much more than looking for inspiration in the bush or, as was the case with Bernard Smith's position in the 1940s as a museum worker, taking art to it,

Cultural development must occur in the regions as well as taking the regional culture to the cities. Since the early 1980s certain regional art galleries

have acknowledged this position and have actioned their programs accordingly. Unfortunately, due to limited resources – personnel, physical and financial – some galleries have not been in a position to curate exhibitions for tour. The Australia Council, Visions Australia and the private philanthropy of such organisations as the Gordon Darling and Myer Foundations have provided the competitive grant schemes to develop and tour exhibitions and other projects from the regions to cities and beyond.

The Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF), established by the Queensland Goss Labor government from a 1989 Queensland Labor Party policy document entitled *Reaching New Audiences* (Trotter 2001) and reshaped by the successive Beattie Labor government, has seen a partnership developed between the Queensland government and local governments throughout Queensland. RADF is an example of “locals” acknowledging the worth of others in the community. Place and people are empowered in this cultural policy process. The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ), at its 1995 conference, supported the federal government’s Office of Local Government when it adopted the 1992 Local Government Cultural Development Strategy and acknowledged the significant role that local government can play in cultural development. In Queensland, the decentralisation of arts organisations such as Arts West, which serves the Central West region or Arts Nexus based in Cairns Far North Queensland, means they act as cultural brokers, celebrating regional arts production as well as managing artists. Other arts and industry support organisations such as Flying Arts, begun by visual artist Mervyn Moriarty in the late 1970s, and the Regional Galleries Association of Queensland (RGAQ), from September 2004 combined with Museums Australia (Queensland) (MAQ) as Gallery & Museum Services Queensland (GMSQ), are excellent example of skills and professional practice being transported to the regions.

While these organisation could be read in postcolonial terms as “cultural subjugators”, the opposite applies. These organisations bring skills, education and new ways of practice that are utilised by “the locals” to enhance their practice and products. The regional gallery could also be read in a similar light to

Flying Arts of GMSQ, as a community educator making “the locals” aware of their position as significant contributors to the multiplicity of differences conflated under the rubric of Australian culture.

### **Building Queensland’s regions: Regional development.**

In the eighteenth century, the majority of the population in England and Europe worked in agriculture. By the end of the twentieth century, less than 2 per cent of the population of European countries (and the same is true for Australia) work on the land. Since World War II in Australia, there has been a noticeable rural depopulation as we became more reliant on a diverse economic base, instead of wheat, wool and minerals – the exclusive economic diet of pre-war years. Australia since white settlement has become a nation of urban dwellers. Since the late 1700s, the divide between the city and the country has been played out in the subject-matter of artworks, predominately paintings by white fine-artists where the landscape and the squattocracy have been romanticised, creating a construct of Australia and its identity which is necessarily false. Australia is one of the most urbanised nations in the world, with over 80 per cent of its population living in city urban centres around the Australian coastline. The rural and regional have not only been mythologised, but also devalued.

The Queensland government’s proposed 2001 *Building Queensland’s Regions (BQR) Framework*, an innovative approach to regional development whereby “regional, rural and remote communities work in partnership with government to achieve growth through vibrant and sustainable communities that have the capacity to extend to their ‘full potential’” was a timely initiative. Dr Barbara Geno points out that, “there has been a constant struggle to maintain population [in rural area of Australia] since the turn of the century” (Fyffe 2001: 24) The BQR framework embodies a regional development process based firmly on a partnership ethos. As the framework document explains:

international evidence suggests that effective community development is primarily based on capacity-building, partnerships, locally-driven innovation and leadership. An opportunity identified by government, in

isolation from community and private sector input, will have little chance of sustainable success. (Fyffe 2001:24)

Any development opportunities that are singled out for a region will be based on the region competitive advantage and linked to the Queensland government's "whole-of government priorities" as well as the government's Innovation and Smart State Initiatives. The BQR strategy concentrates on strengthening the capacities of existing businesses by building business and community networks. This strategy implies an enhancement to the quality of life of regional communities by striking an optimal balance between economic progress, environmental responsibility and social equity" (Fyffe 2001: 24). If successful, the outcomes of this strategy will be tailor-made for each region's strengths and will have ownership by the local community.

Regional galleries such as GAL have benefited from the BQR strategy. GAL is a significant member of the Queensland Heritage Trails Network, where over 30 noteworthy cultural and historical sites are linked together through trails and virtual technology throughout Queensland. Also, GAL has become a conduit where "the local can go global". In its first year of operations (May 1999 – May 2000) over 100000 visited this art museum. Building capacity and sustaining growth in visitor numbers and repeat visits is vitally important for any museum, especially those that are regionally based such as GAL. Of these visitors, a large percentage of "locals" support the museum attending exhibitions.

This support and enthusiasm are best understood by focusing on GAL "Morning Teas" public program. Beginning in 1997, monthly themed morning teas have been scheduled on a regular basis. This audience-development exercise has allowed GAL Ipswich to hear and record the stories of those living in and around Ipswich. Some of these stories have been incorporated into the *Time Machine* – an interactive exhibit located in the museum's Hall of Time social history gallery. Accessed through a navigator lever, this interactive exhibit contains over 300 hours of stories, themes and topics about Ipswich and Southeast Queensland:

While I was Director, each morning tea attracted in excess of one hundred people. In the early days up to two hundred attended some of them. The City as Meeting Place Morning Tea that we hosted on 20 November '97 is a good example of their popularity. Over two hundred came to hear Alan Jensen and Betty Mathieson, both past employees of Cribb & Foote [Ipswich's department store], and Gloria Fish from Nolan's Chemist talk about Ipswich in the 1940 and 50s. Hosting the Morning Tea program in the Civic Hall, nearly every month for over four years, gives people, residents, an opportunity to have a voice, to be proud of their achievements, be proud of living in Ipswich. The Morning Teas were all about this - people meeting, having a scone and telling stories. Listening to each other's stories gave people a sense of pride. (Denoon in conversation with Douglas 2004)

This investment in those who live in a place, a town or region gives the regional gallery an endowment in place- making. The gallery, through its programs, exposes a palimpsest, layers of lived experiences vital to the identity and cultural capital of any community or region.

### **The regional art audience: Inclusionists and restrictionists**

Bourdieu (1984) has argued that certain socially valued kinds of cultural consumption enact (and thus require) the consumers' "cultural capital". The nature of "cultural capital" is subject to debate, as Bennett, Emmison and Frow (in Bennett and Carter 2001) illustrate. Bourdieu, states that some people or groups are well endowed with "cultural capital" while others are lacking or differently endowed. This distinction of capacity may have its roots in class, education, power, income and (possible) geographical location. Within rural and regional Australia, similar to yet different from city and urban settings, the populace in the main is possibly unaware of the value of the arts. With a focus on rural concerns – wool, wheat, beef and mining - the arts are seen as non-essential.

Because of small populations, regional centres, unlike the larger metropolitan populations, have fewer people. Possibly, also fewer people in rural and regional settings embrace the universality and the particularity of their cultural interests. More people are indisposed to the art museum or visual arts' intellectual challenges or moral confrontations. A more considered way of exploring this difference is explained by Paul Kelly (1999) writing in *The Australian*. Kelly supports the notion of "two different societies – a confident, educated, city-based middle class and a pessimistic, urban and rural battler constituency hostile to the 1990s change agenda" (1999: 1) Shanahan (1999), writing in the same issue refines Kelly's argument by positing affluence of the city dweller as opposed to the uncertainty of rural life in economic and futuristic terms. Bennett, Emmison and Frow's 1999 study *Accounting for Tastes: Australian Everyday Cultures*, informed by a nationwide survey of 2756 adult Australians, reinforced "the city-country" divide in relation to cultural pursuits and capacities. The study identified that people participate in a wide range of cultural activities with broad competencies across "high" and "low" culture. The "inclusionists" have a high correlation with high levels of education, with urbanity, youth and women. On the other hand the "restrictionists" are those people with limited levels of cultural participation "correlated with low levels of education, with rural and regional Australia, with age and with men rather than women and clearly exemplified in the manual working class" (Bennett, Emmison and Frow, in Bennett and Carter 2001: 195).

Bennett, Emmison and Frow's (1999) study clearly implies that a potential community-audience base for a regional gallery will succumb to those of a "restrictionist" cultural inclination. With this stated, the contemporary regional gallery, while perceived as "high" culture and hence restrictive to the broader rural community, needs to employ particular strategies that single out place, heritage or history, nostalgia, memory and skills to engage the locals in the art gallery experience. GAL employed these strategies in curating its inaugural (May to July 1999) exhibition entitled– *People, Place and Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich*. Mindful of a regional, outer metropolitan Brisbane

demographic, with a high population of “restrictionists” – neatly fitting the profile of low levels of education, aged, with a large male manual working class, GAL believed its first exhibition, together with the museum’s social history, popular culture, new technology, visual arts blend, could attract locals and cultural tourists alike. Its public programs, especially the GAL Morning Teas, had become well known and popular with locals. Through audience development research, and considering the immediate Ipswich communities, GAL Ipswich realised that its primary audience’s formation, entrenched in the industrial and agricultural local economy, was “restrictionist”. This regional art museum’s goal was, over time, to move these museum visitors towards “inclusionism”.

## CHAPTER 4:

### FRAMING THE REGIONAL PUBLIC ART GALLERY OR MUSEUM

#### **Anchoring the environment**

During the early years of white settlement, there seems to have been little discrimination between what could be labelled professional and amateur art. Inherent genres and media framed visual arts performance. The classical academician, the illustrator and the sketcher (principally a female genteel occupation) cohabited a cultural landscape that included art clubs, societies and Mechanics' Institutes (or Schools of Art, as they were called in Queensland). State galleries established in Melbourne, and then Sydney, in the 1860s and 1870s became centre for instruction and the elevation of taste for colonials. Artists such as Tom Roberts promoted the professional artists' association, possibly driven by Roberts' formal training and his need to engage with artists who saw their livelihood as coming exclusively from being a painter. The visual artists, in particular the Australian Impressionists and the *fin de siècle* artists around them constructed the profession of the visual artists and the notion of nation simultaneously. A particular Australia that spoke almost exclusively of landscape was captured in paint. It was during these formative years of the late nineteenth century and Federation, that the idea of Australia as place was so firmly and deliberately embraced.

Institutionalising the arts became a Commonwealth government concern by 1911 with the establishment of the Arts Advisory Board. This board continued its role as guardian of the Australian landscape tradition from 1911 to 1972 when the Australia Council for the Arts was established. Complementing this system where taste-makers such as Julian Ashton and Sydney Ure Smith. It cannot be underestimated how Smith in particular affected the visual arts of his generation. He was a publisher, etcher, and president of the New South Wales Society of Artists for almost 50 years, a trustee of a state gallery, a broadcaster and an active internationalist, organising exhibitions of Australia, art overseas from 1923 in London.

John McDonald a contributing writer to *Cultivating the Country: Living with the arts in regional Australia* (Timms and Christie 1988) contends that the cosmopolis, with its museums, commercial galleries and colleges, sets the agenda to which all regional artists must conform. More often than not the artist is also portrayed as a rustic or a hick, devoid of the intellectual sophistication that sustains city art and artists. In broader terms, the regionally based artist must also be considered in the context of the visual arts in Australia. Since 1980, when Jean Battersby produced the influential text *Cultural Policy in Australia*, a number of influential texts and reports on the role and rights of the visual artist have been produced. Throughout the last 30 years of twentieth century, the visual arts as a discipline and practice were informed by modernity, repositioned by postmodern theory and shaped by institutionalisation, industrialisation and internationalisation. These formations frame the visual arts in Australia today. Economic rationalism, the focus of the last decade in particular, sees the visual artist in a vulnerable position, where free internationalised markets provide strong competition and systems. Becker, writing in the early 1980s describes the emerging systems in which visual artists need to operate, with the gallery and museum being a potent force. Terry Smith writing in *Culture in Australia: Policies, Publics and Programs (2000)*, suggests, the contemporary visual artist needs to embrace a new kind of post-industrialised circumstance to sustain a healthy practice. Smith acknowledges that, “while the tensions between evolving traditions and emergent institutionalising, internationalising and industrialising forces are true of art practices in other countries with white settler histories, there are some major factors that make the Australian experience unique” (Smith 2001: 68).

Smith goes on to outline what he believes to be the unique Australian experiences. He stresses:

the drive to discover an imagery of identity and difference, to understand the world newly and truly, to create beautiful, engaging and original art – these goals impel artists working from within inherited European-Australian traditions, from immigrant experience, and from the

Contemporary Aboriginal Art movement, but do so differently in each case. Adding to these three civilisational “waves” ... is the increasingly relevant growth of craft-orientated visual arts from the Pacific region. These four tendencies are distinctively aggregated in Australian culture, each of them dealing differently with global forces and local demands. (2001: 68)

Smith continues his comments by informing the reader about his belief that, in the near future the visual arts will be led by:

unique kinds of ‘ between-cultures communication’ ... often hybrid in form and independently critical in character, this tendency is taking on a distinctive character in our region and is part of lateral, or postcolonial, globalisation. (Smith 2001: 68)

### **New economy and regionalism**

In Prime Minister Paul Keating’s 1994 *Creative Nation* - cultural policy, the economic scale and significance of the cultural industries in Australia (of which the regional art gallery sector is a significant part) were made explicit in the following statement:

This cultural policy is also an economic policy. Culture creates wealth. Broadly defined our cultural industries generate 13 billion dollars a year ... Culture adds value; it makes an essential contribution to innovation, marketing and design. It is a badge of our industry. The level of creativity substantially determines our ability to adapt to new economic imperatives. It is a valuable export in itself and an essential accompaniment to the export of other commodities. It attracts tourists and students. It is essential to our success.” (Commonwealth of Australia 1994: 7)

Tourism during the 1990s was also measured in terms of financial commitment by the Commonwealth government. John Morse the Director of the Australian Tourist Commission stated in 1997:

By any measure, the growth in the tourism industry during the past decade has been remarkable. It is now the fastest growing significant industry in

Australia, generating over \$14.1 Billion in export earnings and creating new jobs and opportunities in regions right across Australia. (Stevenson 2000:125)

In broad terms, from the early 1990s onwards, all three tiers of government had clearly identified the symbiotic relationship between the cultural industries – including museums and galleries, heritage, Aboriginal art and tourism - as providing a significant financial contribution to the Australian economy. Smith (2000: 75) suggests that “about 1.6 per cent of the approximately \$900 billion [Australian] economy as a whole in 1993 - 94” was derived from these activities. Guldberg (2000), Throsby and Thompson (1994) and Throsby and Mills (1989) produced major economic studies on Australian artists during the last decade. The “income poor” plight of the visual artist has been recognised in these studies. While it is difficult to quantify visual artists in exact numbers, primarily because of slight changes to Australian Bureau of Statistics classifications and the fact that visual artist were not counted in some census years; visual artists, curators and museum workers sit as groups within “the 255098 people – or roughly one in 30 of all workers - [who] declared themselves employed in the cultural sector in the 1996 Census (Smith 2001: 75). While these statistics speak of a national overview in relation to the visual arts and cultural work, at the micro level of local government, the situation is more acute. In recent years, as the collective Australia cultural industry has grown, in real-dollar terms federal and state government funds have contracted. For example, within Queensland:

the State’s budget for ‘arts and culture’ for the financial year 2004 - 5 is \$301 million .... Most of *that* amount is given over to capital reoccurring infrastructure costs. For example the Millennium Arts Project – such as GOMA (Gallery of Modern Art) the State Library and Museum extensions ... A small amount of funds are devolved through such instruments as the Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF) and the Queensland Arts Council, which service in part, regional and local communities. (Peter Bridgman - Executive Director Arts Queensland,

speaking at the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane on Friday, 15 October 2004)

Diversification of state funds is clearly noted in this statement. The Queensland government, under the leadership of Peter Beattie (2002 - 4) like most leaders of Western democratic governments, sees building cultural edifices as its commitment to a living culture.

Local government, on the other hand, has in the main grown its cultural budgets significantly over the last decade. A new style of local government, cloaked in the ethos of “regionalism” has emerged during this period (Macdonnell 1996; Smith 1999 - 2000). The *Australians and the Arts: What Do the Arts Mean to Australians* report prepared Saatchi & Saatchi (2001), noted that 75 per cent of those surveyed believed that the arts helped them to define and express cultural identity. At local government and community levels, this percentage could be higher. It would depend on the dynamic relationship developed between local government, cultural workers – such as the regional gallery director - their staff and the public’s receptivity.

### **Micro economics**

Local government’s commitment to the visual arts through the construct of the regional art gallery is enormous:

In 2002/3 Local Government funding for cultural activities rose 22% to \$1,024 million. The only state or territory to record a decrease was Western Australia with funding levels falling by \$167 million to \$104.2 million. The largest increases for the other states and territories were New South Wales (\$108.2 million) Queensland (\$33.4 million) and South Australia (\$29.6 million). (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004: S)

Regional galleries operate in “a flexible and constantly changing balance of government funding and user-pays programmes” (Faust 1988: 66), which allows them to survive as micro economies.

Municipal government, like its state and federal counterparts, has long acknowledged the educational value of art galleries within a framework of

citizenship. While this government sector continues to provide significant financial support, administration of regional galleries has and will continue to be complimented by state and federal monies, limited philanthropic funds, and occasional generous bouts of patronage together with gallery generated user-pays programs.

