

2

THE RAPID GROWTH OF LOCAL ARTS AND CULTURE: 1978–1989

The 1980s was marked by increasing activism within the broad Canberra arts community as the need for funding and infrastructure support began to rapidly outstrip meagre available resources. The community's focus as the decade unfolded became how to develop, manage and fund local practice from within Canberra's increasingly visible construct of national capital space.

Community concerns were met with genuine but largely ineffectual attempts from government agencies to respond to the rapidly changing milieu from within an increasingly complex governance scenario. In fact, the complexities of three-tier governance in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), although not new, became more difficult to navigate as the demand for services increased with the growing population. Canberra's population reached 227,581 by 1981 and, despite the economic downturn that occurred in the early part of the decade, it swelled to 282,211 by the end of the 1980s. Although the increased population progressively demonstrated their desire to claim and manage that strand of arts and culture in the national capital that could be considered local, the pressing question, in the face of decreasing federal commitment, became how to fund developing need.

The Commonwealth's political commitment to the ACT as a local community waned during the decade and remained focused on delivering national arts and cultural outcomes of excellence. During this period,

under-resourced local advisory bodies struggled to respond to increasing demands and to provide adequate support structures. Within the dominant national capital paradigm and without the legislative freedoms and arts-infrastructure development that self-government would bring in the 1990s, local arts practitioners felt themselves to be unheard and largely invisible. The way forward during the 1980s, although it proved exceptionally difficult to navigate, was forged by an intelligent and politicised community for whom activism was a familiar mode.

The visual arts demonstrated growing relevance and importance as the 1980s progressed. This was anchored by the Canberra School of Art (CSA), which from 1978 onwards attracted some of the finest art teachers in the country to its Bauhaus-inspired workshops and enrolled an annually expanding student body. CSA graduates bore a peculiar burden. As they were often reminded by federal funding bodies, particularly from the mid-1980s as the number of national cultural institutions increased, Canberrans enjoyed a city that was arguably the best culturally resourced in the country. And yet, outside CSA, young visual artists lived and worked in ad hoc and make-do conditions.

The concerns of the local arts community – expressed through a remarkable number of meetings and forums, held throughout the decade in Canberra and in the regional towns of Yass and Braidwood – centred on the lack of four critical support factors. These were, a suitably resourced local arts funding body, consultation with the federal funding body, a cohesive community arts plan, and an overarching cultural and arts development plan for the Territory. Additionally, major issues for visual artists were the lack of studio spaces and exhibition venues for contemporary visual art, and the continued primacy of performing arts within the arts funding debate.

During 1983 and 1984, activity around these concerns began to coalesce and this section charts the intersections of concurrent community and government actions. The eventual denouement was the release of the 1985 Pascoe Report into the funding of arts and cultural development in the ACT, commissioned by the ACT Arts Development Board (ADB) and authored by Timothy Pascoe.

The rise and funding of community arts

Performance and visual artists were most often conflated with community arts, particularly during the first half of the 1980s. This was particularly the case with the emerging contemporary visual arts. As this naming characterised funding and debate during the 1980s, the following discussion deals with matters relating to community arts in the ACT over the period.

The ADB was created in 1981 as the principal instrument of local arts administration in the ACT. It replaced the ACT Advisory Committee on the Arts, which was itself preceded by the ACT Committee on Cultural Development, established in 1949 by Labor Prime Minister Ben Chifley (1945–49). The ADB – as were its antecedents – was responsible for advising the federal minister responsible for the ACT on grant allocations for the arts and on arts development policy in the Territory.

The locus of Canberra's community arts organisations from the 1970s to 1980 was Reid House. (It was demolished in 1980, after being partially destroyed by fire, to make way for the National Convention Centre.)¹ Reid House was home to a number of performing arts initiatives that were modestly supported, most often by the ACT Community Development Fund (CDF), which itself was funded through gambling revenues accrued from licensed ACT clubs. (This use of gambling revenue for arts development provided a precedent for the application of a \$19 million casino premium to arts infrastructure in 1992.) Reid House tenants included Canberra Youth Theatre (CYT), which was formed in 1972 by Carol Woodrow; Jigsaw Theatre Company, which was established out of CYT in 1976 as a cooperative providing theatre for schools and community venues locally and in Adelaide, Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and country centres; and Oops Multiarts, running school holiday drama/multiarts programs for children, led by CYT members. Woodrow formed Fools Gallery Theatre Co, a full-time experimental ensemble performance group, in 1979 with a director's grant of \$10,000 from the Australia Council.² In the same year, Camilla Blunden and Robyn Alewood

1 The federal government closed Reid House, which was moved to Canberra from Victoria to serve as a low-cost hostel, in 1972. With little low-cost housing available in the city, squatters began moving into the accommodation wings in 1974 (*Woroni*, 'The story of Reid House', 4 March 1974, p 5).

2 Canberra, as evidenced in Chapter 4, provided a focal point for legislative gains for women during the height of second-wave feminism. Fools Gallery Theatre Co spent two years developing a series of four plays concerning the history of patriarchy and the liberation of rejecting sexist philosophy.

founded the Women's Theatre Workshop, making work concerned with women's issues and women in the arts. The workshop attracted a small amount of funding from the Department of the Capital Territory (DCT) towards its 1979 productions of Sylvia Plath's *Three women*, directed by Alewood, and David Selbourne's *Alison Mary Fagan*, directed by Blunden.³ Also at Reid House was the Canberra Community Arts Front (CCAF), initiated by Peter Sutherland. This collective of independent community artists formed to develop community arts in Canberra and to offer an administrative and supportive base for its members. CCAF coordinated children's activities for Sunday in the Park and presented the program *Good goose – a proper gander at the arts* on Canberra's arts radio station 2xx. (This program was a forerunner to *A hitchhiker's guide to the galleries*, which was initiated by Bitumen River Gallery (BRG) in the 1980s.)

Most of the groups at Reid House were later relocated to the Gorman House Arts Centre, which was remodelled for the purpose of providing spaces for community groups and the Arts Council Gallery (ACG).⁴ Also, from 1979, Strathnairn homestead provided a base for the Blue Folk Community Arts Association, led by Domenic Mico, which provided community engagement opportunities for schools and groups.

These early examples of community arts practice provided the base for the formation, post self-government in the 1990s, of standalone community arts infrastructure and personnel in Canberra's growing town centres of Tuggeranong and Belconnen. The arts community's desire to extend Canberra into the regions became evident for the first time in May 1983. This logical progression built from the powerful sense of community that was evidenced in Canberra through Sunday in the Park during the 1970s and through the formation of the small organisations that were based first at Reid House and then at Gorman House Arts Centre from 1981. The sense of community was also established by the growth of women's groups, which moved from social gatherings into art and craft practices – as seen with the Majura Women's Group from 1981 – and through the cross-fertilisation of young artists (particularly print and poster makers), students, activists and musicians as the 1980s continued. The first industry-led moves towards acknowledgement of Canberra's regional arts status would culminate in the opening of the Canberra Museum and Gallery in 1998.

3 Blunden recalls that *Alison Mary Fagan* was written for one woman but that she staged the play with several women performing the role (Camilla Blunden, email to the author, 5 July 2016).

4 *Woroni*, 'Reid House: innovative theatre', 18 September 1980, pp 26–27.