There are excellent examples of patronage in the regions. The establishment benefactor of the McClelland Gallery southeast of Melbourne was Nan McClelland who died in 1961. A trust was set up to build a gallery and workshops on 8 hectares of parkland and to use invested capital for acquisitions, administration and maintenance. Simon Klose, a director of the gallery in the late 1980s, stated that the McClelland “was established on the good old Victorian notion that people should be educated about the arts” (Faust 1988: 60).

Bendigo Art Gallery is an outstanding example of how the generous financial support of individuals has allowed regional art collections to grow significantly. As early as 1897, the late George Drury’s bequest was used to build one of the gallery courts that today bear his name. In 1944:

the Gallery received the first part of the bequest of nineteenth century paintings from the estate of the late Dr J.A. Neptune Scott, later to be extended by the gift of Mrs Scott. Many Bendigonians including William Beebe, Mrs Charlotte Allan, L.A. Sonnenberg and Mr & Mrs Charles Chamberlain made bequests both large and small. Mr and Mrs Arthur Newson presented their collection of decorative arts, together with European and Australian paintings, the largest single gift ever made to the Gallery. (Thomas 1990:11)

Benefaction to Australian regional art galleries continued throughout the twentieth century, and still has currency today. The New England Regional Art Gallery (NERAM) in Armidale is particularly interesting in relation to the Howard Hinton Collection. From Hinton’s major gift of Australian painting, this regional gallery has not only been able to curate significant exhibitions that interrogate particular aspects of Australia visual art practices and developments, but this collection has afforded the Gallery an opportunity to curate a number of themed

touring exhibitions. Through exhibition fees, the gallery's budget improves. These exhibitions have an ambassadorial role in bring the wealth of this New England-based collection to various locations throughout Australia, as well as signalling cultural tourism possibilities for visitors to Armidale and the New England region of New South Wales.

While benefaction and philanthropy have been significant for a number of regional galleries, most galleries receive membership subscriptions, donations and profits from the gallery shop and some restaurant sales. Benefits from fundraising events, entry fees for some galleries (Geelong and Cairns regional galleries, for example), hiring fees for gallery space and lending artworks are never enough to allow for independence. Galleries support an ever-developing set of public programs that see this regional cultural institution become a patron of local visual artists. Hazelhurst south of Sydney is an excellent example.

There are excellent examples of regional galleries and their trustee committees raising money for specific building projects. During Australia's Bicentennial year, 1988, Ballarat Council made available a large commercial building for the Ballarat Gallery's necessary expansion. "The Bicentennial Authority provided dollar for dollar to a maximum of \$175,00 leaving the Ballarat Gallery Association to find the extra million – which it did" (Faust 1988: 66). GAL (rebranded the Ipswich Art Gallery in 2004) is a more recent example of a successful union between governments – local, state and federal - together with the corporate and private sectors. From the mid 1990s, Centenary of Federation monies from the Australian government became available to all states and territories. In Victoria, under the Kennett government, funds were secured to improve regional galleries in Victoria through a substantial capital works program, In Queensland under the Beattie government, a *Queensland Heritage Trails Network* of some 33 regional projects throughout the state was established over a three-year period 1997 - 2000. Global Arts Link Ipswich, in development from 1997, qualified for and secured a major grant of just over \$ 4.5 million to convert the old Ipswich Town Hall into a new model public art museum. This museum

was to become one of the node cultural tourism destinations on one of the five interconnecting trails.

It is important to understand that local councils do not have to outlay enormous sums of money to subsidize a micro economy. They need to provide enough or seed funding to start programs that will then attract state and federal money. Global Arts Link Ipswich is an outstanding example of this principle in action. The Ipswich City Council produced a 1996 study on the future use of heritage-listed buildings owned and operated by the council (Soule 1996). The report identified five buildings in the Ipswich central business district, including the old town hall that required new functions assigned to them. The Ipswich old town hall, in terms of size, location and cultural memory teams ideal for reassignment into a public art museum of regional significance.

### **Culture, community and nation**

In recent years, the idea of “the Nation” has been considered from a number of perspectives – geographical, political, economic and cultural. In 1983, Gellner, author of *Nations and Nationalism* argued that a nation’s “way of life” - its cultural particularity - could be seen as a unifying strategy or motif. To talk about the “Australian way of life” is to make meaning through the identification of connected and at times disparate locations, peoples and histories. The nation could be read as both “real” and “fictitious” simultaneously. Benedict Arnold viewed the idea of nation as, “an imagining”, and a construct. Whereas Bennett suggests that “ the modern nation-state creates its identity through imagining ... that its people are bound to the same territory”. (Boswell and Evans 1999:3). Imagining nation implies particular forms of interrogation and sampling. Heritage sites and displays, expositions and tourism, and the museum with its exhibitions and collections offer complementary ways in which the idea of nation can be articulated and analysed.

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, in *The Invention of Tradition* (1999) approach the construct of nation from a more modernist perspective. They suggest that public ceremonies, symbols and discourses invented no more than

a century ago frame our contemporary understandings. In the period leading up to World War I, “this period saw them spring up with particular assiduity” (Hobsbawn, in Boswell and Evans 1999: 61).

This period saw rapid and social transformations. New social groups (e.g. the voting male public, and those being educated), environments (e.g. the birth of Australia as a new nation state in 1901) and social contexts (e.g. peasants becoming citizens) needed new methods of ruling or establishing loyalties. National economies defined by territory were the basic unit of economic development. The common man, through the mechanisms of democracy, was increasingly entitled to (indirectly) take part in shaping policy. Civil society, and the state within which it operated, became increasingly inseparable during this period: “It is a paradox that the very appeal to tradition is a feature of modern nations [such as Australia] which seek to justify present social arrangements through a reference back to a way of life the origins of which are remote.” (Boswell and Evans 1999: 2).

During the 2000 Republic debate, Prime Minister John Howard, in an attempt to describe Australian national identity, constantly referred to “mateship”, a nineteenth century sentiment. Like George Orwell’s description of the English character set in rural and urban contexts identified in his essay “England for England” (1941) in his use of mateship Howard evoked, the Australian bush, hardship and the spirit of the digger. While traditional symbols were used to describe the Australian character up to World War II, the term is not appropriate, when considering contemporary Australia. At the risk of simplifying comparisons, regional art gallery collections and, by association, some regional art galleries have used selected nineteenth century Australian colonial traditions to reinforce their worth and position within their present-day communities.

Bendigo Art Gallery’s 2002 - 3 travelling exhibition *A Primrose from England: 19th century Narratives from the Collection of Bendigo Art Gallery* (see Image section of DVD under tile of exhibition) is such an example of colonial art collecting and its heritage value. As Karen Quinlan writes in the catalogue preface:

this exhibition began in storage ... Bendigo Art Gallery is known for nineteenth-century narrative paintings ... In the 1880s and 1890s, paintings with such subject matter reminiscent of England and continental Europe were collected ... Many of the Gallery's initial purchases were made at the international and inter-colonial exhibitions held in Melbourne during the 1880s ... *A Primrose from England* explores the theme of the transplantation of social and cultural ideals from England during the Victorian era. Although many of the paintings ... originated in European countries, the scenes of domesticity and rural life in these "continental" pictures reflect the same middle-class values we find in the British images of work and family life. (Bendigo Art Gallery 2002: 7)

This exhibition is an excellent vehicle to explore not only the transplantation of Victorian social and cultural ideals to colonial Australia, but also the domestic and the rural. The two extremes of colonial civil society in Australia are acknowledged and condoned in this exhibition. As a contemporary travelling exhibition curated by Bendigo Art Gallery in 2002, it also shows the power of these particular artworks as exemplars of Victorian moral, rural and town life. It can clearly be understood that, following the discovery of gold there, Bendigo took on the hallmarks of a Victorian inland city. This official city and gallery collection spoke in that time of the particular characteristics of nationhood and civil society – hardship (refer to Charles Edouard Frere's painting *In the Snow* (c.1888) courtship (refer to Alexander Colquhoun's painting *Divided Attention* (1887) nostalgia and homesickness for the mother land (refer to Edward Hopley's painting - *A Primrose from England* c 1855). As imagining nation implies particular forms of interrogation and sampling, the selected works from the Bendigo art collection give an indication of how emerging Australia was being incubated in Victorian sentimentality, coupled with a pioneer spirit. To interrogate nation, by an examination of the works from the foundation Bendigo Art Collection is not only to understand the power of representation or illustration, but also to observe the museum as a reformer giving locals (i.e. Bendigo citizens) a guide to civil virtues.

*A Primrose from England* and the collection from which it is derived could also be understood to represent aspects of the burgeoning Australian nation. The Bendigo Art Gallery was established in 1887, the year of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. It opened in its present location in View Street in 1890. The site had been the Bendigo Volunteer Rifles' orderly room that became Bolton Court developed by W.C. Vahland, a distinguished Bendigo architect of the era. Today Bolton Court, Abbott Court and the Drury Court are the Victorian court galleries in the complex of galleries that comprises the Bendigo Art Gallery.

In the 1990 publication - *A Guide to the Bendigo Art Gallery*, the then director of the gallery, David Thomas wrote:

The Bendigo Art Gallery is unique among Australian regional galleries for its splendid nineteenth century collections displayed in colourful Victorian courts. Large narrative paintings in their gold frames look resplendent against the rich burgundy walls ... Where else in provincial Australia will you find a master Impressionist painting by Alfred Sisley, surrounded by such contemporaries as Charles-Francois Daubigny or Pierre Puvis de Chavannes? The collection also provides a rare insight into the taste of our British forebears in such a sentimental tour-de-force as *Too Late (1886)* by Herbert Schmalz (British painter 1856 - 918) or Thomas Kennington's British painter 1856 - 1916 ever-popular *Homeless (1890)*. The decorative arts of English eighteenth and nineteenth century silver, porcelain, glass and furniture also have their riches crowned by a magnificent Meissen Vase... (1995: 9)

The Bendigo art collection also includes not only visual representations of Victorian ideals. This collection of paintings represents a public service and an educative experience for the enlightened citizens of nineteenth century Bendigo. In twenty-first century Australia, the Bendigo Art Gallery's contemporary collection - in particular, works acquired over the last 30 years - contains works by such artists as Tim Maguire and Fiona Hall which could be read as objects made by image managers. The artworks by these artists in this collection provide new understandings of nation and identity.

The rhetoric of a “nation’s inheritance” is also at play when considering art collections such as those at Bendigo or Global Arts Link Ipswich. The myth that nation is composed of a single culture is clearly debunked when considering the diversity of artists, their practices, backgrounds and social circumstances encapsulated in art collections. The Bendigo and Ipswich art collections, like many other regional art collections throughout the country, can be understood for their “heritage” value:

While the past [read heritage] has been commodified and made to pay its way, it has been the spur for the proliferation of a more accessible and diversified representations that have risen from the grass-roots demand for the expression, exploration and representation of local and distinctive ways of life ((Boswell and Evans1999: 6)

This is what makes these collections significant and relevant to contemporary Australia.

GAL embraced this grass-roots demand for an expression of Ipswich, when the art museum was being developed. An 1998 Ipswich Arts Foundation publication employed phrases such as “GAL is working with the community to collect stories and celebrate civic pride” and “Global Arts Link celebrates the heritage and culture of Ipswich including gardening, sport and music” (Ipswich Art Foundation 1998: 3 - 4) as a public relations device to reassure a somewhat sceptical and fractured community that this art museum would celebrate the local and be distinctive. A nation’s inheritance is understood at the local level. When GAL opened in May 1999, the community experienced for the first time the heritage-listed old Ipswich town hall as an art museum. The local was now on view through exhibitions and displays.

The art museum’s “First Australian Hall of Time” – GAL’s entry gallery - with its focus on Ipswich’s social history would reassure “the locals” that their town, their memories and Ipswich’s significance in historical and contemporary terms would become central to the art museum’s mission as “a meeting place to explore the stories of our past and to enjoy the culture of today ... the premier educational and recreational focus for everyone in the region and a unique

destination for national and international tourists” (Ipswich Art Foundation 1998: 1) This statement can be read as a form of “new urbanity” – a way of enhancing the profile and image of Ipswich as a place in a national or global context. As global corporations scan the world for referenced locations, so particular places, such as Ipswich, are forced into a competitive race to attract inward investors.

The Ipswich City Council has embraced a number of national and international companies such as Delfin Properties and Ball Aerospace, an international corporation at nearby Amberley airbase. Ipswich City Council has understood that partnerships between the council and Industry can harvest impressive results and enrich the community’s “sense of place”. *The Economic Development: Community Planning Issue Paper N.o 7(Draft Working Document)* states:

Economic development initiatives should facilitate improved community relations and social interaction and should empower the community in the enhancement of well-being through employment opportunities, and the nature of access to goods and services throughout the community. (1996: 13)

Delfin Properties, responsible for the development of Springfield Lakes, a new housing development near Ipswich, has become the sponsor for the “On Stage” gallery at GAL Ipswich. This gallery showcases local artists and their practice in exhibitions curated by the gallery. Ipswich City Council is a local government with global business and industry connections. In this context, Ipswich needs to promote and advertise its cultural, heritage, leisure and recreational attractions. Using this strategy, the global and the local engage in symbiosis.

### **Global-local nexus**

Globalisation has many effects on the construct that is the Australian regional gallery. Homi Bhabha (1993) writes about the responsibility of “cultural translation” in his seminal work *The Location of Culture*. He suggests that “cultural translation” is “the deep, the profoundly perturbed and perturbing question of our relationship to others cultures, other states, other histories, other

experiences, traditions, peoples and destinations” (Robins, 1999: 16) The regional gallery is a site, a location, even a zone where the relationship to “other” is explored. Through the exhibition and display processes inherent in the operations of regional art museum, “the other” - in this case, the local can be exported to the world, and ‘others’ can be imported, displayed and explored by a local audience. Globalisation also implies a reconsideration of geography. Edward Soja suggests that we are now seeing the formation of new post-modern geographies, he argues “that it may be space more than time that has consequences for us” (Robins 1999: 16). Clearly geography is important to contemporary economic and cultural transformation.

The European Economic Union supra-national bloc is a tangible example of a geographical transformation driven by the international restructuring of capitalist economies. Within this new world order, cities have developed new and direct obligations. For example, Berlin, with its adventurous museum- building plan, has reshaped this once-divided city as a member of “new urbanity”. Globalisation has created new centres and peripheries. In Europe, “regions are now assuming a whole new significance in the context of a ‘Europe of the regions” (Robins 1999: 17). Beyond this, there is the over-arching global context: “regional differentiation becomes increasingly organised at the international rather than the national level, sub-national regions increasingly give way to regions of the global economy” (Hebbert 1987: 55).

In the shadow of globalisation, local and regional cultures have come to be revalued. This can be exemplified by considering the Queensland’s Beattie government’s *Queensland Heritage Trails Network* (established from 1998) where locations on the various trails are identified as unique and different from other places by geography and history embraced in a broader framing device of heritage. The heritage industry has afforded a renewed emphasis on territorial locations as poles of identity, community and continuity. The “postmodernisation” of geography is about the emergence of a new global-local nexus. As globalisation dissolves the barriers of distance, “it makes the encounter of

colonial centre and colonised [or postcolonial] periphery immediate and intense” (Robins 1999: 18).

The global-local nexus also reinforces the ideal of producing locally and selling the product or service internationally. Some multinational companies such as Sony describe their operations as “global localisation” (Robins 1999: 23). The global -local nexus is not necessarily about the renaissance in the regions. The notion of cultural decentralisation – local and regional cultures eroding the old and rigid hegemony of national culture - is the imperative of what we could label “new regionalism” in Australian tourism. Traditions that are labelled as “space-bound”, languages and “ways of life” such as the Italian community of the Riverina, or the Italians of Griffith in New South Wales, can provide a resurgence of the local. These traditions can inspire nostalgia and what could be understood in the introverted and parochial sense of local attachment and identity: “If glozalisation re-contextualises and reinterprets cultural localism, it does so in ways that are equivocal and ambiguous.” (Robins in 1999: 24)

The issues of globalisation for the Australian regional art gallery can be summarised under the heading of global localisation. While galleries such as Bendigo, Global Arts Link Ipswich, Cairns Regional Art Gallery in Far North Queensland, Bunbury in Western Australia and more recently Artspace Mackay curate exhibitions about place and the traditions of their regions, the parochial or the local is a strong currency in globalised cultural trading. In considering any aspect of the Australian regional art gallery, it must be stated that, as globalisation is profoundly transforming our appreciation of the world, it is providing new experiences of orientation and disorientation, new senses of placed and placeless identity.

The global-local nexus is associated with new relations between space and place, fixity and mobility, centre and periphery, “real” and “virtual” space, “inside” and “outside” frontier and territory”. (Robins 1999: 27). This has implications for individuals, collective identities (such as a regional art collection) and for the unity of community. Peter Emberley describes a momentous shift that has been occurring. He labels it “hyperreality”. Here, “the older order of

prescriptive and exclusive spaces, such as the country town and meaning endowed durations – such as “a lifetime in the bush” - is dissolving and we are consequently faced with the challenge of elaborating ‘a new self-interpretation’.” (Emberley 1989: 75 - 76) The multicultural nature of contemporary Australian society suggests that, “Australianess”, is always in flux. If globalisation is affecting nationhood, it will impact on the local in more focused ways. Protective strategies must centre on the interpretation of place and people rather than just conservation:

“The driving imperative is to salvage centred, bounded and coherent identities, placed identities for placeless times.” (Robins 1999: 27)

The regional art gallery through its collection, curated exhibitions and programs, can provide a place for interpretation, conservation and, through particular understandings, assist a community to centre coherent ideas about its identity and how it can and will relate to the world. The very name and brand GAL attempted to plant the culture and community that is Ipswich – a placed identity into a global context. It was clear from a street survey developed by Ipswich Art Gallery staff in 1996 - 97 that residents found the words “gallery” and “museum” alienating. The name GAL implied for many Ipswich’s potential. At a local level, the name GAL Ipswich made even more sense. In 1995 the Ipswich Library - the first in Australia to provide the Internet to its clients, had created the name Global Info Links (GIL). The synergies were obvious.

For a regional or rural community and an art gallery to work effectively on community development, they both must develop a whole sight and vision for a future that is cooperative. GAL and GIL provided the names and the impetus for Ipswich to connect to the globe.

### **Cultural planning and regional development**

Professor Tom O’Regan (2002) states, “[Contemporary] urban development issues tend to be increasingly organised within cultural planning frameworks which purport to ‘reconcile’ economic and cultural development and promote ‘creative ‘cities’.” This is readily the case with the Brisbane City Council’s urban

development strategies that embrace both community and the arts as part of the urban setting. O'Regan suggests:

Regional development issues tend to be bifurcated into economic development strategies, which exclude culture, and community development strategies, which include culture as both community cultural development and regional arts development. (O'Regan 2002)

Regional and urban development shares much in common. Both embrace the notion of sustainability and the blooming of culture. Both understand the primary role of cultural planning, and both embrace the focus of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development of 1998 (12 - 13) on cultural identities, a participation in the cultural life of the community, sustainability and improved resource for the broader cultural, social and economic revitalisation of communities. Historically, in the Australian regional context, rural and regional development has primarily been community development. Terms such as "social capital", "community capacity-building", "community arts" and "community cultural development" have been employed in policy rhetoric as strategies for dealing with a rural crisis and lack of confidence. This crisis has occurred over the last half-century (1950 - 2000) as rural and regional centres have become depopulated and support services such as banking and telecommunications have failed to reassure rural and regional populations that living in the bush could be sustained. Globalisation and its subsequent rationalisation have denuded regional and rural communities of their self-esteem, questioned their contribution to a collective national Australian identity, and made them uncertain of their futures.

Twentieth century Australian governments moved the focus off the land to urban Australia. They believed that this nation-place would be globally sustained with the industries of beef, wool, wheat, and mining. By default, cultural sustenance is implied in the rural and regional primary industry model. This misreading of rural and regional Australia has left communities hungry for self-affirmation and needy of assistance in transition from one type of community to another. The "cultural industries model" including heritage, cultural centres, social

museums and art galleries, interpretative and keeping places, supported by tourism can provide regional and rural places with new capacities. But cultural planning is vital for success.

Writing in a recent publication of the Council of Europe, Lia Ghilardi (2001: 118) stated in relation to urban planning:

By linking culture and other aspects of economic and social life, cultural planning can be instrumental in creating development opportunities for the whole of the local community.

This planning encounter brings into relation arts, media, heritage, sports, tourism, leisure and the environment, and frames up possibilities for employment. As Tony Bennett contends: “the more these fuse with and inform each other, the more cultural policies will deliver a differentiated range of outcomes for a wider range of constituencies.” (Bennett, 2001: 50). This type of policy thinking moves away from traditional cultural policy frameworks and embraces some non-cultural forms such as town planning, branding and marketing a destination. It firmly connects to the leisure industries and has been embraced by local governments such as Ipswich City Council – town councils keen to assist a municipality to reshape or at times reinvent itself. This reinvention is ably assisted by cultural tourism, the cultural and creative industries to articulate place and the local. For local government, a more embracing cultural policy includes community capacity-building, sustainability, and social justice and employment possibilities. The *Queensland Heritage Trails Network* attraction in Ipswich – GAL - was both the Ipswich City Council and the Queensland government’s one opportunity to use a cultural industry, in the heritage and museum sector to provide a set of solutions for a declining regional town – Ipswich - its central business district and its region. The Ipswich Council hoped that its Central Business District economy would be enhanced by the museum’s presence.

Integrated cultural planning was forced on Ipswich. With the opportunity of money coming from Australian Centenary of Federation via the Queensland government, Ipswich needed a solution to its flagging central business district. Since the 1968 fire that destroyed Cribb & Foote’s department store in central

Ipswich, and with the growth in the 1970s of a large shopping centre situated in Brisbane's western suburbs, forty minutes drive from Ipswich, the retail heart of the city was in decline. Ipswich in the 1980s and 1990s had become "uneconomic". Urban renewal was not going to take place in central Ipswich. The city was tinged with an old history (it is oldest regional city in Queensland, established in the 1840s). This history could not attract and hence harness the inspiration to inform the construction of inner city apartment and warehouse living. Property values into the mid-1980s were in decline. While the population of Ipswich region is 135000 residents, the city didn't have a blend of what Richard Florida calls the creative class. Ipswich's working-class history had been replaced by contemporary low socioeconomic circumstances that have relied on a visit to Brisbane to pursue leisure and cultural.

Ipswich, like many rural and regional towns, relied on a couple of charismatic individuals to see its potential. The Deputy Mayor of Ipswich, together with Greg Roberts (an arts worker employed by the Ipswich Art Gallery in 1997, and later to become the Development Director for Global Arts Link 1998 - 2001), saw a new art museum, to be sited in the old Ipswich town hall in central Ipswich, as a solution to the city's slow economic decline.

While the majority of Ipswich residents read their heritage and contemporary lifestyle as uninspired, Roberts, supported by the Deputy Mayor, saw strategic cultural planning as Ipswich's salvation. They coaxed the Queensland government and - ably supported by the then Treasurer for Queensland an Ipswich resident - obtained \$4.5 million through the *Heritage Trails Network* to establish Global Arts Link. This new-model art museum, which blended social history, popular culture and the visual arts, aided by new technology, would become- significant for Ipswich, not just as a new model art museum cultural institution, but also as a site for cultural tourists.

As O'Regan (2002) correctly observes:

Cultural tourism] serve[s] the cultural diversity purpose of bridging a rural and urban cultural divide by establishing a relation between rural and metropolitan Australia based on the exchange between guest and host. To

be successful it require[s] the metropolitan subject to be the guest of the country-person whether in farm-stays, motel and hotel accommodation, or as a visitor to the various museums, natural and cultural heritage sites and national parks of the region. In turn it required the local communities to develop their own capacity to deal with visitors.

### **Cultural tourism, national identity and the regional art gallery**

In a 1997 paper on cultural tourism, Jerold Kappel, the American Association of Museums' Director of Development, pointed out that what is really important is not just promoting cultural tourism but using the cultural resources of a community and region to build a sustainable "destination area". A sustainable destination area is one that has recreation, natural areas, cultural resources, hospitality and retail. One or two of these assets will not produce a sustainable area by themselves. An area that has all of these elements, that utilises and invests in them, will have the best chance for long-term success.

Tourism is frequently considered to be a characteristic of Modernity. It has been stated that the invention of the camera allowed "arm-chair" tourism to flourish in Europe, England, the Americas and Australia in the nineteenth century, informing generations about unknown possibilities, lands and "exotic" experiences. In postmodern Australia as elsewhere, "the fusing of the past, present and future in a liminal *timelessness* and *spacelessness* characterised by pastiche, simulacra and iconography" (Craik 2001: 90) can be exemplified by the art gallery and museum visitor experience. The liminal zone of the art museum allows the postmodern tourist/traveller the opportunity to experience captured time and space in viewing the unique objects that comprise collections. A tourist/art museum visitor experience with "the authentic object", in the art museum is augmented by simulation and iconographic experiences. The museum in our postmodern world has become a primary destination for cultural tourists, key examples being the Guggenheim in Spain, the Getty in California, the Louvre, New Zealand's' Te Papa and probably all state galleries throughout Australia.

Probably the America's Cup win by Australia in 1983 and Expo '88 in Brisbane could be seen as events where Australia became more visible to the world, "Australia...in the grip of tourist fever" (Craik in Bennett and Carter 2001:89). *Creative Nation* (1994) the Keating Labor Government's (1991-96) cultural policy becomes the obvious marker when a reshaped National Identity informed in part by tourism emerges. In this decade, cultural tourism became the panacea for ills, a strategy for enlivening and giving new relevance to regional and remote Australia:

The focus of cultural tourism involved an emphasis on the potential of tourism to provide enrichment to visitors through exposure to cultural activities, sites, objects and experiences as opposed to mere sight-seeing. Cultural tourism appeared to have the capacity to stimulate cultural production, annex tourism to diverse cultural industries, and promote the culture of the nation. It was a way to develop cultural production and export opportunities for cultural services and products." (Craik in 2001: 94).

Craik (2001: 91) argues: "that tourism was a low priority for many Australian governments prior to the 1960s". The Harris, Kerr, Forster and Co (HKF) Report, *Australia's Travel and Tourist Industry 1965* (HKF 1966,) labelled Indigenous cultural tourism as a unique attraction to world travellers. Various reports into the 1970s identified sites such as the Great Barrier Reef, and Uluru, which would have international appeal. Traditions and presence of Indigenous cultures also implied the need for interpretation. Centres that provide visitors with induction and immersion experiences have been developed. It can be stated that Indigenous cultural tourism and regional tourism have many commonalities, the major difference being that the former is driven by a white settler sensibility, the latter by a unique culture particular to place. Throughout the last 30 years, inbound tourist numbers have increased dramatically, with visitors exceeding one million in 1984 and reaching over five million in 2001. Governments throughout the same timeframe have employed "consultative clientelism - consulting

with the industry when pressure demanded” (Craik 1992; Hall and Jenkins 1995:59 - 63).

While the implementation of some of the *Creative Nation* Labor government cultural policy initiatives were not fully initiated because of the 1996 defeat by the Howard Liberal national Coalition government, some policies and strategies have been reinvented. It is interesting to cite a government fact sheet on cultural tourism in 1999 which stated: “Cultural tourism heralds it as a way to promote the Australian lifestyle, heritage, arts, cultural industries and leisure pursuits: to showcase those qualities and experiences that make us distinctly Australian and to demonstrate to the world our excellence in internationally recognised art forms.”

Significant writing about Cultural tourism and national identity has embraced notions of the spectacular, the multidimensional aspects of Australian food, wine, culture, art, natural attractions and the Human-made (Craik 2001). Authenticity is an active ingredient in” the Australian experience” whatever that may be, and for whomever the tourist(s) may be. John Morse, Managing Director of the Australian Tourism Commission reinforces this observation when he stated in 1999:

That’s what people love about this country. They love coming here because it’s real. It’s not fake. It is real and it is genuine, and it’s authentic. And that’s about the bush, it’s about the country, it’s about the people, it’s about the way we are as a country. And that’s such a special quality about this country (Morse 1999)

It’s this engagement with the “real” as Morse names, it that has direct application for Indigenous cultural tourism and connotations for regional galleries in particular. The authenticity of the bush, an immersion into country, provides a climate and a space where the particularities of a region are best displayed. A region’s geography, its value systems, the interconnectedness of small-town and district communities reinforce their shared values. The regional gallery is located where “the real” is embraced. Objects and exhibits that have special local significance, exemplified in the exhibition *The Portrait of a City: the Centenary of*

*Ipswich* on display in the CS Energy Gallery at Global Arts Link Ipswich, from 14 February to 23 May 2004, engaged Morse's understanding of the "real Australia", albeit particular to a place – Ipswich. The authenticity of objects, geography and shared values of a particular community went on display. While the exhibition considered the official hundred-year history of Ipswich (1894 - 2004), the exhibition featured city scenes, rural views and images of Ipswich people. It acknowledged the achievements of industry through the display of photographs. In celebrating its history and Ipswich events, the various objects that comprise this exhibition can be found in the City of Ipswich Collection.

Here timelessness and simulacra reside, the objects speak of both history (time passing) and permanence simultaneously. In its entirety, the exhibition speaks of what Ipswich - town and place - was like. While the town of Ipswich (located 45 kilometres west of Brisbane) could not be considered as truly regional, possibly not as rural and definitely not as the outback, tourists to Ipswich would still consider it a location or place that supports and exhibits a particular Australian lifestyle embracing heritage and the arts. Ipswich as a place and a set of values is inherent in the exhibition.

Outback tourism has a symbiotic relationship with the Australian regional art gallery. While the outback has always been a prominent feature in Australian tourist promotion overseas, that is "mixing with the locals" (Tourism Queensland 1997) (Craik 2001: 102), it's "on the road" [in] Australia which is the most absorbing, which makes impressions and endures" (Lugaresi 1998). Road journeys and visiting regional towns and their attractions, including the local art gallery have become popular pastimes for an over 55 demographic, commonly known as "grey nomads".

For every tourist who wants to experience the reality of the Outback, flies, heat, dust etc. many are satisfied with what Craik (2001:103) calls:

pseudo-backs ... fronts masquerading as backs, or highly contrived backs. These tourists visit controlled and managed samples of the outback through venues such as the Stockman's Hall of Fame in Longreach ... In short, visitor satisfaction surveys show that most visitors

want an experience that is mediated, cosseted and inoculated - so this becomes the primary way of accessing these sites and experiences.

The regional art gallery, in concert with other cultural and heritage sites, provides that mediated experience. One way of ascertaining its “cultural tourism” significance is through exhibitions, which are mediated experiences. Therefore, the gallery and its exhibitions could be explained as both gatekeepers of past memories as well as tickets to enter new or future experiences.

The *Queensland Heritage Trails Network*, incorporating the Matilda Highway, the 1700 kilometre road that runs from the western New South Wales border to the Gulf of Carpentaria in Far North Queensland was re-named by the Queensland government in an attempt to provide coherence to and connection between the towns and sites along the route. The highway journey takes tourists through the town of Tambo, “where a local and creative woman decide to embrace the flagging economic circumstances of the bush, where wool was being stock piled, and employed the idea of customising toy teddy bears named after Tambo and people in the locality” (Matthews 2000: 31). The enterprise has become internationally famous. Travelling further northwest, tourists could visit the town of Winton where Banjo Paterson wrote “Waltzing Matilda”. Continuing along the highway they reach Barcaldine, home of the Queensland Labor Party. A further stop could be had at Longreach, the town location for the Stockman’s Hall of Fame - a themed exhibition space where rural life is played out in various exhibition experiences. Here the simulacrum of outback tourism is clearly evident. The idea and symbols of rural life are here via reconstruction and artifice. Here the tourist gaze vicariously explores “the local” as commodity.

There are many definitions employed to consider cultural tourism. Foo and Rossetto, writing in 1998, produced a study that was embraced by the federal government as the keystone of its strategies for cultural tourism. The study defined cultural tourism in very broad definitional terms to include the following: festivals and fairs, performing arts or concerts, museums and art galleries, histories or heritage buildings, sites or monuments, art and craft workshops or studios and Aboriginal sites and cultural displays.

While cultural tourism is complimented by special- interest tourism, such as food, wine, gay travel, whale-watching to name a few types, there has been suspicion by regional galleries, some of which have marketed themselves to a high art clientele without the realisation that the cultural tourist may comprise up to a third of visitor numbers in any given year, dependent on location, special events and the gallery's program. In the main, Australian regional galleries embrace cultural tourism as additional to their core function of serving their immediate town and regional community.

Arts Queensland - the Office of Arts and Cultural Development, for the Queensland government advocates - cultural tourism to a tourist industry that needs to be persuaded about its profitability. Museums have been called "the consciousness industry" (Haacke 1984: 9). They must be profitable to survive or be heavily subsidised. They are in the business of culture - what the Queensland government's *Building Local, Going Global* 1995 cultural statement calls "Queensland cultural distinctiveness". What is important to note is that museums have long served as surrogates for travel, a particularly important role before the advent of mass tourism:

They have from their inception preserved souvenirs of travels, as evidenced in collections of plants, animals, minerals, and examples of the arts and industries of the world's cultures. While the museum collection itself is an undrawn map of all the places from which the materials have come, the floor plan, which determines where people walk, also delineates conceptual paths through what becomes a virtual space of travel. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 132).

## CHAPTER 5:

### TOWARDS THE NEW MUSEOLOGY: AUSTRALIA AND A CENTURY OF CHANGE

#### Visitor expectations and the art museum

Since the nineteenth century, demographics have always shaped museum attendance. Nineteenth century English public art galleries such as Whitechapel saw a challenge in giving the working class a reason to attend the gallery. Demographics - or in nineteenth century parlance, class and education - were significant factors in shaping cultural experiences. In the twentieth century museum researchers have found that those who attend art museums on a regular or semi-regular bases are in the main better educated, more affluent and hold better paying jobs. Nightingale, writing in *Media Information Australia* in 1994, argued that, "the art museum audience was not a person or a group but a relation," (1994:40 - 42). In the closing decades of the twentieth century, the audience became paramount to a new understanding of museums. Peter Vergo, the author of seminal publication *The New Museology* (1989), was promoting significant changes in thinking about the role and purposes of museums, and in particular the relationship between the museum and its audiences. In Australia, a number of significant studies and publications reinforced the importance of the visitor to the museum.