The possibility of forming a regional community arts network was canvassed in 1983 during a day-long meeting in Yass, involving members of the Canberra, Yass, Goulburn, Queanbeyan and Cooma districts. Following this meeting, Ben Grady, then director of the ACG, wrote to Alison Alder at BRG in June, asking the collective to consider becoming part of the proposed network, to contribute to 'the process of exploring the relationship between arts and the community'.⁵ This sequence of events was in line with the growth of the community arts sector internationally and in Australia. The international rise of community arts began with the alternative arts movement in Britain in the 1960s. In Australia, community arts networks began operating in New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria in the early 1970s as support organisations for artists working in the community, developing opportunities for community engagement. Their national growth was assisted through the Australia Council's Community Arts Board from 1973. Vivienne Binns, whose relationship with Canberra is expanded in Chapter 4, was among Australia's foremost early exponents of community arts practice.

A development in the evolution of local government agencies responsible to the arts and cultural sector occurred at the end of 1981, when the ACT Advisory Committee on the Arts was replaced by the ADB with Sir Richard Kingsland as chair.⁶ Although the change of name flagged an awareness of local arts as a growing sector, the previous eight members of the Advisory Committee comprised the new board's members. A change of name alone was not enough to guarantee forward development. Kingsland, a committed advocate for the arts, was a recently retired senior public servant who held the inaugural chair at the Canberra School of Music from 1972 to 1975 and chaired CSA from 1976. Canberra's status as national capital space and the performing arts as the signifier of culture were uppermost in his mind:

As the physical focus of national self-awareness, Canberra must play a significant part in the development of all aspects of artistic performance and expressions and participation ... Canberra is much more of a theatre and concert going public than any other comparable city. We are a participating group, a city with a soul.⁷

5 Ben Grady and Edwin Relf, letter to Alison Alder, 10 June 1983, Correspondence file, 1983, CCAS archives.

6 Kingsland was knighted in 1978.

7 Stephen Payne, 'Sir Richard named arts chairman', *Canberra Times*, 11 December 1981, p 7.

While this was a strong acknowledgement of Canberrans' broad cultural literacy, Kingsland's belief that young people were absent from these theatre-going audiences 'because they watch television or their parents cannot be bothered taking them to performances' indicated his lack of awareness of the growing cross-arts youth culture.⁸

Arts ventures in Canberra that could demonstrate links to the community continued to be assisted through the federal government's Wage Pause and Community Employment programs in the first half of the 1980s and by the ACT Community Development Fund (CDF) throughout the decade. However, funding requirements for the Community Employment Program (CEP) required clarification. In April 1984, CEP officers wrote to the Canberra Symphony Orchestra (CSO) general manager, Maeve Galloway, to clarify the rules under which community organisations could apply for job creation funding. The rules stipulated that CEP funding for the arts was not to be viewed simply as an alternative funding source, the program required that at least 70 per cent of the grant sought must be committed to the wages of previously unemployed people, CEP positions must be filled from priority unemployed groups, and jobs should require a low level of experience and skills.⁹ This was a big ask for small arts organisations in which, logically, there are only a limited number of jobs requiring low-level skills.

Jobless Action took a leading role in advocating for changes to the CEP programs. Following the CEP's clarification of the funding rules, Jobless Action project officer Annie Kavanagh wrote to Canberra arts organisations, suggesting that both Wage Pause and CEP was previously inundated with requests for funding from individuals and organisations who fell outside the criteria. Additionally, unskilled applicants to job positions were rejected by community organisations due to the high degree of self-reliance, motivation and commitment required under Wage Pause and CEP requirements. Kavanagh successfully proposed that the CEP modify its requirements and approach community groups with a view to the training of unskilled workers rather than their immediate employment. In order to streamline information sharing and CEP funding application processes, Jobless Action's Julian Webb took on the additional role of community development officer and was tasked with assisting

8 Payne, 1981.

9 CEP, letter to Maeve Galloway, GM of the CSO, April 1984, Communication folder 1984/2, CCAS archives.

community groups to apply for CEP funding. As the CEP program evolved to include this funding for training unskilled workers, Jobless Action provided additional employment to young printmakers who were leading programs that developed printmaking skills among local groups of unemployed persons. This was to prove crucial for the growth of a strong printmaking community in Canberra.

Increasing need and diversity in local arts and culture was indicated when CEP provided more than \$340,000 to arts organisations and projects in 1983/84. Of this, Megalo International Screenprint Collective received \$80,000, supporting full-time employment for four persons and allowing the fledgling organisation to provide classes and services to the Canberra community, including through Jobless Action. Other arts organisation beneficiaries were able to offer full- and part-time positions through Wage Pause. In 1983/84, these were the Arts Council (ACT), Craft Council of the ACT, Australian National Eisteddfod Society, Blue Folk Community Arts Association, Café Boom Boom, CCAF, Capital Art Patrons' Organisation (CAPO), and Stagecoach Theatre School.

Arts community needs and government responses: 1981–1985

Revealing an awareness of the growing local visual arts sector within the national capital space, in June 1983 the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), the federally appointed body responsible for Canberra's development, released the first draft land-use policy concerning art galleries on residential leases.¹⁰ The policy's opening phrase, 'Properly conducted, art galleries on residential leases have cultural value',¹¹ implied a growing awareness of Canberra's lively home-based gallery scene (the first gallery opened in the late 1960s) and the activity generated since the 1981 opening of the BRG collective in the inner south suburb of Manuka, Canberra's premier residential, shopping and dining suburb. It also implied a growing understanding that the relationship between artists and the community, mediated by accessible artwork, had positive

10 As discussed in Chapter 1, the NCDC was responsible for development in Canberra insofar as it impacted on the original Griffin Plan.

11 NCDC, 'Draft land use policy concerning art galleries on residential leases', public notice, *Canberra Times*, 6 August 1983, p 10.

cultural resonance 'of benefit to both the community and the artist'.¹² The draft's end statement commenting on 'the generally low economic viability of galleries dedicated solely to the display of artworks'¹³ reflects the number of smaller galleries that continued to open and close during the period. The difficulty in accessing affordable space was also recognised by the report's authors:

Without this form of [home] gallery the bulk of the artwork might not be displayed at all, because of the severe limitations in Canberra on the availability of leasable public gallery space [and] the high rents demanded for commercial premises.¹⁴

There were already considerable strictures around the operation of galleries in private homes. *Canberra Times* art critic Sonja Kaleski reported in September 1981 that:

Canberra gallery directors live under constant fear of closure by the Department of the Capital Territory. Each year the directors are presented with an official form and are obliged to supply details of their operations such as provisions for parking, number of visitors, number of cars and other pieces of administrivia. The DCT has the power to close galleries if the answers on the forms appear unsatisfactory, while gallery directors claim that the system is unduly authoritarian and exists nowhere else in Australia.¹⁵

Members of the fledgling BRG collective were understandably preoccupied with identifying and securing visual arts spaces. Their *Future directions forum*, in mid-1983, considered all potential ACT spaces beginning with 21 commercial galleries. Of these, they recorded, 15 dealt in 'the import/export trade of used consumables of "pre-loved art", such as Salvador Dali prints', while the other six were seen to deal with 'craft objects' produced outside the ACT.¹⁶ These conclusions reflect the disjunct between BRG members and the local commercial gallery scene. Fourteen other possibilities included occasional spaces such as shopping centres, schools and colleges. These occasional spaces were an important avenue for community exhibitions during the 1960s and 1970s and potentially suitable for emerging artist exhibitions. Seven institutions

12 NCDC, 1983.

13 NCDC, 1983.

14 NCDC, 1983.

15 Kaleski, 1981.

16 Stephanie Radok, 'Future directions forum', *Bitumen River Gallery Newsletter*, 5 ½, September 1983, p 2.

with gallery potential were The Australian National University (ANU) (four spaces in total), Canberra College of Advanced Education (CCAEE), Australian War Memorial (AWM), National Library of Australia (NLA), Alliance Française, Goethe-Institut and St John the Baptist Church at Reid. The option offered by the Goethe-Institut was considered to be 'the most exciting while the others tended to be fairly conservative and have well drawn parameters'.¹⁷ Indeed, none of the above was suitable for exhibitions for emerging artists. The National Gallery and the CSA were regarded as 'institutionalised Taj Mahals and hardly public art spaces where you can bring your own art object along'.¹⁸ This last conclusion speaks eloquently to the change occurring locally and nationally in contemporary art communities. The purpose-built ACG at Gorman House was identified as a potential space for larger exhibitions organised by groups such as BRG.¹⁹ This last venue suggestion was the forum's most prescient conclusion.

The developing needs of Canberra's arts community were discussed at a high level. On 6 July 1983, Minister for Territories and Local Government Tom Uren met with arts community representatives and Senator Susan Ryan, federal Labor senator for the ACT (December 1975 – January 1988).²⁰ At the meeting, the ADB, then chaired by Kingsland, with two minister-approved community representatives – Simon Dawkins (administrator of the Arts Council (ACT)) and George Whaley (the new general manager of the Canberra Theatre Centre (CTC)) – committed to formulating a discussion paper on arts development in the ACT. This was a most promising development. The paper's proposed ambit included mechanisms for policy formulation and grants allocations, a policy for arts development in the Territory, appropriate administrative arrangements, and the desired level of support for the arts from the CDF. In an interview the following day, Uren commented that 'the paper would meet a clear need, expressed at yesterday's meeting, to promote wide discussion concerning arts development in the ACT'.²¹ The ADB committed to circulating the discussion paper for public comment in early August.

17 Sasha Grishin, quoted in Radok, 1983.

18 Radok, 1983.

19 Radok, 1983.

20 Ryan was both the ACT's first female senator and first Labor senator.

21 Tom Uren, Minister for Territories and Local Government, media statement, 7 July 1983, CCAS archives.

No such paper had appeared by October, however, and concerns grew over the lack of a cohesive vision around the development of local art activities. In that month, in the most significant meeting to date concerning the state of the arts in Canberra, executive officers from nine of Canberra's arts organisations met at Braidwood.²² To contest Canberra's status as a planned city, attendees believed that opportunities existed to develop a unique cultural face for the city that was 'adventurous, eccentric and innovative'.²³

Nine important recommendations were made. One was that the ADB should 'conduct discussions with the Canberra Development Board and the NCDC regarding the arts in the overall development strategy of Canberra', indicating attendees' understanding of the complexity of planning and decision-making at that time in Canberra.²⁴ Another was that the ADB 'should commission an appropriate organisation to gather statistical data on the patterns of involvement in the arts in the ACT', reflecting a belief that the ADB were not up to undertaking this task themselves.²⁵ A further recommendation was that the ADB:

should investigate the placement of Arts Officers in the Belconnen and Tuggeranong areas to identify needs, facilitate networking and put the [ADB] in contact with grass roots demands.²⁶

The latter would come to fruition after self-government in the 1990s. The meeting also recommended that, as the ACT was under-represented on the Australia Council with only two representatives out of 56 members, there needed to be 'closer consultation between the Australia Council and arts funding bodies in the ACT'.²⁷

22 They included representatives from BRG, Blue Folk Community Arts Association, Arts Council (ACT), CSO, CYT, Canberra Opera, Jigsaw Theatre Company, CCAF and Theatre ACT.

23 *BRG Newsletter*, 'Braidwood seminar of Canberra's arts organisations', 6(b), November 1983, p 2.

24 *BRG Newsletter*, 1983.

25 *BRG Newsletter*, 1983.

26 *BRG Newsletter*, 1983, p 3.

27 *BRG Newsletter*, 1983. Further recommendations were that: the ADB should be requested to give direct and indirect employment impact statements in relation to its funding decisions; funding strategies should ensure that projects are funded to realistic levels and provide for appropriate remuneration for professional arts workers involved; supplementary to General Grant provisions to professional organisations, the Community Arts Program and Special Projects Grants, which in the past have provided valuable assistance and a flexible response to Canberra's needs, be maintained and appropriately serviced; the ADB is encouraged to consult with NSW and Victorian governments' arts funding authorities about funding for ACT groups touring to those states. The meeting further emphasised that any policy guidelines developed for the ACT will have to perform two basic functions: provide a perspective for the development of the arts in relation to total cultural programs and provide reliable information to arts groups on funding criteria.

Lack of provision for studio space was a crucial issue undermining the development of a vibrant local arts community. As the number of graduating students from CSA continued to increase, this became a driving factor for the loss of artists post-graduation to capital cities elsewhere in Australia. The warehouses and abandoned industrial sites that were repurposed as art spaces in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide since the 1970s were simply not in evidence in a young planned city.²⁸ There was some hope that the 1981 revamp of Gorman House Community Arts Centre, previously a hostel for single public servants, would provide some artist studios, but its spaces were quickly filled with the community organisations relocating from Reid House, and with the refurbished spaces of the new ACG.

In response to these pressing issues around lack of availability of studios, a 'Space for Artists' campaign was convened in 1983 by a group of art school graduates, students, musicians and activists. In July, they staged a multi-day mural paint-in of the public toilets in Garema Place, reported in the *Canberra Times* as a 'creative demonstration'.²⁹ Their action aimed to reverse the government's decision to allocate the centrally located Beauchamp House to the Academy of Science and, instead, to turn it over to artists. While this claim for studio space was unsuccessful, the tendency to conflate artists with community groups (which yielded funding benefits from both of the federal government's Wage Pause programs and the CDF) proved useful once again when a campaign for community space was run concurrently with the Space for Artists campaign. Members of the former succeeded in gaining access to the old motor registry in Mort Street, Braddon, and to spaces in the Griffin Centre in the city centre for community groups to carry out activities and hold meetings. The combined lobbying of both campaigns resulted in the allocation at the end of 1983 of the converted three-storey building, previously home to the Australian Archives in Leichardt Street, Kingston, as a community arts centre. This was a landmark victory.

The preceding three years brought tremendous changes to the local arts and cultural landscape. By the end of 1983 neither the federal minister, the NCDC nor local advisory bodies could doubt the presence

28 Chapter 4 discusses the reclamation of parts of Ainslie Village in 1980 by Megalo Screenprint International and the repurposing of the old bus shelter at St Christopher's School in Manuka by the BRG collective in 1981.

29 Michael Foster, 'Jobless paint a plea for artists' space', *Canberra Times*, 8 July 1983, p 1.

of a determined, effective and broad-based arts lobby that aggressively sought appropriate government support. Changes included the 1980 establishment of Megalo Screenprint International, the 1981 launch of BRG, the 1981 refurbishment and opening of Gorman House Community Arts Centre and the 1982 opening of the National Gallery. As well, the NCDC acknowledged the growth of visual art galleries, community groups and arts groups engaged in concerted joint activist actions, a number of meetings took place involving the wider arts community and government, and the first dedicated studios/gallery spaces for the visual arts were allocated. The increasingly politically savvy pressure for expansion applied by the arts community over the next three years was marked by rapid response to government-initiated discussion papers and reports.