In 1991, Bennett and Frow were commissioned by the Australia Council to examine gallery visitation. Their report, *'Art Galleries: Who Goes? A Study of Visitors to Three Australian Galleries with International Comparisons* became an important work in considering why visitors attend galleries and how their experiences are shaped. This study concluded that there were fewer differences between the population of gallery visitors in the Australian study compared with the equivalent visitor groups in the United States, Britain and France. Despite the fact that the art museum was the most popular of all museums the Bennett and Frow study showed attendance was far from being evenly distributed across the population and that less than half the population, visited galleries once a year,

and fewer than one in five visited with any regularity. (Bennet and Frow 1991: 45 - 56).

Psychographic studies have found that regular visitors to art museums are interested in learning, like to explore new things and use their leisure time in a constructive way. With most people being leisure-time poor today, the art museum has had to compete with other forms of entertainment such as the Internet, other home-based activities and sport. Demographics of museum studies also show a need to embrace immigrant and minority populations. Cultural diversity became fundamental to museum art museum audience development. From the late 1980s, the state galleries and the National Gallery realised that, in order to sustain or grow visitor numbers they, would need to consider diversity when programming visiting exhibitions They worked constructively with Art Exhibitions Australia to secure a wide range of international exhibitions that would appeal to a broad cross-section of the community.

The exhibitions *From Sari to Sarong* (2002) and *The Age of Ankor: Treasures from the National Museum in Cambodia* shown at the National Gallery in Canberra focus on Southeast Asian textiles. These exhibitions were developed in consideration of the Gallery's own extensive collection of Asian textiles. These exhibitions not only placed the gallery's textile collection in a broader socio-historical framework, and spoke about the significance of textile as social documents, but also became audience development tools to attract Asian audiences, both travellers and Australian residents to the gallery.

Queensland Art Gallery's Asia Pacific Triennial exhibitions, while different in scope to the textiles exhibitions mentioned above, were extremely successful in attracting new audiences. The 2002 *Kids APT*, was a deliberate strategy by the Queensland Art Gallery to reach a vital under-subscribed audience: children under twelve years. *Kids APT* was about interaction, enjoyment and fun. For museums, and particularly, art museums, this demographic has been difficult to sustain. Previously, the gallery saw Saturday morning classes begun in the

1950s by Vida Lahey, as the gallery's solution to children, education and the visual arts.

In the United States, a number of public art museums have grasped the challenges of a new museological direction. For example "the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco has encouraged the wide mix of Asian communities living in the Bay area to become patrons, volunteers and board members." (Ragland-Dilworth 1998: 56 - 57) The Indianapolis Art Museum has encouraged African-American audiences by developing programs that highlight the museums collection of African works. In 2003, the Queensland Art Gallery (QAG) curated *Story Place: Indigenous Art from Cape York and the Rainforest* an exhibition that considered the cultural practices of the Torres Straits and Indigenous communities of Cape York in far North Queensland. This exhibition secured for QAG communities and locations that had not been embraced by the gallery's broad-based Queensland remit. Evidently, the Torres Straits and Cape cultures became important to the QAG in light of the success of the Asia Pacific Triennial and the significance of a exhibition curated by the Cairns Regional Gallery in 1998 entitled *ILAN PASIN: this is our way – Torres Strait Art*. The *Story Place* exhibition not only provided visitors to the QAG with a new Indigenous culture to comprehend, it employed over the first weekend of the exhibition Torres Strait and Cape York Indigenous peoples to act as gallery guides. This strategy by the curators and staff of the QAG provided a weight of authenticity to the exhibition, as well as adding a powerful interpretative voice generated by the Indigenous docents. *Story Place* and *ILAN PASIN* provide two important examples of the New Museology in action.

In the last two decades, there has been a veritable explosion in the number and type of art galleries and museums. As this growth has gained momentum, so too has the size and type of public, audiences, communities and visitors that engage with the art museum. As various publics have engaged with the art museum, new ways of connecting to this cultural institution have emerged. Competing in the leisure industry for a significant slice of visitor numbers, and supporting "quality" meaningful visitor experiences, the

progressive public art museum has finally realised that the nineteenth century classification of artworks and subsequent the methods of display and interpretation of those artworks has limitations for contemporary audiences. A “policy moment” occurred when Ralph Applebaum (1995,) the designer of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, argued: “that the new museologically driven museum had shifted from a house of collections to a place where communication on a multitude of levels was the key to meaningful and long-lasting community participation” (Garfield 1996: 34 - 45).

The art museum as a building also became an integral part of this New Museology. Driven in part by a growth in cultural tourism, the heritage sector, government policy, and at times regional arts and cultural policy development, the museum building as place, a designed space, as experience and icon, became significant for audiences. GAL - a new- model art museum located understood the significance of a particular CBD building when the museum was being invented in 1999. As mentioned previously, GAL Ipswich was created in the Heritage listed Ipswich old town hall in the main street of the town. One of its missions was to embrace the history of the building through interpretative exhibition and public program strategies. In addition, the building became an object for interpretation. The gallery museum as architectural landmark became important in the growth of domestic and international cultural tourism and the renewal of cities.

Ipswich City Council saw GAL as an opportunity to revive a flagging commercial city heart. It hoped that GAL Ipswich would bring substantial visitor numbers to the centre of Ipswich and thus, by the principles of ‘supply and demand’ stimulate the local economy as visitors engaged with the museum, spent money in its shop and café and possible other businesses nearby. In this strategy, the Ipswich City Council has a lot in common with the Bilbao local government authority in Spain, which embraced Frank Gehry & Associates, futuristic design for the Guggenheim Museum at Bilbao (1997). Both saw the museum as a viable stimulant not only to revive the local and regional economy, but also improve the standing, reputation and significance of the respective town

or city in the minds of local, national and international audiences. In the South Pacific region, Te Papa Museum in New Zealand, Global Arts Link in Ipswich Queensland and the Museum of Australia in Canberra are significant in understanding changes in the contemporary audience and the museum boom.

In regional terms, the City of Broken Hill and the Broken Hill City Art Gallery located in far western New South Wales:

undertook to provide work, training and income opportunities as an important part of [the gallery's] program and character. The first was the development of the Outback Art Prize (1993). The second was The Living Desert Art Trail (1994) followed by the Heritage Art Trail (1995) The third was the Outback Touring Exhibitions Program (1995). Both the Outback Art Prize and The Outback Touring Exhibitions Program are now permanent facets of the Gallery's program and profile as a regional resource, while the Arts Trails have become important facets of the City's infrastructure. This has provided employment for its large art community and a deeper experience for the viewer/consumer. (Corbett 1997: 3).

Ralph Applebaum and others who embraced the New Museology saw the modernist "white box" gallery and its collections-based museum counterparts as restricting their potential to create new audiences. The historical and critical concerns of the modernist art museum, with its genetic imprint of enlightened democracy, didn't give the audience and museum visitor a voice. Modernism, while it liberated the art museum and celebrated popular culture, mostly did this through the artist genius and the object.

Both Applebaum and Vergo realised contemporary audiences wanted to *interpret the object within the context of their life experiences*. By the beginning of the 1990s in Australia, the progressive public art museum had embraced this shift. It took on the mantle of a reconsidered liminal zone, a place where the essentials of globalisation, the significance of the local and the worth of the visitor intersected with the interpretation of the art object and the artist's intent.

## **The art gallery and its relationship to ‘the local’**

If intelligent and at times interventionist, curatorial practice can provide a provincial community with, as Smith argued, a local avant-garde (1984:46 - 53). Issues, ideologies, points of departure, subversions and interventions become the platform upon which the health, well-being and progress of regional arts development occurs.

The regional art gallery must be the provocateur, teasing, fostering a local *avant-garde* of thinkers and “doers” into new ways of being with their place. The gallery can be the “powerhouse”, the locale where regionalism can be reconsidered, recontested, and not - as is the case with some regional galleries - a place of entrapment caught up with clichés about art, “art-making” and its effects on citizenry. Regional personas, as Kate Ravenswood (1995) states: “are nearly always explained in terms of geographical metaphor – the regions are mapped, located, traced and placed”. Michael Bogle, writing in *Cultivating the Country: Living with the Arts in regional Australia* (1988: 74) defines regionalism as two forms:

“geographic regionalism” which is based on political boundaries of administration and convenience, as in “north coast” or “central west” and *cultural regionalism* which often has its basis in a revival of vernacular language or literature ... *Cultural regionalism* often results in the formation of regional centres such as galleries and festivals... Galleries should be at the centre of cultural regionalism because they provide the focus for “cultural memory”, thus ensuring that each local generation has the opportunity to investigate and reassess its artistic past – an increasingly necessary task for contemporary artists.

Alderman Tim Sullivan, the Mayor of Orange in rural New South Wales, when accepting the Dorothy Helmrich Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Arts in 1987, spoke of cultural regionalism from a different perspective. He stated:

Our Gallery [Orange Art Gallery] attracts many tourists to Orange. It brings money to the town and its buildings gave many out-of-work people their

first jobs. The arts are worthwhile not only for the way they change people's lives but also for the great economic benefits they bring to the community. (Faust 1988: 62).

Mayor Sullivan's comments are about cultural tourism and the microeconomics of local government. What is implied in Sullivan's acceptance speech is that cultural tourism and the cultural memory of a community cohabit. Tourists crave difference. Cultural memory reinforces place. The local is a key ingredient that provides difference from one region to another. Tourism, the local and cultural memory together supports the microeconomies, that together form the nation.

### **Audience development and the art museum**

The relationship between corporate business and the Australian art museum was strengthened through the last two decades of the twentieth century. In general terms, business and the arts formed new partnerships around the blockbuster. One of the most significant of these "exhibition types" is the Asia - Pacific Triennial (APT) produced by the Queensland Art Gallery, as three curatorially rigorous exhibition projects throughout the 1990s. Complete with performance, spectacle, new technology and visitor interaction, the APT exhibition events were fully orchestrated productions. Unlike other blockbuster exhibitions (e.g. *Surrealism: Revolution by Night* the 1992 - 93 exhibition curated by the National Gallery of Australia (and toured to the Queensland Art Gallery and the Art Gallery of New South Wales), where objects and artworks from significant art museums and collections overseas were imported into Australia to tour a specific state gallery circuit, the APT was specifically curated by the Queensland Art Gallery and did not tour. Cultural tourists and those interested in arts and international cultural diplomacy had to visit Brisbane.

The APT exhibition concept was an act of international and cultural diplomacy for both the Queensland Art Gallery and the Queensland government. The Queensland government's increased trade potential in the Asia Pacific region, together with the Queensland Art Gallery's urgent need to establish its parity with the other state galleries throughout the country, cemented this union

of government and the art museum. In corporate terms, this union was complimented by financial support from foundations such as Myer and Mazda. In recent years, the Queensland Art Gallery Collection has benefited further, with a substantial gift of Asian art from the Ken and Yasuko Myer Foundation.

The APT phenomena grew new audiences, through provocative curatorship that embraced and explored diverse art practices throughout Asia and the Pacific. Through new museological practices, which employ audience participation, presenting the artist in the gallery as maker, social commentator and documenter, popular culture invaded the “white box” gallery and the Queensland Art Gallery had a success on its hands. Increases in visitor numbers to the various APTs -1993, 1996 and 1999 - suggested that the gallery not only gained new audiences but also was able to sustain them from one APT to the next. This repeat visitation cemented relationships between visitors and the gallery that have the possibility of becoming fruitful partnerships once the Queensland Government’s Millennium Arts Project, including a major extension to the Queensland Art Gallery occurs in 2006 - 07. With APT, the Queensland Art Gallery, had finally found its special curatorial niche in relation to its interstate counterparts.

Throughout the 1980s, and especially in the 1990s, the partnership between government, the corporate sector and the art museum became fundamental to the success of major visual art exhibitions. Throughout these decades, the major public galleries realised that there was a growing need to drastically improve museum visitor numbers. This was achieved in part by improvements in marketing and merchandising, the celebrity factor of exhibitions themselves, cultural tourism, and good scholarship. During these decades’ management structures in Australian public art museums also changed. A clear example was the appointment of Timothy Potts to the directorship of the National Gallery of Victoria. Potts had a financial background, a doctorate in the classics and attempted to guide the gallery through the heady negotiations of repositioning it as an international gallery for the new millennium. The hierarchical staff structures within the art museum also eroded during this period.

The strict domain of the curator as arbiter of taste and scholar was changing. The Queensland Art Gallery's ATP exhibitions are an excellent example of democratisation within the art museum curatorship. Here teams known as "curatoriums" complemented the curator. These groupings comprise scholars, university lecturers, practitioners and sometime government officials. As a group they gave diversity to the curatorial process. The most significant question raised by the changes in galleries was their role in determining what was important enough to exhibit and collect, that is - what was offered to audiences.

Art as a social product, and what art is seen in galleries is an important component of what becomes institutionalised as the canon." (Crane 1987:97) Galleries are important in establishing aesthetic values; especially in the field of contemporary art in which competing players, artists, dealers and collector-investors all have a stake.

### **Australian corporate collectors and regional philanthropists**

The 1939 *Herald and Weekly Times Exhibition* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, sponsored by the Murdoch family, was to become a seminal event regarding corporate support for the visual arts and museums in Australia. It set the pace for individuals and companies like James Fairfax and Ken Begg of ICI to create significant art collections. In the 1960s, Dr Coombs for the Commonwealth and Central Banks (later the Reserve Bank of Australia) built contemporary art collection. Coombs was visionary in that he was able to work with the architects of the building and incorporated sculpture into the design brief. He was the first consultant to include work by Indigenous artists. By the 1970s, corporate art collecting had afforded a company like BHP the opportunity to amass a contemporary art collection far larger than the National Gallery of Victoria's:

As to emphasise this dominance, the National Gallery of Victoria showed a corporate collection, the JGL Investments Collection, to mark the state's [of Victoria's] 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary under the title *The Great Decades of Australia Art'* (Van Den Bosch 2005: 79).

While corporate Australia's focus was primarily on the triangle of Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra, regional Australia, and in particular regional art gallery collections, did not receive the largesse of corporations.

In regional terms, benefaction was scarce. Janet and Robert Holmes a Court did develop a major collection of regional Aboriginal and Australia art throughout the 1980s. Philanthropic gestures that have sited artworks in regional towns, in particular regional art galleries are limited in number, though significant, as they contribute to what the Cultural Ministers' Council has labelled *The National Distributed Collection*. The most noteworthy are the nineteenth century Victorian collections of Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong, the Howard Hinton Collection at the New England Regional Art Gallery, the Mildura Collection of Edwardian British art, the definitive collection of Australian glass at Wagga Wagga, the Pilbeam Collection of Australian late modernism in Rockhampton, the specialist collection of paper at Burnie Art Gallery in Tasmania, and the sculpture garden collection at Campbelltown City Bicentennial Art Gallery. Most of these collections have been established through the vision and determination of civic-minded people of influence. In broad terms, corporate sponsorship of any significant type did not appear in the regions until the 1980s, and even then to a limited extent.

The growth in American corporate art collecting in the period 1950 - 80 has been monitored and commented on by a number of writers (Saarinen & Loucheim 1959; Kuh & Sloane 1979) In Australia during roughly the same period, taxation legislative changes allowed corporations to donate works of art to institutions or foundations while receiving a full market value tax deduction. During the 1980s, through corporate collections such as Hoechst Australia, Faber-Castell, IMB, BP and Shell Australia many multinational corporations entered the art market. This decade saw a growth in the number of art dealerships and together with the establishment of - "Artbank the federal government's art collecting corporation - in November 1979" (Snell, in Dysart & Dunn 2001:10) provided confidence for a booming art market. However, what distinguished many of the corporate collectors of the 1980s, was the use of both

sponsorship and collections for marketing, “often blurring the distinction between the two through processes that impinged on artists’ moral rights and copyright” (Van Den Bosch 2005: 81).

The 1980s extravagances of Bond and Skase were replaced in the 1990s by the selling of corporate art collections. Corporations could see that company marketing strategies and targets could be met through sponsorship deals. These associative connections allowed companies like Shell, Louis Vuitton Australia, Optus and Qantas to assist in the sponsorship of blockbuster exhibitions such as *Vincent Van Gogh* at the National Gallery of Victoria, (Shell) *Lautrec* at the Queensland Art Gallery (Louis Vuitton Australia) and *Surrealism: Revolution by Night* (Optus and Qantas) at the National Gallery Canberra. These blockbusters attracted large audiences. Companies could see that, by association, their names or products could reach new audiences and either improve sales, or change perceptions of the company by the general public.

The exhibition *Creating Australia: 200 years of art 1788 -1988* presented by the Australian Bicentennial Authority, sponsored by BORAL, Australian Airlines and the Seven Network, and indemnified by the Australian Government through the Department of Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories had strong backing from the federal government. It is interesting to note that while the exhibition celebrated a significant Australian event, the artworks in this exhibition came from the state galleries and the National Gallery collections. There was no representation of regional collections. *Creating Australia: 200 years of art 1788-1988* engaged in the collective signs and symbols that speak about national-identity; the actuality of regionalism was only implied.

### **A change in the audience for art**

To understand certain aspects of art collecting in regional Australia, and in particular regional art gallery or local government art collections such as the City of Ipswich Collection, or those of Bendigo, Newcastle or Rockhampton in Central Queensland, a broad interrogation of the audience for art is needed. While significant changes occurred in the audience for art during the nineteenth century

in Australia, as evidenced by the developments in Art Societies, and attendances at Mechanics Institutes (or Schools of Art in Queensland), the most considered changes took place in Australia after World War II.