The much-awaited *Arts development in the Australian Capital Territory: a discussion paper* was released by the ADB in January 1984, between the announcement of the allocation of the Kingston Art Centre at the end of 1983 and its opening in March. While acknowledging that the last five years saw a 'visible growth and diversification of the arts in Canberra',³⁰ Kingsland, the ADB's outgoing chair, remarked that achieving 'consensus', including among members of the ADB, 'on some aspects [of arts, administration] is a task of exquisite difficulty'.³¹

The statement is unsurprising. Peer assessment of grant applications and arms-length funding were foundational concepts of the federal funding body, the Australia Council for the Arts, established in 1973. Neither was evident in the make-up of the ADB, whose nine members included Kingsland, two non-arts senior public servants, one from the Department of Home Affairs and Environment and one from the Department of Territories and Local Government (DTLG), and arts bureaucrat Catherine Santamaria, who would shortly replace Kingsland as chair. Of the four remaining members, only poet Geoff Page and visual arts critic and ANU head of Art History Sasha Grishin were involved with contemporary arts practice. Eight board members filled the 16 positions on each of four art form committees comprising theatre, music, visual and community arts, thus sitting on a minimum of two committees each. Consensus was impossible.

30 Richard Kingsland, 'Overview', in ACT Arts Development Board, *Arts development in the Australian Capital Territory: a discussion paper*, Canberra, 1984, p 3.

31 ADB, 1984, p v.

The continuing primacy of performing arts, including music, and the treatment of visual arts as expressed through craft and community arts, is demonstrated in the discussion paper. Statements around performing arts, music, craft and community arts accounted for 17 of the 22 points in the overview. Four points were specifically allocated to the visual arts, the principal expression of which was considered to be the National Gallery. Importantly, however, the discussion paper directly recognised the gallery as ‘a national institution with no formal responsibility to the ACT community’.³² Growing calls for a regional art/heritage museum were addressed in the statement:

The location of national institutions in Canberra seems to have led Government to overlook the need for cultural and other institutions – including art and heritage museums – at the Territory and municipal levels.³³

CSA’s wider involvement of staff and teachers in the local community was recognised. The discussion paper credits CSA, however, with the formation of BRG, ACME Silkscreen Workshop, the Artworkers Union and ‘the current campaign for community space for artists’.³⁴ This reading indicated that there was no understanding of the critical role of Jobless Action and Canberra’s young social activists not connected to CSA in the formation of all of the above, except for ACME.³⁵ Finally, the overview listed, among a number of writers and musicians, some ‘less visible’ individual artists, with a shortlist comprising painters Michael Taylor and Robin Wallace-Crabbe, sculptor Rosalie Gascoigne, ceramicists and CSA staff Alan Watt and Alan Peascod, and printmaker and CSA director Udo Sellbach. Again, this reading reveals only a superficial knowledge of what was occurring in the burgeoning visual arts scene.

The discussion paper called for general feedback on the wider arts milieu, as well as specific submissions around the management of the General Grants Scheme of the Arts Development Program. Having delivered a comprehensive series of recommendations in the preceding October,

32 ADB, 1984, p 5.

33 ADB, 1984, p 5.

34 ADB, 1984, p 6.

35 ACME’s support from CSA’s Print Workshop tutor Mandy Martin is discussed in the section ‘Mandy Martin: background and impacts’ in Chapter 4.

the arts communities' general frustration with the slow progress of response from the ADB was growing. Clearly the sector was now looking for concerted action rather than continued invitations for discussion.

Some relief for visual artists was provided by the opening of the Kingston Art Centre on 30 March 1984. The centre was funded by the ACT CDF and managed by the Arts Council ACT. The first facility of its kind in the city, it provided multiple artist studios, fee-free gallery hire and spaces for a number of commercial galleries. In opening the centre, Uren 'signalled the Government's intention to establish similar projects in other parts of Canberra'.³⁶ Dawkins, then administrator of the Arts Council (ACT) (no doubt additionally buoyed by the January release of the ADB's discussion paper), said the opening marked 'a new era in art'.³⁷ There is little doubt of Uren's awareness of the pressing need for space and his genuine intention to build infrastructure. At the press conference that followed the opening, he urged the successful lobbyists to 'campaign for other groups in other areas of Canberra'.³⁸ In spite of this, it was not until the advent of self-government in the 1990s that purpose-built community art centres and standalone artist studio complexes would adequately service arts and community cultural groups.

Lobbying for support continued apace throughout 1984. The timed release of grant monies was the focus of the CCAF's sector-wide letter sent to 17 Canberra arts organisations on 21 June.³⁹ The letter, evidencing growing frustration with the cycle of meetings and discussion papers, concluded:

Finally, could we draw your attention to a discussion at your meeting with arts groups and the Arts Development Board on 4 July 1983 [11 months before]. Arts groups made representations of this nature to you, and the Departmental representative undertook to follow the matter through.⁴⁰

36 Debbie Cameron, 'Kingston space launched for art', *Canberra Times*, 31 March 1984, p 9.

37 Cameron, 1984.

38 Cameron, 1984.

39 These were BRG, Arts Council (ACT), Blue Folk Community Arts Association, Canberra Stereo Public Radio, Craft Council of the ACT, Theatre ACT, CYT, Canberra Dance Ensemble, CTC, Canberra Opera, Human Veins Dance Theatre, CSO, Stagecoach, Canberra Rep, Megalo Screenprint Workshop and Gorman House Community Arts Centre.

40 CCAF Inc, letter to arts organisations, 21 June 1984, Correspondence file 1/1984, CCAS archives.

The letter sought written support to back up a request to Uren to change the payment of arts grants from quarterly instalments to bi-annual instalments payable in April and November.⁴¹ Concerns regarding the efficacy of current arrangements included the working capital deficits sustained by ‘almost all of the large professional arts organisations in Canberra’.⁴² These were caused by ‘the rapid expansion of these organisations, their full and effective usage of all grants received, and the lack of opportunity for them to build adequate working capital reserves’,⁴³ and resulted in the use of overdraft facilities in November and December. The letter reflected the cyclic nature of performing arts in the city and the desire to reduce requests to the ADB for accelerated payment of grants, thereby reducing the growing administrative overload on under-resourced companies. In 1984, five companies including CCAF, Canberra Opera, CYT, Human Veins Dance Theatre and the Arts Council (ACT) found it necessary to apply for accelerated funding. The requested change sought to bring the ACT into line with Australia Council practices, which were already servicing clients with payments in two instalments.

In fact, by 1984, the wider process of developing an arts and cultural policy for the ACT seemed unlikely. Continuing population growth was matched by rising local unemployment and decreasing federal government commitment to Canberra. Numerous local advisory committees, with reporting and advisory responsibilities to federal government, operated across government departments, creating increasingly expensive and unwieldy overall management of the Territory.

Clearly the task of formulating a comprehensive Territory-wide arts and culture strategy was beyond the under-resourced ADB, now chaired by Santamaria who had replaced Kingsland at the beginning of the year. Additionally, the political and economic climate in which the ADB was attempting to devise a forward plan was not conducive to long-term planning. In response to the previously detailed persistent lobbying from an increasingly visible and vocal extended local arts community, the ADB decided to engage a consultant to undertake a review of the General Grants Scheme of the Arts Development program, alerting arts organisations to this decision on 31 October 1984. Issues the consultant was required to address included:

41 CCAF Inc, 21 June 1984.

42 CCAF Inc, 21 June 1984.

43 CCAF Inc, 21 June 1984.

The range and nature of arts activities which should be supported, the level of funding appropriate in the territory, the balance of support between professional, semi-professional and amateur organisations, the contribution of different activities to the cultural and community life of the ACT and the limitations on funds available under the Arts Development Program and from other sources.⁴⁴

The consultant appointed was Timothy Pascoe.

The Pascoe Report

At the heart of the problem of developing funding that responded to existing local needs and provided opportunities for growth in local arts was the difficulty of separating the construct of Canberra as national capital space from the real and rapidly developing needs of Canberra's local arts community. The complexity of developing funding mechanisms that supported local arts within this national space was exemplified throughout the processes of commissioning, researching, final reporting and responses to Pascoe's report.

The ADB commissioned Pascoe in October 1984 to deliver in the following March a report titled *Arts in the ACT: funding priorities and grant administration*. Having completed a three-year term as executive chairman of the Australia Council (1982–84), Pascoe was previously based in Canberra as federal director of the Liberal Party of Australia in 1974/75. It is likely that the ADB concluded that these factors made Pascoe an appropriate choice to conduct a survey to enable the ADB to adjust their funding parameters to meet increasingly vocal concerns and needs around local funding.

Rather than confer a bias towards the local, however, Pascoe's Australia Council role and his political role in the mid-1970s were overtly linked to Canberra as national capital space and as the locus of federal politics. Additionally problematic was that he carried out his research over the summer of 1984/85. The following pages examine these three difficulties, beginning with Pascoe's connection to the Commonwealth arts funding body.

44 ACT ADB, letter to Canberra arts organisations, 31 October 1984, Correspondence file 1/1984, CCAS archives.

For almost 20 years, the two iterations of federal government funding for the arts, that is the Australian Council for the Arts and its successor, the Australia Council, had garnered significant criticisms. Among these was the ever-present charge of elitism. This stemmed from the core decision made by the Australia Council to fund major or ‘flagship’ performing arts companies as internal and external signifiers of a nation civilised by culture. So much money had been invested in these companies by the beginning of the 1980s that it was impossible to conceive of them failing, with the resulting widespread perception that they exerted undue influence over the Commonwealth funding body.

This entrenched tendency to continue funding performing arts companies regardless of economic or artistic justifications was increasingly obvious in Canberra during the period from the end of the 1970s to the onset of self-government in 1989, and it was one of the major contributing factors to growing unease among the arts community in the capital. This was particularly pertinent to the continued unsuccessful attempts to develop a professional theatre company in the capital.

Nationally, between 1983 and 1985, there emerged the possibility of a major policy shift in the way that Australia Council funding was allocated. In 1985, one quarter of all Australia Council funds went to the Australian Opera, the Australian Ballet and the two major orchestras. Debate centred around whether the council should continue to use limited Commonwealth funding to support these major companies – which it was felt should be able to attract corporate and private sponsorship – or whether funds should be directed away from these and other large dance and theatre companies, towards smaller companies making more experimental works.⁴⁵ Labor Party rhetoric appeared to support a change in funding focus and Pascoe was bipartisan in his support for this change. In the middle of his three-year term as executive chair, Pascoe urged the Council ‘to support a shift in funding from assumed excellence to genuine creativity’.⁴⁶ This insider knowledge of Commonwealth funding mechanisms and politics and his public support for the funding of creative, community and regional art development provided compelling reasons in support of the ADB commissioning Pascoe to write an ACT arts funding report.

45 John Gardiner-Garden, *Commonwealth arts policy and administration*, Social Policy Section, Parliament of Australia, Canberra, Department of Parliamentary Services, 7 May 2009, p 9. The 1984 Australia Council-commissioned Throsby Report supported the change in policy ‘to shift the emphasis of its overall financial policy towards individual artists’. See also *Age*, ‘Australia shuns its artists: inquiry’, 1 February 1984, p 3.

46 Internal Australia Council report, as quoted by Gardiner-Garden (2009, p 20).

And yet, the opposite of Pascoe's public views is evident in the finished report. It contains clear indicators that its author, though willing, struggled to distinguish between Canberra as national capital space and Canberra as home to a growing local arts community. This is not surprising. Pascoe's time as executive chair of the council coincided with the opening of the National Gallery in October 1982. The gallery's establishment was the ultimate cultural signifier of both national capital space and civilised nation that had been in train since Liberal Prime Minister Harold Holt simultaneously announced the formation of the Australian Council for the Arts and the commitment to a Canberra-based national gallery in November 1967. Since that time, successive federal governments variously approved, rescinded, re-proposed and completed various national cultural monuments in Canberra. Pascoe was thus surrounded by the rhetoric and problems of culturally funding Canberra as national capital space. Secondly, Pascoe's experience of Canberra, where he was based during 1974/75 in his capacity as federal director of the Liberal Party, was inexorably tied to the construct of Canberra as the seat of federal government. Federal politicians and federal party directors left Canberra, as they do today, on Thursday or Friday afternoons during sitting weeks and were absent from the capital during non-sitting weeks. During the working week, Pascoe may have attended events at the CTC. If so, he may have seen travelling performances from Old Tote Theatre Company, Nimrod Theatre, Hungarian State Symphony Orchestra, Marcel Marceau or Kamahl, Australian Opera, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Barry Humphries, Cleo Laine or Roy Orbison. Local offerings were diverse, including performances from Canberra Rep, Canberra Philharmonic Society, Canberra Theatre Trust, Tempo Theatre, CSO, Canberra Youth Orchestra, Canberra School of Music faculty in concert, the first and second Canberra Film Festival, Woden Valley Youth Choir and Canberra Opera.⁴⁷ It is unlikely, however, that Pascoe was a regular Canberra Theatre attendee; his business during those two years of sitting weeks was politics, not art and culture.

Finally, the research phase of the report was initiated in the lead up to and during the 1984/85 summer holiday, beginning on Wednesday 28 November. Research during this period was unlikely to foster a deep understanding of Canberra's cultural development needs. Pascoe understood the local scope of the report saying, 'I think the challenge of

47 'Canberra Theatre Centre ephemera at the ACT Heritage Library', www.library.act.gov.au/find/history/search/ephemera/performing_arts/canberra-theatre-centre-ephemera, accessed 16 March 2014, updated 6 July 2015.

the study is to do something about Canberra's needs'.⁴⁸ But then, as now, a large number of Canberrans left the Territory for extended summer holidays in southern NSW coastal towns and elsewhere. Not only were audiences absent but also the majority of galleries were closed. Students were absent from CSA and ANU, which regularly hosted local arts and culture events throughout the academic year, during the November to February period when Pascoe conducted his research. Pascoe admits that he sometimes had to make do 'with an external inspection and peering through windows'.⁴⁹ There were a number of wide-ranging events on at CTC, some of which he may have attended.⁵⁰ In November, December, January and February, he could have seen the Beverley Flanagan School of Classical Ballet, Queensland Ballet, Melbourne's Playbox Theatre Company, the Australian tour of the Oxford Revue group, Canberra's Philharmonic Society performing *The sentimental bloke*, Canberra theatre company Women on a Shoestring and Canberra Opera. In February, Theatre ACT performed the Kathy Lette-written, Carol Woodrow-directed *Perfect mismatch*, and Human Veins Dance Theatre presented a week of lunchtime dance.⁵¹

Both during Pascoe's 1974/75 period of flying in and out of Canberra and the 1984/85 summer months when he conducted research for the report, his impression of arts in Canberra would have been of performing arts as expressed locally and as imported as part of the national touring circuit. In terms of visual arts, it was the ANG that remained open over the summer period, where art was a cultural function of the national capital space. It was too much to expect that Pascoe would be able to view the city through local eyes or to conceive of a broader arts practice that was unequivocally local in expression and requirements. The imprimatur of the national capital space was powerful.

48 *Canberra Times*, 'Chairman appointed for arts review', 30 November 1984, p 13.