The most significant artists' society to develop during the nineteenth century was what was to be later known as the Heidelberg School. George Bell in Melbourne and Julian Aston in Sydney also developed teacher-student coteries from the 1880s through to the 1930s. Formally constituted professional organisations such as the Royal Arts Societies, in various states around the country, provided locations and environment where debates, aesthetics and values could be formed and/or acted upon. For these societies, the regular group exhibition was paramount. Peer review built reputations for artists, with most "renowned" visual artists gaining recognition for their skills, dexterity and their ability to capture "the real". These societies prized visual artists who engaged with realism. Pictures of the quintessential Australian landscape were highly desirable commodities. It is from these societies that taste for particular forms of visual art transferred to country Australia. Belonging to such groups or being taught by artists from these societies, had currency in both metropolitan and regional Australia. The amateur artist became a taste-maker for a whole community in rural and regional Australia.

The City of Ipswich Collection, which dates back (officially) to 16 March, 1951 (documented in the *Queensland Times* newspaper), is a prime example of a regional collection established through the efforts of amateur artists and city officials, as community taste-makers and advocates for the establishment of a civic art collection:

The idea of a public art gallery for Ipswich had as its genesis the 1950 Ipswich Technical College Collection exhibition and on the 16 March 1951 the Ipswich Art gallery was officially opened by Robert Campbell, then the Director of the Queensland Art Gallery. Located in the upstairs foyer of the [Ipswich] Town Hall, fourteen original paintings, gifts to the city by prominent citizens of the day, were displayed on this occasion. These

paintings were to become the nucleus of the City of Ipswich Collection”  
(Douglas 1999: 2)

The fourteen paintings that comprised this establishment collection were gifted to the City of Ipswich by prominent citizens of the day. Many of the scenes depicted in these paintings are of Southeast Queensland locations, such as *Glasshouse Mountains* (undated) by Robert Campbell or *Looking towards Flaxton, Blackhall* (undated) by Frank Waldo Potts. Most of those who gifted works had their own personal collections such as Merle Finimore, the wife of the then Major Alderman Finimore who gifted *Pheasant Girl* (undated) by Queensland artist Bessie Gibson (1868 - 1961) to the Collection. Merle had been a student at Ipswich and Central Technical College Brisbane in the 1940s and had, possibly through friendship and association, acquired a number of artworks by Brisbane based painters from that decade. Included in the Finimore collection were works by Robert Campbell, Bessie Gibson and Melville Haysome. Another donor Mrs May Hancock, who gifted *Morning Light* (undated) by Leslie Campbell (1902-72) said of her own collection: “ lot of them [the paintings] were of familiar places that we knew and that added more value to them. We had much more respect for them in some way because we were familiar with the places. (Denoon & Douglas 1994: n.p.).

It is realist landscape painting, the familiar and “the local” that become key to understanding this regional civic art collection. And it was these characteristics plus “the idea of what a civic collection should or must do” that fuelled many other regional collections to develop or significantly grow during the pre - and post - World War II period in Australia. Local philanthropy was alive and well in the Ipswich of the 1950s, and in a small way mirrored what had been important in American visual arts collecting since the nineteenth century. The trend in the 1940 and 1950s towards the promotion of contemporary art - best understood by the public during this period as abstract art - was less attractive to regional audiences of the period. Realism equated to an artist’s skill and hence was acknowledged as a “quality” when artworks were being acquired in the regions. There seems to be on average a ten-year time lag in the transference of aesthetics and taste from the city to the country. And, while this may be read as

insularity, parochialism or even regionalism at work, it speaks more about the role of tertiary art education and training, the growth of art societies such as the *The Centre Five Group* formed in 1959 (Sturgeon 1978: 138) and the development of commercial art galleries in the cities. Hence the centre or city continued to attract the *avant-garde* and the country town or region the traditional artist craftsman. In both circumstances, context is the deciding factor.

From the 1940s, a new mass audience for the arts took shape in the United States. The process of audience development would establish a model for the rest of the world to follow over the next half-century. Corporate America was activated during the 1950s, and became a partner in audience development and gifting during this period. The United States has a history of philanthropy and the arts with examples such as the Frick, Guggenheim, Barnes and deMinel families and individuals collecting significant artworks for the eventual enjoyment of the American art loving and museum-going public. Museums in the United States have always been associated with the development of new collections.

By 1954 there were 2000 museums in the United States (Van Den Bosch 2005:70). In this period, Francis Henry Taylor, Director of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, was in the vanguard of improving or building new audiences. Blockbusters such as *English Painting from London Museums* provided American audiences with new artworks to experience, and in so doing allowed them to become cultural tourists without leaving the comfort of New York. Magazines such as *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair* and *Life* increased their reporting on the work of individual artists and exhibitions. By the mid 1950s, synergies between fine art museum exhibitions, the art, as provocateur, marketing and commercialism were evident.

In post war Australia, Sydney seems to have been the city where marketing the visual arts was most strongly recognised. Public art museums such as the Art Gallery of New South Wales had their presence in the local art world enhanced with art galleries opening in department stores such as David Jones, Grace Bros and Farmer's Blaxland Gallery. The strong and growing Australian economy in the 1950s and 1960s saw the average wage rise

significantly. It is this twenty-year timeframe that shapes contemporary art collecting in Australia. In regional Australia, the forces of the commercial art world are almost absent. While regional centres such as Townsville had commercial art galleries – Ralph Martens Art Gallery in Flinders Mall - the majority of towns and regions experienced the changes in Australian art only through their regional art museum and the limited exhibitions that toured from State galleries. During this period the intellectualisation of the visual arts occurred mostly in Sydney and Melbourne with contemporary art societies supporting writers such as the historian Franz Phillip. Dr Gertrude Langer who wrote for the *Courier-Mail* in Brisbane, provided an intellectual and world-view of the visual arts for this small arts community.

In the early 1960s, *Art and Australia* replaced *Art in Australia* and continues to be the longest-standing art magazine in Australia. While this magazine has embraced regionally located artists and their practices, regional art museums and their programs have been somewhat marginalised. The most recent and comprehensive article “Regional Galleries in Australia: an abbreviated history” by Pamela Bell, was published in 2002. It was the magazine *Art Network* – a quarterly produced by artists for artists - that engaged regional editors and contributors. Up until the 1980s, regional art activities were not well represented in national art publications in Australia. *Periphery* a northern New South Wales magazine was one of the first in regional Australia to celebrate artworkers and their diverse practices. This magazine unashamedly attempted to redress the imbalance or lack of regional arts coverage in publications. As a strategy, it not only gave voice to visual artists resident in regional and rural Australia, but it also distinguished the local and a sense of place as important to art-making. Its very title deconstructed territory, and helped develop a realisation in the Australian cultural psyche that the edge or periphery and the borders that define it are ever-changing. This bold move to publish should not be seen in isolationist terms. It should be understood in a border climate of change that had been present since the 1960s, especially in relation to the Arts Council movement.

The Queensland Arts Council, like its interstate counterparts and national affiliate Regional Arts Australia is committed to regional Australia. Predominantly a performing arts organisation, it toured players to country towns, and in its early cultural imperialist years – 1960 to the –1980s, provided stimulus and entertainment to thousands of people, especially school children resident in “the bush”. In 2002, the Queensland Arts Council “saw the employment of 376 artists, arts workers, stage and technical support personnel across ... three core programs with a combined audience of 652152. This audience shared in 79 productions and 12 exhibitions.” (Frame 2002 n.p.) The Queensland Arts Council, unlike its interstate counterparts, also operated an exhibition-touring scheme.

Initiated by Dr Gertrude Langer in the 1970s, and directed in the 1980s and early 1990s by Mrs Len Davenport, this exhibition-touring scheme provided visual art exhibitions that were shown in banks, shops and community halls, as well as in some regional art galleries throughout regional Queensland. In fact, it was Len Davenport’s diligence and determination to connect to the regions and lobbying by the Mayor of Rockhampton – Alderman Pilbeam - that stimulated the establishment of the Regional Galleries Association of Queensland. The office of the regional Galleries Association of Queensland (RGAQ) was established in the Arts Division of the Queensland government in 1987. From its establishment until 2004, this incorporated organisation had supported the establishment and development of over twenty regional galleries in Queensland. In her final report dated December/January 1998, the inaugural and (now) retiring RGAQ Executive Officer, Julie-Foster Burley, selected a quote from Stephen Weil to encapsulate her understandings of the significance of regional galleries. Foster-Burley quotes the following:

Regionally based galleries (particularly with their flexibility about subject matter and ability to be more immediately responsive to the local community) increasingly seem to be a critically important alternative to discipline based institutes ... I’m all the more convinced that they represent the field’s most hopeful futures. (Stephen Weil Emeritus

Professor & Senior Scholar, Centre for Museum Studies, Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC.) (Regional Galleries Association of Queensland 1998: 2).

### **Regionalism in collecting policies**

To Local Government the sophistication of a gallery's collection and exhibition programmes is often a secondary consideration. A completely different set of standards ought to apply. A gallery's success should also be seen in terms of its ability to form collections that reflect in part the culture of the arts and crafts of its own region. A local gallery should act as an "institutionalised memory bank" of regional cultural life. Both Daniel Thomas and Michael Bogle referred to the 1975 Piggott Report in their respective chapters in *Cultivating the Country: Living with the Arts in Regional Australia*. In citing the following statement, it is clear that both Bogle and Thomas agree, with the Committee of Enquiry's recommendation:

Government policy, we recommend, should encourage local museums to concentrate on their own history. At present, regional differences are not adequately reflected ... Far too little attempt is made to concentrate on what is unique to the town and district. (Bogle 1988:72)

This statement is a clear indicator that the Committee of Inquiry understood that for almost 200 years (since white settlement began) that *the uniqueness of place* was poorly understood within museum circles. This is not to say, for example, that in art museums local art (subject-matter and practitioners) didn't exist - it did. State collections were slow to embrace "the local" in relation to Australian Impressionism. The works of Roberts and Streeton were slow to be acquired by both the National Gallery of Victoria and the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

While Bogle used this quote to reinforce the point that regional galleries need to forefront the local in their collection policies, the 1975 Piggott Report's recommendation was about history museums.

Lewis Mumford, a cultural theorist writing in his 1938 publication *The Culture of Cities*, provides an interesting framework through which to consider regionalism,

the gallery and art collections: “Loosely defined *regionalism* is the adoption of goals that benefit, support or reinforce regional values.” ( Bogle 1988: 74).

### **Regional Collecting and the Community**

Daniel Thomas in a 1988 interview by Peter Timms for inclusion in the publication *Cultivating the Country* stated that the priority for any new regional art gallery would be to develop an exhibition program before a collection. Thomas saw a collection policy as paramount and worthy of the time spent in developing one. He emphasised the local artist and material culture that has significance to the community. He spoke of the “warm flow” or pride of a community in understanding its significance.

in my view there are deep emotional, perhaps even primitive associations with the things like birthplace which art historians don't think of at first; but the innocent public does ... If you collect in this way [acquiring art works that are either by local artists, artists who have worked in the region, artists from the region who have succeeded in major cities, or art that relates to the life and history of a community] it will touch the hearts and minds of the local people” (Thomas 1988 : 84)

Lippard (1997: 33) concurs with this “pride of place” view when in *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, she states: “finding a fitting place for oneself in the world is finding a place for oneself in a story. The story is composed of mythologies, histories, ideologies – the stuff of identity and representation.” In continuing the interview with Timms, Thomas highlighted an example of local lures: the *Tichborne Claimant*, a legal case from the 1870s in Wagga Wagga New South Wales where a local butcher claimed to be a legal heir to an English family fortune. A large oil painting of the track completed at the time is in the possession of the Council. Thomas suggested that this artwork could provide the starting point of a collection about the social issues of lawsuits, acrimony and litigation. Timms in interviewing Thomas - now a venerated elder curator/statement in Australian art and museum circles - teased out a number of issues that are crucial to a contemporary understanding of the regional gallery

and its circumstances. Thomas emphasised that the local community's needs should be paramount. Collecting policies and collections, while referencing the local - directly or indirectly - should also afford the locals and visitors to the gallery or museum with certain experiences "something that might take viewers outside themselves ... [and] push your locals in new worlds" (Thomas 1988: 86) Thomas gave the example of a World War II internment camp for Germans situated at Tatura near Shepparton in Victoria. He thought that the particularity of the camp to Shepparton, and the broader topic of World War II, could also form a framework for engaging the local while implying global concerns about war and social justice. The tension to embrace the local and construct opportunities where the local and the global or other communities can be considered is a constant for both exhibitions programming and collecting in regional galleries.

GAL attempted to address the local/global connection with its inaugural 1999 publication *Exploring Culture and Community*. The publication was an attempt by this new art museum to embrace and sell Lippard's *Lure of the Local* ideas about two generic publics – the Ipswich communities themselves and the broader public who have fixed but not immutable opinions about Ipswich as a place and community. The publication, in its complexity, also attempted to embrace and interrogate culture and community in its wide-ranging forms, evidence and justify the existing City of Ipswich Collection, imply its future growth, as well as present a five year strategic plan for GAL. The publication was under-utilised by GAL and the Ipswich City Council. While it clearly explored the rich heritage and material culture of Ipswich, as a strategic planning document it can also be read as a five year plan of exhibitions, public programs and acquisitions to the Collection. The publication's potential to encourage debate within Australian museum circles and local government has been limited.

During the interview with Timms, Thomas acknowledges how regional art museums use their collections:

If you have a collection, it's almost immoral not to actively promote it, not only to your local audience but also to the world at large ... It's not a question peculiar to Wagga (on any regional town) the question applies

equally to Sydney and Melbourne ... The state galleries and the National Gallery in Canberra are very well aware of collections as immensely important resources... But the real problem is the lack of federal policy for heritage, other than land and buildings, which is fixed heritage. For movable heritage that is for objects in art, science and history museums there is very little clear policy at federal level ... So policy thinking doesn't percolate down from federal to state (and then onto local government where regional galleries are administered). (1988: 86)

Thomas continued the interview by reinforcing the importance of the exhibition as a mechanism for presenting ideas and challenging the public. He concluded by identifying the need for a Museums Commission to be established at federal government level, not only to support the acquisition of objects in rational and useful collections, but also deal with their preservation, documentation, research and interpretation. Thomas's suggestion repeated one of the recommendations of *Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections (the Piggott Report)*, as it is commonly titled), published in 1975.

Twenty-nine years on from that report and sixteenth years after the interview between Thomas and Peter Timms, the federal government has not developed a Museum Commission: objects acquired by art museums at state government level, or for regional art galleries, are actioned by the galleries themselves. The rationalisation and alignment of collections and policies to create a succinct integrated National Distributed Visual Art Collection is still problematic. With this stated, it is worth reiterating that all three tiers of government engage in the acquisition of objects. But local government is charged, through regional galleries and other cultural institutions and interpretative centres in its remit, with the task of preserving, documenting, and researching (depending on the funds available) a significant portion of Australia's national distributed collection.

## CHAPTER 6:

### GLOBAL ARTS LINK IPSWICH – CURATORSHIP, AND THE CITY OF IPSWICH ART COLLECTION

This chapter is an entry point into my final chapter, which can be found on the accompanying DVD. While this thesis has attempted to answer the question of whether ‘*curatorship*’ as a defined visual arts practice sustain the regional art museum as a viable and relevant cultural institution in contemporary regional Australia; it has also provided direct and indirect evidence to suggest that, and as the thesis title implies, “a new country” has been cultivated or emerged through progressive and insightful curatorship within the regional art museum.

This new country could be thought of as:

a way of knowing or being with a place. Understanding a place is about committing to particular narratives. Knowing that in every place name (Ipswich) is a story, an outcropping of the shared tales that form the bedrock of community. (Lippard 1996: 46).

These shared understandings can only occur in the reflective or contemplative space of the art gallery or museum. The regional gallery or museum can only develop them in partnership with a community. The cultural and economic potential of GAL was assured when its commitment to new museological practices located the people of Ipswich and their stories as paramount to the museum’s vision and operations.

I have structured this final written chapter of the thesis as a number of interconnecting sections – seven in total. It is important to provide a context in which evidence of my curatorial practice, (located on the accompanying DVD) could be fully examined and understood. In addition, a synopsis of the publication - *Exploring Culture & Community for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Global Arts Link Ipswich - a new model for public art museums*, together with an overview of the City of Ipswich Collection and the inaugural exhibition - *People Places and Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich*, a select history of Ipswich and the

establishment of Global Arts Link, provide a comprehensive frame through which to view the exhibitions I curated.