49 Pascoe, 1985, p 6.

50 'Canberra Theatre Centre ephemera'.

51 The Canberra-based touring company Human Veins Dance Theatre was founded by Don Asker in November 1979. It was envisaged as the flagship carrier of dance in the national capital, and funded by the Australia Council in this and continuing guises until 2006. It disbanded in 1988 when Asker took up a Churchill Fellowship, and it reformed as the Meryl Tankard Company. In 1992, it metamorphosed into Vis-a-Vis Dance Canberra under the directorship of Melbourne's Sue Healey, who left in 1995. A rethink saw the company change to the Choreographic Centre, directed from 1996 by Mark Gordon, and then expanded in 1999 under Ruth Osborne's Quantum Leap Youth Choreographic Ensemble, becoming the Australian Choreographic Centre in 2001. After triennial funding was not renewed in 2006, the centre closed in 2007 and re-launched as QL2 Youth Dance Ensemble in 2008 under Osborne as artistic director and continuing until the present day. The continued success of QL2 is due in no small part to the programs run by the centre over the period of Gordon's leadership.

The Pascoe Report was submitted to the ADB in mid-March 1985. 'As an input to the debate that will follow', Pascoe, positing several scenarios for discussion, concluded, 'There is no right answer',⁵² Arguably the ADB was looking for clarity in the way forward and a funding model that had a higher possibility of success and consensus. On both counts they would have been disappointed.

The bias towards national capital space is clear in Pascoe's comments in the introduction that characterise Canberra as the city best served by arts funding nationally. Central to this argument was the presence of the National Gallery, but surely it was the nation in whose service this gallery functioned. From the late 1970s, Roger Butler, the gallery's inaugural curator of Australian Prints, Posters and Illustrated Books, vigorously collected the work of Canberra-based printmakers – along with nationally produced prints and posters – for the national collection. The gallery was, however, inextricably tied to the conception of Canberra as national capital space. Many of Pascoe's recommendations were likewise tied to the development of professional, performing arts organisations whose success in the national capital space would reflect well on Australia. This in spite of the fact that he was writing his report in the middle of a funding debate that proposed the benefits of moving away from flagship companies towards more experimental arts ventures, a move he publicly supported.

In opposition to ACT arts community desires and in apparent opposition to his public calls for increased funding of experimental art forms, but in line with historical funding trajectories, Pascoe recommended funds go to four core areas with only one company in each area being selected for funding. Additionally, he recommended that these companies be funded with the proviso that they attain a level of excellence reflecting their position as national flag bearers resident in the capital. Given that Canberra's small population of 220,000 citizens displayed an immensely diverse arts and cultural practice, it is clear that Pascoe's recommendations centred on funding the national capital space and not the local community.

Pascoe summarised his recommendations under three headings: core strategy, supplementary strategy, and administration. Under core strategy he wrote: '[T]he ADB should provide ongoing, operating funding to achieve a small core of world-class, full-time, fully professional activity

52 Pascoe, 1985, p 17.

in a limited number of areas'.⁵³ These were: classical and contemporary drama, through Theatre ACT; contemporary dance, through Human Veins Dance Theatre; craft, through extending the role and facilities of the Crafts Council of the ACT; and community arts, by building on the Arts Council (ACT). In the report's introduction he wrote: 'As a final note, I should point out that my study has not covered the delegated Community Arts Program. However it does get a passing mention towards the end of the report.'⁵⁴ This omission, given that Canberra's community arts scene was such an integral component of its arts and cultural landscape, reveals his low-level engagement with and understanding of the realities of the community's arts and cultural needs.

The report's core strategy did not mention individual artists, innovative and experimental artists and art forms, musical theatre or education in the arts, on which Pascoe, shifting responsibility away from arts funding, wrote that 'the ADB should work assiduously to have [education in the arts] funded within the education budget'.⁵⁵ The supplementary strategy recommended upgrading studio and exhibition facilities for visual arts and craft, sustaining some non-core areas of professional endeavour and reserving some funds for other art forms. Administration recommendations included three grant categories: professional development, professional assistance and facilities, and special projects and equipment.

The omission of the visual arts from the report's core strategy is further evidence of a disconnect from the realities of developing arts practice. Pascoe reported that 'this art-form is not particularly strong in Canberra'. For this reason, he continued:

[A]n injection of funds to create a professional infrastructure might have been attractive. However, I came to the contrary view for three reasons – galleries tend to be the major professional and institutional structures supported by governments and their funding agencies. In the ACT, the Australian National Gallery fulfils most of the roles of a State gallery; compared with craft there is not the same foundation on which to build; nor is the strength of the School of Art so distinctive; there does not appear to be the same opportunity for uniqueness.⁵⁶

53 Pascoe, 1985, p 57.

54 Pascoe, 1985, p 6.

55 Pascoe, 1985, p 58.

56 Pascoe, 1985, p 57.

In between the release of the report to the community for comment on 27 March 1985 and prior to 11 November that year, when the ACT arts community was advised of grant decisions for the 1986 calendar year, the ADB held three meetings with arts community members⁵⁷ and accepted 32 written submissions.⁵⁸ Continued funding for the major recipients, Theatre ACT and Canberra Opera, were of particular concern; their time was widely felt to be over.⁵⁹ Participants reported feeling that their concerns and suggestions, principal among which was for a diversification of resources, had not been heard.

On 24 May the chair, Cathy Santamaria, reported that the ADB:

would not implement the Pascoe report in 1986 except where it was agreed that the report's approach was appropriate ... Even where there is agreement the Board sees 1986 as an interim year with the full effects of any substantial change in approach not being implemented until at least 1987.

The *Canberra Times* additionally reported on the widespread misgivings surrounding the report's implementation, writing that:

much concern [was] expressed by the arts community that the recommendations would be accepted before there had been enough time for their implications to be considered.⁶⁰

Therefore, on 11 November, when the ADB released funding allocations for the 1986 year that closely shadowed the recommendations of the report, the response from the arts community was swift and outraged. Quite rightly, they felt that both the carefully considered recommendations from meetings held in the first half of the decade, and the feedback given and apparently accepted prior to the release of the 1986 grants, had fallen on deaf ears.

On 16 November 1985, five days after the 1986 grants were announced, members of the ACT arts community placed an advertisement in the *Canberra Times* to draw attention to their profound disappointment (see Figure 5 below).

57 The meetings ran on 9 April (advertised in the *Canberra Times* on 3 April 1986) and 11 May (*Canberra Times*, 8 May 1986).

58 Ken Healey, 'Practical Pascoe sheds light on art wars', *Canberra Times*, 12 May 1985, p 12.

59 Funding for both organisations was withdrawn by 1987.

60 *Canberra Times*, 'Timing of arts funding decision', 25 May 1985, p 7.