The seven interconnecting sections of this chapter are as follows:

- **Section 1:** Community, collections and the regional gallery - a postcolonial or postmodern context. This section is an essay that situates GAL into the broader environments of culture and community. This study is contextualised utilising selected cultural theorists' understandings of the "postcolonial" and "postmodern."
- **Section 2:** Milestones in Ipswich's social and cultural history from 1842 to 2002. This section is a brief chronology of events and exhibitions that occurred at Ipswich in the period 1842 to 2001 with a particular focus on the five years –1997 to 2001. The history of Ipswich is reflected in its Art Collection.
- **Section 3:** A brief history of Ipswich City Art Collection. This section provides an overview and brief history of the Collection. Understanding the sequence of selected acquisitions, gives insights into how and why this collection was formed. Civic art collections by their very nature are organic. No collections policy was established until 1985 when the first formal public art gallery was established.
- **Section 4:** The establishment of Global Arts Link – a new- model art museum. This section provides a brief history of why and how GAL was established at a particular time and place. These events are indirectly economic in nature and have a bearing on both the city's Art Collection and the need to curate specific exhibitions about Ipswich as a place with a history and a people.
- **Section 5:** An overview of three exhibitions.  
Guest curators at GAL Ipswich between 1999 and 2001 curated three exhibitions about or including some works from the City of Ipswich Art Collection. The exhibitions are: *People, Places & Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich* (15 May - 18 July 1999) curated by Rod James; *Pride of Place: the CS Energy Gift & the City of Ipswich Collection* (23 July

- 29 August 1999) curated by Craig Douglas and Engage: Collected Works - City of Ipswich Collection & the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University (28 November 2000 - 4 February 2001), also curated by Craig Douglas.
- **Section 6:** A synopsis of Global Arts Link's inaugural publication *Exploring Culture & Community for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Global Arts Link Ipswich - a new model for public art museums*. This full colour publication was published by Global Arts Link Ipswich to coincide with the open of the museum in May 1999. It is an anthology of 42 essays about culture and community. It contains images of artworks from the City of Ipswich Collection, the *People Places and Pastimes* exhibition and a commissioned work by David Usher – a photo essay of a road trip to Ipswich.
- **Section 7:** The GAL PLAN 1999 – 2004. Both the inaugural GAL exhibition - *People, Places & Pastimes* and the publication *Exploring Culture & Community* are independent of each other, yet interconnect through their individual interrogations about culture and community. Both the exhibitions and publication laid a curatorial blueprint for future Global Arts Link exhibitions, acquisitions for the City of Ipswich Collection and the museum's public programs. Both exhibition and publication informed the *GAL PLAN* – the art museum's five-year operational and strategic plan (1999 - 2004).

### **Section 1: Community, collections and the regional gallery - a postcolonial or postmodern context**

The history of museum representations of communities and museum activities with and about communities is a recurring and important element in the relationship between museums and their communities. This relationship is magnified when the regional art museum and its communities are in focus.

When one considers a civil society, the history of that society is a living part of a people's sense of who they are and how they relate to other elements of

that society. History is more than events it contributes to a cultural framework that informs an ideological dimension.

The histories of specific art collections, exhibitions and individual museums reveal the ways in which social groups and the objects that can be made to stand for them are presented in museums and perceived by communities.

The authorial voice of the museum so characteristic of the universal museum negated a public voice. Collecting and exhibition in this model was the domain of a small group of museum professionals, private collectors and patrons. While the *Wunderkammers* of the seventeenth century became the public museums of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the explicit and implicit intentions for collecting have altered very little. Collecting has been used as a strategy to establish positions of authority and dominance, to position oneself against the collective “other”, in the service of the state or to reinforce sovereignty. While the last three centuries has seen the history of the museum slowly move to embrace “the public”, profound understandings of the public-visitor relationship with the museum have little more than a decade’s history.

Early twentieth century museums (Bennett 1995; Coombes 1993) acknowledged their mandate to serve diverse audiences, to be educational and morally uplifting. But exhibitions at this time were designed to control or manipulate the educational process, and of course had political imperatives. In Australia, like other white settler colonialist dominions, the museum reinforced colonial policies. As recently as 1941, these colonialist policies - translated into the rhetoric of modern pre-World War II Australia - were illustrated by the exhibition *Australian Aboriginal Art and Its Applications*, exhibited at the Australian Museum, Sydney: “The cultural logic of colonialism ... sometimes excluded Indigenous people, or denigrated them and yet also frequently celebrated Indigenous folklore and art.”(Thomas 2001: 301). The colonial expositions in Melbourne and Sydney in the late nineteenth century framed Australian Indigenous culture in terms of arrested development and representative of “the other”. These exhibitions were also experiences in

vicarious tourism, providing visitors with a sense of participation. White superiority was articulated through the dioramas and constructs that supported a whole industry based upon colonial spectacle. Nineteenth century exhibitions, which employed scientific classifications and typologies mostly, negated or generalised a cultural context.

In 1941, the Australian Museum curated an exhibition that focused on the motifs found in Aboriginal culture and their potential to stimulate the production of contemporary china, fabrics, architecture and design. Local arts and crafts practitioners supported this exhibition with great enthusiasm. Enthusiasm coupled with the economic potential that appropriating motifs could afford white craft production meant that the craft arts component of the exhibition was expanded and took place in the David Jones department store auditorium in central Sydney “Adapted with intelligence and taste, aboriginal art can make a unique contribution to modern Australian craft work ...” (McCarthy 1941: 355 - 356 cited in Thomas 2001: 303). As Thomas has rightly observed, while this exhibition was in essence a particular construction from a collection of Indigenous peoples’ artefacts:

Paradoxically ... the effort to assimilate Indigenous culture to a distinctively national school of design had underlined the incommensurability of Indigenous and settler forms, and hardly sustained the idea that a transition from one to the other from aboriginal prehistory to a settler future represented any kind of cultural progress. (Thomas 2001: 304)

In the contemporary regional Australian context the art museum and its collection(s), while being both a silent witness to the history of the museum and collecting, has also had a relationship with its predecessors, which is both inclusive and exclusive. It has all the mannerisms of authority and dominance, the imprimatur of local government. It is a house of curiosities or marvels similar to seventeenth century antecedents. Its exclusivity is shaped by new museological ideologies that focus on audience and the visitor experience

providing answers to the question of how objects have come to be lodged in the museum.

Both Arnoldi and Peirson Jones, writing in Karp, Muller Kreamer & Lavine (1992) *Museums and Communities – The Politics of Public Culture* illuminates the benefits of enhanced audience interest in collections. Museums have captured this interest by presenting exhibitions on the histories of specific collections. In the last decade (1994 – 2004), a number of travelling exhibitions on particular collections or selections from collections have toured Australian state galleries. A recent example came from the D’Orsay Museum, Paris, which was translated into *French Impressionism* at the NGV for its opening in 2004. This and similar exhibitions have provided the Australian public with an opportunity to engage with iconic masterpieces. During the renovation phase of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) from 1998 to 2003, Bendigo Art Gallery was loaned “22 pictures from the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Victoria, extending upon the existing display of the French paintings in Bendigo’s Collection.” (Bendigo Exhibition Calendar brochure 2001).

“Communities often look to museums as places in which identity is articulated.” (Karp, Muller Kreamer & Lavine 1992: 371) The myriad of local museums situated in many country towns throughout Australia is testimony to their position in and about a community. While these under-funded, lamentably understaffed and often aesthetically neglected institutions appear marginal in relation to their towns’ dynamics, they provide a physical place where aspects of a community’s identity dwell. Albeit dusty and in shambles, these volunteer-run often ‘down –at- heel’ social history museums speak of a town or district’s history read through displayed objects that no longer have a functionality. These museums reinforce the stereotype and become more important to the vicarious tourist-traveller as “cabinets of curios” rather than sites where the past and the present intersect. They lack contemporary relevance. In these unresolved collections dwell the colonial and the imperial. These collections are evidence of empire and outpost blended with the struggle of the white settler to exist in an alien land. Through a combination of mismanagement, an unclear direction and

no strategic plan, these community museums trace a place and simultaneously reinforce the obsolete.

But, while their irrelevancy does relegate “the idea of the museum” to a bygone age, they should be interrogated in concert with the regional art museum, the performing art centres (if the town or region has one), tourism, regionalism, national identity, the parochial and the micro-economy of the community.

A possible way through this multitude of constellations, partnerships, relationships and associations that speak for and about a regional community is to examine the community through the lens of one of its cultural institutions: the regional art museum. This contemporary museum is a cultural location. Like its metropolitan, based counterparts, the regional art museum sits uncomfortably amongst *colonial* sensibilities, *postcolonial* ideals and *postmodern* resolutions.

Where it differs fundamentally from its metro cousins is in its particularity and immediacy to its constituents. Regional communities throughout Australia can be discussed from multiple perspectives, yet - while these perspectives shape and impact on the regional gallery - it is in the local that particular difference occurs.

The regional gallery, like the communities it serves is physically isolated, on the perimeter. This position doesn't ready allow for the spontaneous and at times serendipitous connections that occur when cultural institutions are metropolis- based. Associative connections and the close proximity to universities and other cultural institutions, together with the surge of people and their ideas confined by the dynamics of a large city, are absent around the regional town.

### **Location of culture**

In disparaging terms, commentators have likened living in regional Australia of living in a Third World country. Postcolonial theory can be captured and utilised in considering this comment. Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political

and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives, as Homi Bhabha (1994) has argued:

emerge from the colonial testimony of Third World countries and the discourses of the “minorities” within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South. They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic “normality” to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities peoples. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the “rationalization” of modernity. (1994: 171)

Bhabha suggests that postcolonialism can also be understood by bending Jurgen Habermas’s theoretical position and seeing it as a way of exploring social pathologies – “loss of meaning, conditions of anomie” (Habermas 1987: 348). It is within the discourse of the minority and culturally different, that the relationship between a rural or regional town and its art gallery is best understood.

Regional communities, while similar in language and some cultural sensibilities to metropolitan communities, could be explained as *culturally* different. This occurs because of their isolation and their micro blend of minorities as well as their geopolitical circumstances. Their collective social authority has been diminished throughout the twentieth century. Due to limited work, a sluggish economy and the refocus on industries in the late 1940s, rural towns and communities saw their populations dwindle. The wheat, wool, coal and labour that cemented many rural and regional communities in a commitment to the bush disappeared. By the late twentieth century, cultural differences were a tangible way of reconsidering rural communities. Reshaped regional and rural demographics also reinforced cultural difference.

### **IPSWICH: a regional city**

Ipswich a regional city of 135000 people located 50 kilometres west of Brisbane, (and the site of Global Arts Link) is a supreme example of a rural city supporting

cultural difference. Ipswich as a physical place has changed radically within the three decades 1970 - 2000. Predominately a “blue-collar, working mans” town, Ipswich has a white settler history complete with disenfranchisement of the local Indigenous population. The Boxflat mining disaster of 1967, where a number of coal miners died; the 1968 fire that destroyed Cribb & Foote - Ipswich’s well-regarded department store; the systematic closure of mines throughout the 1970s and 1980s including the Aberdare Colliery; and the closure of the Ipswich Railway Workshops where 3000 men once were employed – these events changed the social and cultural landscape of Ipswich forever.

The social pathologies – “loss of meaning, conditions of anomie” - referred to by Habermas (1989) were at play in this rural cityscape. Ipswich had lost its industrial and proletariat focus and was in free fall during the 1970s and 1980s. The economic imperatives of cheap housing for a broad range of nationalities moving into Southeast Queensland, and the welfare dependence of a significant cohort of the population, meant that the “white Anglo-Celtic” working man’s town of another era merged with Ipswich’s marginal status as a town in the shadow of Brisbane, and morphed into “otherness”. The culture that was Ipswich and the demographics that constructed contemporary Ipswich set up an “indeterminism”.

To reconstitute the discourse of Ipswich’s cultural content and symbols, and replace it within the same timeframe of representation was impossible. What was required was a radical revision of the social temporality of Ipswich in which the emergent histories of this city and region needed to be written. The rearticulation of the “Ipswich sign” in which cultural identities were ascribed needed to be renegotiated.

Ipswich’s “indeterminism” as a mark of conflict emerged within its new social discourses during the 1990s. What could this contemporary Ipswich become? How could this former “working man’s town” emerge from the past and be confident about the present? How could the city’s old cultural contents and symbols cohabit with emerging ones? A radical revision was required and articulated by the Ipswich City Council and concerned citizens. With the opening

of GAL Ipswich on the 15 May 1999, the histories of this city, its cultural landscape, its' "otherness" and "indeterminism" could be interrogated by, in and around this new-model art museum.

As Ipswich's cultural landscape began to change, especially from the 1980s onwards, the construction of its culture and its traditions were also changing. Ipswich's cultural landscape during these years could be labelled as both "transnational" and "translational" (Bhabha 1994: 172). With over 80 different languages being spoken in the Ipswich region:

the transnational dimension of cultural transformation – migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation [made] the process of cultural translation [for Ipswich] a complex form of signification. The natural(ized) unifying discourse of "nation", "peoples" or authentic "folk" tradition, those embedded myths of [a] culture's particularity [could not] be readily referenced [in Ipswich]. ((Bhabha 1994: 172).

GAL, like so many other regional art museums that have emerged in regional Australia in the last twenty years, was an ideal location and system, directly removed from the machinations of local government, where the abiding themes and ideologies of *the postcolonial* could be interrogated. Ipswich as a physical place, a location and region is best explained as *postcolonial* and *postmodern*. Cultural difference, social authority, displacement, diaspora and even political discrimination – these terms could be used to explain the Ipswich of today and apply to the *postcolonial*. The embedded myths and the unifying discourses of nation and people so characteristic of a colonial Australia and Ipswich of the nineteenth century (Ipswich was established in 1832) were reshaped by modernity. Contemporary Ipswich, like so many other regional towns, sits beyond the modern and inhabits "a newness" - an intervening space, a postmodernity.

## **Section 2: Milestones in Ipswich's social and cultural history from 1842 to 2002**

As early as 1842, when Moreton Bay was opened for free settlement, Henry Wade made a survey of a township and gardens at what is now West Ipswich. In 1863 Ipswich Grammar School opened - the first official secondary school in Queensland. A School of Arts, later to become the Ipswich Town Hall, was completed in 1861 with further additions at various times up to 1892. In 1864, the Railway Workshops were established in North Ipswich. By 1865 the first section of railway line between Ipswich and Grandchester was completed, a first in Queensland. By 1904 Ipswich was proclaimed a city. In 1893, the start of technical classes was celebrated with an exhibition in the School of Arts. This exhibition included works by Carl Oscar Fristrom and Godfrey Rivers, the first curator of the Queensland Art Gallery.

In 1951, the first public art gallery was opened in the upstairs foyer of the old town hall, Ipswich. Fourteen original paintings - gifts to the city by a number of prominent citizens - were on display. They were to become the nucleus of the City of Ipswich Art Collection. At the time, the city's interest was clearly about the acquisition of a collection of pictures that in style reflected the prevailing fashion: traditional, tonal compositions with an emphasis on landscape.

In 1982, *Chookyard*, large oil on canvas by Brisbane artist William Robison was acquired for the Collection. At \$2000 this was a large expense for a newly established gallery without a director. The first director was appointed in 1985.

The City of Ipswich Art Gallery was officially established in 1985. It occupied what was St Paul's Church Young Men's Hall in Limestone Street. The gallery ceased operations in this location in 1997 in preparation for the establishment of Global Arts Link. This new art museum would incorporate the old gallery space as collections storage.

GAL opened as new art museum in the remodelled old town hall Ipswich, on 15 May 1999. The museum was configured as seven galleries:

*The Bendigo Bank Hall of Time* (previously the First Australian Hall of Time sponsor's name change) is a social history gallery containing: the Time Machine, an interactive exhibit containing 300 hours, of stories about Ipswich and district, *Queensland Heritage Trails Network* (QHTN) interactive, and other exhibits.

*Making Tracks – Indigenous Gallery* with an 8.2 metre video wall; *On Stage* showcasing the work of local artists and the *CS Energy Gallery* – the temporary exhibition gallery complete the ground floor gallery spaces. (The first floor houses the four remaining galleries, including *Lottie's Place* – a children's gallery.

In 2004, five years after Global Arts Link Ipswich was launched, the Ipswich City Council changed its title to Ipswich Art Gallery. The name Global Arts Link (GAL) had been a deliberate choice to move away from using "museum" or "gallery" in the title. GAL also reflected and extended on Global Infolinks (GIL), the name given to Ipswich Library's Internet service, the first public library in Australia to have ready access to borrowers. In marketing terms, the GAL brand while distinctive - became synonymous with Ipswich.

In 2004, Global Arts Link Ipswich annual attendance was in excess of 80,000 museum visitors.

### **Section 3: A brief history of Ipswich City Art Collection**

From its modest beginnings in 1951 there was a hiatus of inactivity of 29 years, when no collecting occurred and no permanent home for the collection was made available.) Today, however, the City of Ipswich Collection has grown to over 2000 objects.

The first work to establish the City of Ipswich Collection was a watercolour entitled *Glasshouse Mountains* c. 1949 by Robert Campbell, a previous director of the Queensland Art Gallery. Other works acquired in 1951 included mostly traditional landscapes and still-life by artists such as William Bustard, Frank Waldo Potts, G.K. Townsend, J. W. Tristram, Bessie Gibson's *Peasant Girl* and Arthur Murch's *Portrait of Robert Andrew*.

It wasn't until 1979 that the then mayoral candidate, Des Freeman promoted the idea of a permanent art gallery for the city. In June 1980, a dedicated gallery was opened in the former St Paul's Church Young Men's Hall and named the City of Ipswich Gallery. In 1982 and as an attempt to enlarge the small civic collection (as it was then), the City of Ipswich Acquisitive Art Competition was held with prize money of \$2000. Among the selected works was *Chookyard* 1982 by William Robinson.

In 1985, the first full-time director Stephen Rainbird was appointed, remaining at the gallery until 1987. During this time the gallery's first collection policy with a focus on watercolours was implemented. Works acquired during this period include:

Robert Boyne's *Heavy Night 1* 1986, *Cape York Landscape* (n.d.) by Ray Crooke, C G Gibbs's *Toowoomba Ranges* (n.d.) purchased 1985, Stephen Killick's *Untitled* 1985, Helen Lilliecrapp-Fuller's *Untitled (Still Life)* 1986, Sally Robinson's *Kakadu 1-V* 1985 and Bill Yaxley's *Sky Mountain* 1987.

From 1987 to 1990, (Mrs) Len Davenport was the gallery director. During this three year period the collection continued to grow with additional work by such artists as Merv Feeney, Sam Di Mauro, Barbara Hanrahan, Jan Hynes, Ron McBurnie, Charles Page's folio of nineteen photographs entitled *A Troublesome Class of Men* 1990, as well as works by photographer Richard Stringer and others.

Throughout the early 1990s under the directorship of Alice Anne McRobbie additions to the collection included product from the Design for Production Ipswich based, Council funded design workshop project, and a suite of watercolours based on Ipswich coal mining landscape and industries by John Caldwell and Len Davenport. In the mid 1990s the gallery curated *Final Gauge*, an exhibition about the Ipswich Railway Workshops. From this exhibition a wealth of historical and contemporary photos about the workshops has now passed into the collection.

With the closure of the Ipswich Regional Art Gallery in 1997, and the establishment of the Ipswich Arts Foundation and Global Arts Link, the City of

Ipswich Collection moved into a new and vital growth phase. Over the last two years significant gifts and acquisitions through the Foundation have changed this collection from one of local and state importance to that of a regional collection of national significance. From Global Arts Link's inaugural exhibition *People, Place and Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich* new works by contemporary artists such as Mike Green, Ellen Jose and Robert Moore with his GTS 1999 moulded inflatable plastic car installation, have given this collection contemporary relevance.

#### **Section 4: The establishment of Global Arts Link: a new- model art museum**

Global Arts Link (GAL) Ipswich, a new model public art museum, opened on the 15 May, 1999 to fanfare and acclaim by the people of Ipswich. This art museum occupies the old Ipswich Town Hall, which had been built between 1861 and 1892. During 1998 - 89, the architectural partnership of Buchanan, Gutteridge and O'Neill provided a sensitive and user -friendly re-adaptation of this heritage listed building.

GAL 's establishment was serendipitous, in that three opportunities occurred simultaneously that allowed this new art museum to come into existence. The opportunities presented themselves as: an 1996 Ipswich City Council study on the adaptive use of a heritage-listed buildings in the Ipswich CBD and the subsequent commitment by the council to utilise the old town hall as an art gallery; the establishment of the Ipswich Arts Foundation in 1997- the first foundation established in regional Australia; and the availability of substantial funding from the federal and the Queensland governments. Together these opportunities would allow the realisation of Ipswich's vision to establish a cultural centre that was an art gallery, a social history museum, a children's gallery, and a location where popular culture and new technology could cohabit in innovative ways to engage the museum visitor in the visual arts. In addition it had to be people focused.

In 1996, the Ipswich City Council commissioned an internal study of the reuse of five heritage-listed buildings in the city's central business district. The

old town hall was one of those buildings identified for reuse. The study recommended that the old Town Hall be used as an art gallery, logically extending on the existing Ipswich Regional Art Gallery's space, then housed in what had been St Paul's Church Hall. This building is adjacent to the old town hall. It had been renovated in 1984 - 85 to accommodate the first free standing public gallery in Ipswich.

In its final configuration, Global Arts Link is comprised of three free standing, yet now connected buildings – the old town hall is now Global Arts Link the art museum. The Ipswich Regional Gallery, building decommissioned in 1998, has become the museum's collection storage facility. Adjacent to collection storage was a café, currently operating as a studio for art activities. In the first year of operations, over 100000 museum visitors attended exhibitions and a wide variety of public program events.

In establishing the Ipswich Arts Foundation in 1997 capital subsidy on construction cost monies was provided by the Queensland government. Ipswich City Council committed to the project and provided \$500000. Additional monies were obtained from a community appeal and \$3 million from the federal government to establish GAL as a member of the *Queensland Heritage Trails Network*. The Network was a joint initiative of the Queensland and Commonwealth governments for the Centenary of Federation.

The museum's inaugural exhibition was *People, Places & Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich* (May 15 - July 18). The publication *Exploring Culture & Community for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Global Arts Link Ipswich a new model for public art museums* was launched at the opening.

### **Section 5: An overview of three exhibitions**

Art museum curatorship doesn't occur in isolation. It is contextualised, framed and enmeshed in a number of interconnecting events, circumstances and systems within the context of the art museum and beyond. Curatorship is integral to the museum's operations and contributes to its mandate. To the art museum

visitor, the institution's authority and legitimacy are subliminally understood through the exhibition – a product of museum curatorship.

Between 1999 and 2000 Global Arts Link Ipswich developed three major curatorial projects as exhibitions housed in the museum's main gallery – the CS Energy Gallery. All three exhibitions focused, in part or whole, on the City of Ipswich Collection. The titles of the exhibition and a brief description of each follow.

Exhibition 1: *People, Places & Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich*

*Location:* All galleries of Global Arts Link

*Dates of exhibition:* 15 May - 18 July 1999

*Guest Curator:* Rodney James

The exhibition was curated by guest curator Rodney James and was GAL inaugural exhibition. *People, Places & Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich* was an exhibition particular to Ipswich as a place. The curator used an environmental scan methodology to structure the exhibition, and in so doing aimed confront the art museum visitor with the physical, social, historical and contemporary terrain of Ipswich. This exhibition explored the multiplicity of community, and included the City of Ipswich Collection as a social document. The curator's empathetic vision of a regional community sat well with GAL claim to be an integral part in the life and times of Ipswich. *People, Places & Pastimes* provided a template of possibilities, ways in which to embrace, examine, consider and affirm the symbiotic relationship between a public art museum and the communities it serves.

This exhibition spoke of Ipswich's history and its contemporary life simultaneously. The curator utilised Australia's white history as a construction device or conceptual skeleton for the exhibition. The exhibition's physical structure provided the museum visitor with four tableaux or four connected themes: people and community; a sense of place; living culture (popular pastimes); and the home gallery. The exhibition's introductory panel, provided the curatorial rationale described as follows:

## **People, Places and Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich**

Artists seek to communicate ideas about themselves, the world they live in and the practice of their art. The artists included in this exhibition have been chosen because of the ways their work relates to, engages with or comments on Ipswich and other regional centres like Ipswich. Some of these connections will not be immediately obvious, nor are they intended to appear difficult or contrived. The assembled works of Canberra-based artist Rosalie Gascoigne are, for example, intimately connected to where she lives and works, but at the same time they speak in broad terms about what connects people to place. On the other hand, artists such as Louise Weaver and Deborah Klein renew our contact with skills and techniques associated with the work -pastimes of earlier generations.

*People, Places and Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich* comprises over one hundred and twenty works of art drawn from private, regional, state and national collections within Australia and from overseas. The artworks range from celebrated eighteenth and nineteenth century English landscape paintings by Thomas Gainsborough and John Constable through to room installations and sculptures by leading contemporary Australian, New Zealand and Samoan artists such as Robert Moore, Julie Gough, Rodney Spooner, Greg Semu, John Ioane and Vanya Taule'alo. In bringing together such a diverse group of artists, this exhibition identified some of the different ways in which the making and appreciation of the visual arts is linked to the cultural background and personal circumstances of particular individuals and communities. (Rod James, curatorial statement and introductory panel text to exhibition - *People, Places and Pastimes: Challenging Perspectives of Ipswich*.)

The four interconnecting exhibition narratives - people and community, a sense of place, living culture (popular pastimes) and the home gallery - became the tableau structure for the exhibition. This structure allowed for a complex exploration of both community and place. The rich diversity of Ipswich's peoples was foregrounded in this curatorial exercise. Indigenous cultural and more recent arrivals were explored in the sub-themes of journeys and migration, the adaptation and survival of cultural traditions in new environments, body

decoration and ceremony as an expression of distinct regional identities, and art as a form of cultural exchange.

The curator saw popular pastimes as a theme with which to interrogate the living culture of Ipswich. Popular pastimes in this context referred to artworks and community objects - historical and contemporary images of sport, lappers and car culture, and the use of everyday materials. Ipswich like so many country towns supports a network of clubs and sporting associations. Sport is where the worker has the capacity to gain a particular status. Regional towns such as Ipswich perceive sport as the most liberating of activities. From the early years of the nineteenth century, labour and physical sports became a symbiotic union. The physicality of labour and sport were defining characteristics of a patriarchal society. With its coalmines, railways and woollen mills, Ipswich was a predominant *male* town. At its peak in the 1930s the Railway Workshops in North Ipswich employed over 3000 men. The “maleness” of contemporary Ipswich is manifest in its car and sporting culture. Car lappers, using the car as a symbol of male intent, have replaced the Ipswich railway worker.

The intersections of old and new, past and present, city and country were defining ways in which the curator attributed a distinct physical entity to Ipswich in the exhibition. Of the artworks placed in the “home gallery” - one of the tableaux included paintings, photographs, stamps and other objects drawn from collections in both Ipswich and elsewhere. This tableau focused on the relationship between objects and their owners, early colonial patrons of Ipswich, the continuing relevance of artists such as John Constable and Thomas Gainsborough, as well as the role of contemporary artists as collectors and assemblers of “junk”.

*People, Places and Pastimes* was a representation of a living culture manifest in name and a physical location known as Ipswich, Queensland. This exhibition comprised 135 artworks and objects from 70 artists, craftspeople and manufacturers including artworks commissioned specifically for the exhibition. A reference group - a “curatorium” to assist the curator in his research and his connection to community - supported him. At their first meeting eighteen months

before the exhibition opened, he posed four questions /statements to this group.

They were:

*Who are we?* This question helped in defining the people of Ipswich.

*Where are we?* This question considered Ipswich as a place.

*What is it that we do?* This question investigated the many and varied practices that employ people's minds and labour.

*What is the relationship between objects, display and collectors?* This last question allowed the exhibition to investigate collections both private and public.

These questions guided discussion as provided for specific area of investigation.

The exhibition ran for 65 days. Visitor numbers were approximately 37,200 making an average daily attendance of 572. Additionally, 48 formal tours were conducted during this exhibition for school and university groups, organisations and bus tours. (Denoon 1999: n.p.)

No catalogue was developed to accompany this exhibition. Instead the list of works can be found on pages 131 – 135 of in GAL's inaugural publication - *Exploring Culture & Community for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Global Arts Link a new model for public art museums.*

## **Exhibition 2: Pride of Place: The CS Energy Gift & the City of Ipswich Collection**

*Location:* CS Energy Gallery, Global Arts Link Ipswich

*Dates of exhibition:* 23 July - 29 August 1999.

*Curator:* Craig Douglas

**(Please note:** the following text is complemented by a full audio-visual presentation and curatorial rationale, which is located on the accompanying DVD (chapter 7 of the thesis.)

The exhibition focused on a gift of 73 artworks presented in 1999 to the City of Ipswich by CS Energy. In the 1980s the Aberdare open-cut mine provided funds for an acquisitive art prize to be shown at the City of Ipswich Art Gallery. Aberdare Colliery was taken over by Allied Coalfields, who in due course were purchased by CS Energy. This power company in partnership with the Ipswich Art Foundation saw major benefits in a business union. In a magnanimous

gesture, the company's gift of a broad selection of Australian contemporary visual art produced and acquired in the 1980s and early 1990s, complimented the City of Ipswich Collection in meaningful ways.

In addition to the exhibition, the curator developed a comprehensive public program that animated the artworks. A suite of six half-hour performances around selected artworks from the exhibition provided interpretative ways in which the museum visitor could extend their appreciation of art, as well as realise the artworks as social documents. All six performances were filmed *in situ* as they were performed every Sunday. An edited 15-minute video entitled *Performance Energy & Art* produced by GAL and SC Energy Swanbank provides a select overview of the performances. The exhibition itself was supported by extended labels and selected quotations from David Malouf's 1996 ABC Boyer Lecture Series *A Spirit at Play* which were randomly placed on the gallery's walls. The exhibition was mounted in the CS Energy Gallery only. A tri-fold room brochure accompanied the exhibition. No formal catalogue was published.

**Exhibition 3: *Engage: Collected Works - City of Ipswich Collection & the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University***

*Location:* CS Energy Gallery, Global Arts Link Ipswich

*Dates of exhibition:* 25 November 2000 to 4 February 2001

*Curator:* Craig Douglas

**(Please note:** the following text is complemented by the audio-visual presentation and curatorial rationale, which is located on the accompanying DVD (chapter 7) of the thesis.)

This exhibition was the third in the series that highlighted the City of Ipswich Collection. The exhibition was developed exclusively around two collections: the City of Ipswich Collection and the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University Collection. Both collections expressed commonalities that were explored through the exhibition. The curator structured the exhibition around four themes: portraiture, history/memory; still life; and landscape. These groupings acknowledge and critique nineteenth century art museum classification systems. The exhibition also reinforced the abiding themes found in Western art. A

comprehensive public program accompanied the exhibition, including drawing from the nude and still-life workshops. Audience interaction was encouraged with a competition that asked museum visitors to choose their favourite work of the week. No exhibition catalogue or room brochure was published.

**Section 6: A synopsis of Global Arts Link's inaugural publication *Exploring Culture & Community for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Global Arts Link, Ipswich a new model for public art museums.***

This publication was developed and published by GAL in May 1999. It was edited and production managed by Craig Douglas – a Doctoral candidate from the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane and the recipient of an Australian Postgraduate Award (Industry) Scholarship. Global Arts Link, Ipswich City Council was the Industry partner in this scholarship supported by the Australian Government. The brief given to Douglas was to create a publication that reflected and embraced the local (historical and the contemporary) in the context of the national and international.

*Exploring Culture & Community* was a courageous attempt by a new regional public art museum to document the diversity and complexity of the past, present and future of its communities, those who are collectively represented by the name Ipswich. This anthology contains 42 essays, grouped in six chapters: *Introducing a New Model Public Art Museum; People and Community; A sense of Place; Living Culture; the Home Gallery and Acknowledgments*. Chapters vary in the number of essays they contain. The essayists were invited to contribute one essay to the publication. They were stimulated in their writing by a number of factors that sit around regional museums: collections, community, history, and memory, new technologies, indigenous and ethnic issues, culture, popular culture, industry and commerce, and art practices. This publication was to symbolise the many voices lost or current that speak for and about a community's culture - how it is, its characteristics, its impermanence, fragility and resilience.

This publication is a social document, a miscellany of narratives about place, people and practices filtered through the perspectives and particulars of

the commissioned writers. This publication is the first in Australia to comprehensively explore the idiosyncrasies of a regional or rural community published by a regional gallery at its launch.

Through its various narratives, the complex layers of community are slowly uncovered in this anthology. The 170 colour images placed with purpose throughout the book are also stories in their own right and not illustrations. Together, image and text cement a relationship that allows the visual artist and the writer to “stand for” both culture and the art museum.’

As a publication, *Exploring Culture & Community* was designed as a marketing tool, a portable education and culture kit about Ipswich for residents and tourists alike. It was also a way of introducing a new art museum to sceptics, those who saw Ipswich as “lacklustre” and somewhat directionless. Incorporating images of artworks from GAL’s inaugural exhibition, *People, Places & Pastimes*, saw the publication take on the dual roles of catalogue and informed study about regionalism, community and the art museum. Incorporated images of artworks from the City of Ipswich Collection gave this collection importance and value beyond the local.

This publication is a mix of credible writing about community and culture, and a selection of enduring images, which speak about the particularities of Australia. The document clearly explores the dualities of regionalism and the local against the national and international.

Ipswich is a physical location, a multiplicity of communities, an idea and a shared history. Its own characteristics are unashamedly celebrated in this publication. This 137page book is also a strategic plan, a template of possibilities for GAL to explore configured as topics or themes for future exhibitions and or public programs. As Lippard states in her book *The Lure of the Local* (1997: 6) “each time we enter a new place, we become one of the ingredients of an existing hybridity, which is what all local places consist of”. This publication is clearly about hybridity, a blend. As a new regional gallery in 1999, GAL, was thinking about how it would become a part of the Ipswich community. ‘Exploring Culture & Community, could also be understood as a jigsaw, not necessarily

complete. As culture and community are organic, ever changing entities or ideas, so the regional gallery, if dynamic, will respond to those changes and commit to their visual interrogation and interpretation.

Complimenting the essays specifically about Ipswich is an essay by Kirschenblatt-Gimblett entitled “Objects of Memory”. In this essay, the writer explores the notion that some individuals create “memory objects as a way to materialise internal images ... People save, collect and arrange their possessions in ways that are profoundly meaningful through the life span.” (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett in Douglas 1999: 94). The author provides insightful and powerful observations about the need to collect, to remember and thus create home gallery collections.