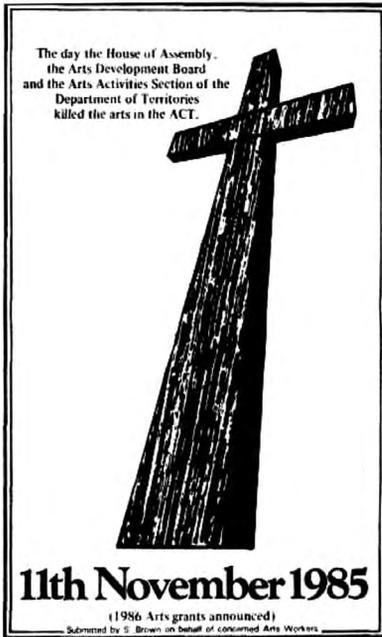


Figure 5. Memorial advertisement submitted by S Brown

Source. *Canberra Times*, 16 November 1985, p 9s, reproduced with permission

At the heart of the powerful negative response that swept through the local arts community was the report's primary recommendation that grants to core groups be increased by decreasing available funding to smaller groups. This was exceptionally bad news for the lively local theatre scene, which included five active theatre companies in addition to Theatre ACT, the Territory's nominated flagship company. Theatre ACT received the majority of total arts funding – \$170,000 for the 1986 year from the overall \$210,000 allocated to theatre. Of the remaining \$40,000, Human Veins Dance Theatre received \$10,000. Pascoe's recommendation was out of step with the concerns of local arts workers who deeply desired:

enlightenment under the present system ... [T]hat institutional model, with four flagship companies, has failed in the ACT. Institutionalisation is the last thing a developing industry like ours needs.⁶¹

With no response to the memorial advertisement forthcoming from the ADB by 30 November, a number of ACT arts workers took the radical step of submitting their resignations. They included, among others: Steve Brown, administrator and artistic director of the Arts Council (ACT), who had arrived from Adelaide in mid-1984, 'where there is respect for the professional arts worker as well as support and understanding'⁶² and who had submitted the memorial advertisement; Wendy Taubman,

61 Wendy Taubman, quoted in Ken Healey, 'Disheartened arts workers leave their jobs: 1986 grants meet silence of the defeated', *Canberra Times*, 30 November 1985, p 18.

62 Steve Brown, quoted in Healey, 30 November 1985.

administrator of Through Art Unity Theatre (TAU)⁶³; Jim Koehne, music coordinator at the Arts Council (ACT); and Gail Kelly, director of CYT. Pascoe recommended the latter organisation not receive increased funding, because he felt the success of CYT was wholly dependent on its current director. ‘The predominant feeling,’ remarked Brown, ‘is one of despondency rather than anger.’⁶⁴

The provision of hidden subsidies from arts workers in the form of unremunerated working hours was of great concern. The Arts Council (ACT), which had demonstrated broad relevance across the arts sector for decades in Canberra, including – though not recognised in Pascoe’s report – as the instigator and driver of community arts projects, received \$105,000 in funding for the 1985 year with a grant of a further \$105,000 for 1986. Brown maintained that he had given around half of his working hours for no remuneration since arriving from Adelaide and taking up the job in 1984, a situation common then and now in the arts industry.⁶⁵ Taubman felt strongly that ‘[b]y continuing to provide such large hidden subsidies we are only continuing to cover up the ADB’s inadequacies’.⁶⁶

The final sally in the sector’s response to the release of arts grants for 1986 revealed extreme distress from the growing sector over the lack of direction and clear, appropriate policy from the overworked and understaffed Arts Activities section of the DTLG. On Thursday 5 December, arts workers published an open letter to the ACT community, the House of Assembly, and Gordon Scholes, the new Minister for Territories, demanding that all positions on the ADB be declared vacant and the Arts Activities section of the DTLG be restructured.⁶⁷ The meeting that developed the wording of the letter was organised by Anne Virgo, then coordinator of BRG, and BRG member Mark Ferguson.⁶⁸

The *Canberra Times*’ interpretation of the memorial advertisement as a ‘theatrical statement’ by arts workers masks a much more pervasive exhaustion felt throughout the community, not just in the arts sector. By the end of 1985, economic hardships were biting deep in Canberra.

63 Through Art Unity Theatre (1984–94). Founder: Dominic Mico. TAU – renamed UP Front Theatre in 1991 – was one of the success stories of the CEP program, continuing as it did beyond the initial six months of CEP funding.

64 Healey, 30 November 1985.

65 Healey, 30 November 1985.

66 Taubman, quoted in Healey, 30 November 1985.

67 *Canberra Times*, ‘Call for change for arts sake’, 5 December 1985, p 8.

68 Ken Healey, ‘FOI adds material to arts funding debate’, *Canberra Times*, 13 December 1985, p 21.

The slowing economy was matched by a growing paralysis around local decision-making as increasing population numbers and need were met by a decline in federal commitment to local endeavours in the national capital.

The passionate local response to the Pascoe Report in the mid-1980s marks an important moment in the development of contemporary arts. The ACT arts landscape had undergone dramatic change between 1978 and the release of the report in 1985, with local performing arts companies, community arts organisations and Commonwealth-funded cultural institutions being joined by an increasingly vocal contemporary visual arts sector that had gained considerable momentum. The commissioning of the report marked a chance to radically alter the funding landscape in response to local needs, but, in the end, inertia prevailed and a bold leap into a better future for arts funding and development eluded the advisory bodies.

Comprehensive change in the sector would not occur until 1991, after the introduction of self-government. That year saw the handing down of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Cultural Activities and Facilities. The first recommendation adopted was the formation of the peak arts body the Cultural Council, which replaced the ADB. Most critical to forward development was the handover of the \$19 million casino premium to the ACT Government and the decision to allocate the premium to the provision of arts and cultural infrastructure. As a result, the ACT entered an extended era of rapid and inspired growth in local arts with a trajectory that was managed and directed by Canberrans themselves and a legacy that would transform the face of the city up until the present day.

Unique local solutions

Now I turn my attention to three significant local communication and funding solutions: the establishment of the arts magazine *Muse*, the creation of the fundraising group CAPO, and the Emerging Artist Support Scheme (EASS).

As previously noted, the Commonwealth continued to grapple unsuccessfully throughout the 1980s with funding art forms in Canberra that were not related to developing identified flagship companies.

Additionally, the ADB, which was responsible for advising the federal minister for territories on funding needs, was extremely under-resourced. Conversely, however, the national capital paradigm allowed the rise of unique solutions to the challenge of carving out the local from within the primary rhetoric of national capital space. Within Canberra's highly educated and politicised population were passionate arts practitioners and supporters and experienced teachers, administrators and negotiators. The continued success of these local solutions indicates that there were also community members with resources available to support the growing sector as consumers and buyers of locally created artworks.

Three innovative solutions were developed, two of which continue to the present day. The first was the arts magazine *Muse*, which from 1980 to 1998 provided a focal point for the rapidly developing arts community. The second was CAPO's unique arts funding model that, from 1983 to the present, has provided an alternative non-government funding source for local arts practitioners. The third, the EASS, emerged from CSA and, from 1988 until now, it has extended funding and exhibition opportunities to CSA graduates.

Muse provided an alternative voice for local arts in a city in which media coverage was dominated by the *Canberra Times*. It was deeply embedded in the local community from its inception and demonstrated lively topicality, relevance and commitment to Canberra's arts and cultural practitioners for 18 years. During this time it remained true to its founding statement that as '[t]he arts and entertainment provide a vital means of expression for the whole community ... *Muse* will concentrate on the work of Canberra artists and groups'.⁶⁹ *Muse* was launched in June 1980, assisted by a \$1,000 grant from the DCT, and initially operated as a collective, coordinated by Robert Garran and staffed by volunteers. The free arts magazine, initially published every six weeks, included features and reviews, drawings, photographs and cartoons, stories and poetry, arts news and an arts and entertainment diary. Until 1987, *Muse* was published collectively by CCAF. In 1987, following protracted negotiations with the CCAF over paperwork that – curiously for a volunteer arts organisation that attracted a level of government funding – implied ownership rather than custodianship of *Muse*, the Arts Council (ACT) assumed the role of publisher. Following this, *Muse* was awarded a grant of \$20,000 from the

69 *Muse*, 'Statement and call out for contributors', advertisement, *Canberra Times*, 23 May 1980, p 22.