The essay by Judith McKay entitled “The Home Gallery” explores the life and art collection of James Henry Martin of Goodna, an Ipswich suburb. Martin was a postman, an amateur visual artist and an arts benefactor. From the 1960s Martin collected earnestly, amassing a comprehensive if not eclectic group of art displayed in salon hang inside his modest cottage. Martin bequeathed his collection to Global Arts Link. The gallery engaged a photographer, to document this collection *in situ*, as evidence of a man’s passion and his commitment to art. Those photographs and a small selection of Martin’s own work are now in the collection. Martin’s enthusiasm for collecting and his role as a significant contributor to the economy of amateur arts, was further enhanced when GAL acquired for the Collection the contemporary landscape *Twilight highway*, by Brisbane painter Robert Brownhall in Martin’s memory.

*View of Ipswich from Limestone Hill c 1862*, an oil by an unknown artist, is the focus of “A taste for British Art” an essay by Anne Kirker. This topographical view of early Ipswich, while commemorative and precise, is firmly fixed in the panoramic, a nineteenth century phenomenon. As the City of Ipswich Collection oldest picture, it is symbolic of a regional town that struggled through its solid core of working class values to become a city built on the hard labour of mining coal and the railways.

Colin Painter's essay, "The uses of an artist: Constable in Constable Country now", builds on Kirker's essay by bringing into focus how Constable and his art have touched the lives of contemporary "Brits" living in Sussex – "Constable Country." "When people talk about Constable's pictures they talk about their lives, their experiences of the world, their relationships, their mortality," states Painter (in Douglas 1999: 111). The power of art to not only represent the physical world but also to evoke feelings, sits at the heart of Constable's legacy. *'People, Places & Patimes* GAL inaugural exhibition, included works by Constable and Gainsborough - famous Sussex painters.

Stuart Koop's observation that "it seems that Doyle's job as an artist is to ply this road house, to revisit his memories as seven-year-old child in the 1930s," (Koop, in Douglas 1999: 120) has resonance in relation to a sense of place and childhood memories and the artist's ability to represent them in paint or print. A favourite son of Ipswich, d'Arcy Doyle has been immortalised in a local and national dimension. GAL's entrance comes off D'Arcy Doyle Place. More than 300000 Doyle prints have been sold throughout Australia, and it's estimated that one in 40 Australian homes has one of Doyle's "sentimentals" on their walls. It appears that the sentimentality of the Victoria age evidenced in the 2002 touring exhibition *'Primrose from England...'* which was curated by Bendigo Art Gallery still has currency with the populace today.

It seems that colonial Ipswich while deprived of a vibrant cultural life, did have a number of visual and performing artists visit, sketch and paint the town and the nearby countryside. Julia Ashton came to Queensland in about 1885 to make drawings for *The Picturesque Atlas* Buchanan, in Douglas 1999: 115) Conrad Martins visited Ipswich late in 1851. But it is in the work of William Emery and Charles Hirst that the domestic and the burgeoning sporting life of Ipswich are best represented. Emery's drawing of Zoe, the winner of the Queensland Champion Race in May 1861, now in the National Library, represents a local interest in horse racing that is still celebrated today. The Ipswich Cup is an important event in Queensland's racing calendar. Global Arts Link recently acquired the 1861 Ipswich Cup for the collection. Hirst's naïve style (refer to

Douglas 1999: 115) captured the grand homes of colonial Ipswich. These homes build in the Queensland vernacular style known today as 'Queenslanders' have become important to Ipswich's identity. Throughout the 1990s the Ipswich City Council used the brand name – "Heritage City" to sell Ipswich to both tourists and locals.

But it is Poochee, an Indian immigrant, one of the first photographers in Ipswich, who provided the City of Ipswich Collection with an intriguing image of early Ipswich. A companion print (*after Poochee*), produced by the London firm MacLure and Macdonald provides us with the same image, but slightly altered to accommodate an English understanding of what the Australian and Ipswich landscape could look like. It must be acknowledged that the photograph was the inspiration for the lithographic print and that MacLure and Macdonald never visit Ipswich. The Poochee photograph a sweeping panorama, of the Bremer River and the Ipswich countryside, is dated to c.1865. The MacLure & Macdonald lithograph is dated 1872. Betty Churcher in her essay "Biggingee Sorabjee Poochee: Ipswich and the Popular Image" (Douglas 1999: 50 -51), praises the dexterity, and sheer dogged determinism of colonial photographers like Poochee. These photographers provide contemporary Australians with an understanding of "what it was like back then", but more importantly, their images play an integral part in imaging an Australian national identity.

In February 1999, Ipswich City Council produced an internal council document titled *Ipswich: Profile of Ethnicity by Birthplace, Language, Religion and English Proficiency*. It was compiled from the 1996 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data. It provides some interesting facts about Ipswich's population mix. There are 84 different languages spoken, and 31 different religions practiced. Of the various population groupings, those born in New Zealand, Tonga and Western Samoa provide the second largest groupings after those born in Australia and England. Twenty-first century Ipswich, with its eclectic racial mix, is so different from its nineteenth or mid twentieth century counterpart.

*Greg Semu: Re-establishing cultural identity* through photographic practice by Nicholas Thomas, (Douglas 1999: 36 - 37), while predominately an

article about Semu - a young New Zealand Samoan photographer - speaks about the power of heterogeneous Polynesian cities cultural production. While the contemporary is clearly acknowledged in Thomas's article, the voice of a growing ethnic group within Ipswich cannot be denied. Within GAL's community consultative and audience building processes that occurred from 1998 to 2004 two exhibitions - *Island Crossings: Contemporary Maori and Pacific Art from Aotearoa New Zealand* (19 August to 19 November 2000) and the Tscharke Gift of Paua New Guinea (1998) publicly celebrated Pacific cultures and their place in contemporary Ipswich. The City of Ipswich housed the *Tscharke Gift* of over 100 ethnographic artefacts and some contemporary pieces. Edwin and Tabitha Tscharke, residents of Ipswich who once lived and worked in New Guinea, presented these works to the collection.

The hidden histories of Ipswich are a history of shame, neglect, racism and the disenfranchised. The Salvation Army Aboriginal Homes at Purga and Deebing Creek (it closed in 1916), both on the outskirts of Ipswich, is where protectionist's practices resided in Southeast Queensland. "These practices ensured the provision of cheap and under-educated Aboriginal labour [...] necessary for the development of infrastructure, particularly primary industry infrastructure." (Bunda, in Douglas 1999: 31) While these practices are shunned by contemporary Australia, Tracey Bunda's touching account "I come from Ipswich: Hidden Histories," is an essay of memory, loss and survival. But, as Bunda rightly states, "the extent to which the non-indigenous community acknowledges the legacy [of Aboriginal oppression] and celebrates our survival is a measure of total community consciousness" (Bunda, in Douglas 1999: 33).

GAL's commitment to Indigenous local culture and its place in contemporary cultural life has been acknowledged by the exhibition *The Road to Cherbourg: the Art of Vincent Serico* (5 September to 31 October 1999). This exhibition presented the commentary and vision of one Aboriginal artist, Vincent Serico on contemporary Aboriginal life. Serico was born at Baramba Mission in the Cherbourg area, some 30 kilometres from Ipswich. Of the three public art pieces commissioned to complement the architectural vision for this new public

regional art museum in Ipswich was the *Rainbow Serpent* by Queensland Indigenous artist, the late Ron Hurley. Located in the social history gallery the Hall of Time, this eight-metre wall installation celebrates Aboriginal mythology and acknowledges contemporary Indigenous culture as a living culture with a 40000-year history.

Rodney Spooner's installation *The Three Lost Buildings of Ipswich*, located at the museum's main entrance and foyer space, honours commerce and industry. Here three demolished buildings - Cribb & Foote's department store (razed to the ground in a fire in 1968), Brynhuffrd, the stately home of a nineteenth century coal miner (which collapsed due to instability caused by underground coal mining) and the Commercial Hotel in Brisbane Street (destroyed by fire and one of the oldest hotels in Ipswich) - speak about memory, loss and significance: tangible yet human emotions. David Burnett in his essay, "Whenever I hear the word memory, I reach for my laptop", engages with memory. Supported by the maxim, 'think globally, remember locally' (Burnett, in Douglas 1999: 46), Burnett is convinced that "memory binds and connects us to a sense of place and historical lineage" (Burnett, in Douglas 1999: 45) – important issues for any regional gallery in its quest to "tap the essentials" of any community. Our global, market-driven culture, informed by information technologies, needs cultural institutions such as regional galleries to house objects or to be a symbol itself, standing for public collective memory.

There have been many journeys made to Ipswich by people over the last century and a half. In recent times most have come by car or train. (Because of its proximity to Brisbane, Ipswich doesn't have an airport.) Mark Usher, in his *Road to Ipswich* series 1997 (type C photographs) is a photographic essay of the 50-kilometre road trip from Brisbane to Ipswich. This series has been incorporated into *Exploring Culture & Community* as a way of reminding the reader that all regional towns and centres are travelled to or from, and hence are peripheral to somewhere else. *Road to Ipswich* takes the viewer on a visual journey that is punctuated by a series of checkpoints or makers recorded by the camera along the journey. The makers are signifiers of the subliminal - places

and objects that individually speak of the particularity of a certain place, but collectively are powerful symbols, “memory objects” that stand for the physicality and spiritual resonance that is place and community.

Images from this photo essay have been placed at significant points within the publication – predominately at the start of sections. The images captured by Usher can read as individual stories. For example on pages 16 and 17 (unpaginated) of the publication, the introduction to the section “People and Community” the three photos on this page speak about grief, the transient and the itinerant – abiding themes in the history of Australia and its art. The three photo-images located on pages 92 and 93 provide the viewer with a different engagement of place. Here the old town hall and the post office, Ipswich’s most recognisable civic buildings, sit next to an image of whimsical suburban fence. The image puns, in its kitsch way, on the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The old scout hut in the third images references youth exuberance and boyhood adventures. All three images are symbolic reminders of the civic and the local, the iconic and the forgotten.

Usher’s photo essay, while subtle and undemanding has recorded the intangible “places with a present” (Lippard 1996: 278). The artist has embraced a ‘place ethic’ that demands respect for a place that is rooted more deeply than an aesthetic version of the ‘tourist gaze’ “ (Lippard 1996: 278). Usher has provided us with an experience. This artist has been an analyst, reporter, activist and a photo-essayist. His interdisciplinary approach considers community, culture and place simultaneously.

It is in the section titled “Living Culture” that the community’s “everydayness” is played out. Essays on “Samoan cricket”, “Knowing Alfie Langer”, and “Country music in Ipswich” acknowledge a popular culture that traditional sat, until recently, outside most art museum spheres of influence. But as a new-model art museum the everyday and the ordinary have become the conduit between this public art museum and the communities GAL serves.

The contexts that swirl around exhibitions and collections have increasingly become contexts over relations between museums and communities

...” states Ivan Karp in the publication *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (1992). Andrea Witcomb references this quote to introduce her essay, *Museums as cultural brokers: Producing rather than representing communities*. The quote speaks to the essence of a community’s relation with its museum. Museums often have a prescribed way of dealing with the perceived homogeneity of communities. Instead, they need to realise that communities are complex and variable. The similarities and differences that are community can be articulated in and by the exhibition process. Global Arts Link understood that if it was going to provide a true picture of community, it needed to listen to many voices.

A copy of ‘*Exploring Culture & Community for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Global Arts Link Ipswich - a New Model Art Museum*’ is a component part of the thesis, and should be read in concert with the synopsis above. This publication is not a catalogue, but a visual and literary expression of place and people.

### **Section 7: The GAL plan 1999-2004**

This was a strategic plan or blue print for cultural trading in Ipswich through the art museum. The GAL Plan was a future exhibitions and public programs strategy developed by myself as a Griffith University doctoral research student and GAL for a five year period, 1999 - 2004. GAL’s inaugural exhibition *People, Places & Pastimes* in partnership with the publication, *Exploring Culture and Community* provided - through their themes, topics, various artworks, histories and associative connections - the potential for future exhibitions to be developed by Global Art Link. The GAL Plan was a philosophy as well as a strategy and its intention was to build and extend on exhibition ideas, one exhibition and project to another. This Plan allowed and supported an organic and almost seamless dialogue to continue between scheduled gallery exhibitions over time. The very nature of a community suggests complexity. So too with GAL’s exhibition and public program, it needed to reflect the ever-changing nature of this art museum’s communities. A selection of exhibitions curated by GAL from 2000 to 2003 is listed as follows:

- *Island Crossings: Contemporary Maori and Pacific Art from Aotearoa New Zealand* (exhibited CS Energy Gallery, 19 August –19 November 2000) – works by seventeen contemporary New Zealand artists, curated by guest New Zealand curator Giles Petersen.
- *Ready, Set ...Go! Sporting Life and Australian art* (exhibited CS Energy Gallery, 18 August – 11 November 2001) – an exhibition curated by Global Arts Link about the national obsession with sport and the visual artists who have focused on sport as their subject -matter.
- *Our d’Arcy: the original art of d’Arcy Doyle* (exhibited CS Energy Gallery, 17 November 2001 – 10 February 2002) – an exhibition curated by Global Arts Link of original paintings, limited-edition prints and plates by Ipswich born and nationally recognised artist d’Arcy Doyle.
- *Island Treasures: The Tscharke Collection from Papua New Guinea* (exhibited Energex Children’s Gallery - Lottie’s Place, in May – June 2002) - a unique collection of Papua New Guinea, artefacts, a gift from the Tscharke family displayed to encourage children to learn about different cultures and the nature of collecting.
- *Engaging Works from the City of Ipswich Collection* (exhibited Freeman Gallery December 2002 – April 2003) – this exhibition followed on from *Engage: Collected Works - City of Ipswich Collection & the Queensland College of Art, Griffith University* curated by Craig Douglas in 2000.

**Some final observations: GAL, curatorship and the postmodern art museum, a case for a new paradigm**

Although it is notoriously difficult to define “postmodernism’, Lyotard (1984) is one of the most celebrated of cultural theorists and critics including Foucault 1980; Derrida 1976 and Jenks 1989 to grapple with a definition. Lyotard’s conception of it as a cultural condition suggests the erosion and rejection of modernist ideals, universality, inherent logic and the rationality of realms of knowledge. Lyotard has acknowledged modernism’s master narratives. He has realised that such interpretations of culture have lost their power, relevance and

credibility. Today communities, especially those in the regions shape meaning from local events and narratives. The traditional power and knowledge formations, so prevalent in modernist Australian's commerce and industry until the 1960s - where the expert was at the top of the apex and the populace massed at the bottom - has been permanently eroded.

So to, the progressive art museum has seen a need to move from a position of authority (the authorial voice of the museum), to one that acknowledges many voices and the stories they tell. Global Arts Link Ipswich has embraced this move, which has allowed GAL's monolithic presence in the centre of town to become a community-meeting place. This regional art museum has engaged in the effacement of the boundaries between high art, and everyday life. A collapse between high art and popular culture, informed the curatorial rationale for the exhibitions - *Pride of Place* and *Engage*, as well as the museum's subsequent five year plan of exhibitions.

By casting regional art museum/gallery curatorship within the framework of postmodern challenge and investigation, new interpretations of the visual arts can take place within the broader context of the everyday life of museum visitors, whether regional "locals" or tourist. The postmodern curator also takes on the role of educationalist, who orchestrates new relationships with the objects found in museum collections and the community. The universalism and grand narratives fundamental to traditional curatorship and the modernist art museum, have given way to programmatic features such as shared decision making - as identified in GAL's curatorium/ reference group, a respective forum for all voices, community and children's participation as see in GAL's commitment to develop the first purpose-built children's gallery "Lottie's Place" in regional Australia. GAL's priority, to desanctify the museum space and make this new-model regional art museum into a people's place, subverted the embedded sociocultural assumptions and behaviours that have been apart of modernist and traditional art museum practices. Operating as strategies of postmodernist pedagogy GAL, through its curated exhibitions and public programs (1999 – 2004), questioned the issues of representation, power and authority, so vital to a region's identity.

While the publication, *Exploring Culture & Community*, can be read as a sociocultural document of a Ipswich and region over a particular timeframe (1860 – 2004), this text indirectly poses the question: How can works of art be recontextualised so they can be seen as a product of the culture that is rural and regional Australia. Utilising the strategies employed in the 'New Museology', inventive regional art museum curatorship can bring into focus cultural politics that includes the issues of language and identity.

To effect change, regional art museum curatorship needs to identify which culture or cultures the art museum will represent. Curators must acknowledge and embrace the community's particular social messages. Innovative regional art museum curatorship, as evidenced at Global Arts Link and in particular through the exhibitions: *Pride of Place*, *Engage* and *People, Places & Pastimes*, has fostered the development of non-hierarchical dialogic programs. These encourage museum visitors to celebrate the local. The exhibitions allowed histories and stories about Place to have a currency and a future to be explored and told by and about those you live in Ipswich.

### **Addendum**

In 2004 Global Arts Link (GAL Ipswich) was re-named - The Ipswich Art Gallery. It appears that the Ipswich City Council, after wholeheartedly embracing the change in name from Ipswich Regional Art Gallery to Global Arts Link in May 1999, reconsidered its position. In the years 1999 – 2002 the name GAL became synonymous with difference and the particularity of Ipswich. In selecting the name GAL, the museum's planning team surveyed the community to find that most Ipswich citizens saw the title 'gallery' or 'museum' as elitist. Now the 2004 museum brand, while symbolically negating all that GAL stood for (community participation, social history, new technology, the visual arts, a specific audience development strategy, a particular attention to Place, and a commitment to children) will need to secure its own place in the cultural future of Ipswich.

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