ADB. By its 10th anniversary in 1990, funding had increased to \$25,000 and *Muse* was additionally able to raise another \$19,000 from advertising and sponsorship, conclusively demonstrating its relevance within and for the community. At the end of 1990, with the Arts Council (ACT) coming to an end, *Muse* became an incorporated association and, in August 1991, the magazine celebrated its 100th issue with a party at Gorman House.

By employing local writers from its first issue, *Muse* was instrumental in developing arts writing and criticism in Canberra. Arts journalist Helen Musa (who was arts editor of the *Canberra Times* from 1995 to 2007) wrote for *Muse* from 1985 and was its editor from 1990 to 1996. During her editorship, the magazine was published on the first of each month. Musa encouraged robust journalism, and ‘invited conflicts of interest and bias’⁷⁰ by encouraging writer/practitioners in visual and performing arts to write and review within their disciplines. Among these, from 1984 to 1986, was Tim Ferguson, whose comedy trio the Doug Anthony All Stars learnt its craft busking on Canberra streets; and Australian author Cate Kennedy, a graduate of the University of Canberra. Long-time *Canberra Times* visual arts reviewer Sonia Barron first wrote for *Muse* before moving on to the *Canberra Times*, as did senior visual arts critic Kerry-Anne Cousins. Musa herself employed Canberra artist Stephen Harrison, whose cartoons featured in every issue. Importantly, Musa presided over an expanded program that, in addition to providing local arts content, hosted regular arts-focused events including political forums, public meetings with arts practitioners and, under the umbrella of the Canberra Critics Circle (itself founded by Musa in 1991), regular arts writing workshops.

The founding of *Muse*, its focus on the work of Canberra artists and groups, and its continued strong presence in the Canberra community over 18 years are testament to a growing awareness of the importance of local arts as the glue binding a strong local community and as a central marker of place. That it survived during economically difficult periods is proof of its relevance. Importantly, its longevity also indicates continuing and growing capacity within the local sector over the period.

The second unique local endeavour arose at the end of 1983. On Saturday 12 November, CAPO held its inaugural gala banquet auction at the Lakeside International Hotel, at which ‘500 people paid \$60 each for

70 Helen Musa, interview with the author, 18 September 2015.

a bidding stick'.⁷¹ CAPO was modelled on the Seattle, Washington State, organisation PONCHO,⁷² whose president travelled to Canberra to act as auctioneer for the gala. The evening's proceedings were managed by Richard Thorp, architect of Australia's new Parliament House. The cost of the bidding stick covered the gala banquet's considerable expenses and the monies raised through auction were distributed via a committee to arts groups and individuals who had successfully applied for funding.

It is unlikely that any other Australian jurisdiction would have been able to raise the level of interest in such an event or the kind of rewards available to bidders in early CAPO auctions. An extraordinary 182 gifts were donated for the inaugural event. Among them was a chestnut yearling colt called Gulliver, a carcass of venison, the opportunity to conduct an orchestra, local Olympian Robert de Castella's running shorts, a skiing holiday in Aspen, Senator Flo Bjelke-Petersen's pumpkin scones recipe printed for the occasion on Senate notepaper, an autographed copy of Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke's inaugural parliamentary speech, and a 'commemorative banner of the opening of Parliament House on May 9, 1927 ... presented on parchment and extremely rare'.⁷³

Canberra provided a unique environment for CAPO's success. The quality and number of donations says a great deal about the nature of its community at that time. On one hand, the nationwide period of economic decline that had followed the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor government and the rise of the Liberal Fraser government in 1975 was acutely felt in the national capital. By 1981, Canberra registered a net 'out' migration of 262.⁷⁴ Unemployment rose sharply with concomitant flow-on effects throughout the city, particularly among young job seekers. The public service, which in 1975 had accounted for 60 per cent of the workforce, had contracted by almost 10 per cent by the early 1980s. By 1983, homelessness and emergency housing issues affected 2,396 adults and 276 children in a population of just over 238,983. By 1984, 'an inquiry into welfare services in the ACT declared that the political will to develop Canberra had evaporated'.⁷⁵

71 Edna Boling, 'Auctioneer has sociable way to raise money', *Canberra Times*, 10 November 1983, p 8.

72 Between 1978 and 1983, PONCHO raised \$4.4 million for the arts.

73 Ross Andrews, 'From pasture to gala dinner', *Canberra Times*, 23 October 1983, p 11.

74 Brown, 2014, p 198.

75 Brown, 2014, p 202.

In spite of the economic downturn, the city's position as the seat of federal government and the Commonwealth public service and as home to the majority of embassies resulted in a culturally literate and educated population with high disposable income. The gala banquet auction format infused the concept of support for the broader arts in the ACT with pleasure. Philanthropy as practised in this model was unique within Australia and allowed supporters to experience close engagement with contemporary cultural life.

One individual and 23 Canberra-based arts organisations submitted 43 projects to CAPO for consideration in 1983. Ten were awarded funding. Most useful in supporting the growth of visual arts were 'several thousand dollars' granted to Studio One to enable the provision of printing services to assist young artists; \$1,160 to the Crafts Council of the ACT to support tours of visual arts collections within Canberra; and \$1,000 to the CCAF to enable it to pay small fees to *Muse* contributors. The largest grant, of \$11,440, went to the oft-funded Theatre ACT, to employ a full-time actor for 1984. The CSO, Canberra Opera, Jigsaw Theatre Company and the Canberra Children's Choir represented performing arts. A proposed scheme from the Arts Council (ACT) to circulate the work of young artists among potential purchasers was funded at \$5,500, but it did not come to fruition. A prescient grant of \$6,540 was awarded to Canberra Stereo Public Radio to purchase digital recording equipment and to cover costs involved in an application, if successful, for a broadcasting licence. Although the first application for a broadcast licence was unsuccessful, this grant provided vital early support for the station that would become ArtSound FM, and that continues to inform and add cohesiveness to the broader Canberra arts and cultural community.⁷⁶

The *Canberra Times* reported a combined total of \$150,000 raised over the first two CAPO auctions, with just over \$100,000 distributed to practitioners: \$46,694 in 1983 and \$54,435 in 1984. The balance of around \$50,000, raised from ticket sales, covered the costs of the gala evenings. The third gala ball in 1985 was advertised as *An affair of the arts*

76 The remaining grants were: \$5,904 to CSO to fund a two-day rehearsal and performance with Japanese conductor Hiroyuki Iwaki; \$3,000 to Jigsaw Theatre Company for designer fees and set construction for *The dream circle*, a play about Marion Mahony, who worked hand in glove with her architect husband Walter Burley Griffin on the design of Canberra; \$900 to Canberra Children's Choir to buy a sound system; and \$3,500 to Canberra Opera to hire a principal singer. The *Canberra Times* reported that CAPO had reserved \$4,000 of auction monies for auction expenses, with a balance of \$11,000 retained for further future allocations to the arts ('Auction to benefit arts organisations', 30 November 1983, p 9).

and auction items on offer included a return trip to Europe, fine furs, jewellery, antiques, and a day at the races with Queensland politician, the Hon Russ Hinze.⁷⁷

CAPO's relevance extended into the period post self-government. By 1990, CAPO's *raison d'être* addressed successive federal governments' desire for partnership funding of the arts with non-government organisations. CAPO was good news also for the fledgling ACT Government, which demonstrated a growing awareness of the importance of local arts to the wider community but with a budget, one year into the three-year handover to self-government, that was constrained.⁷⁸ ACT Liberal Minister for Health, Education and the Arts Gary Humphries, calling on the Canberra business community to support the 1990 auction, identified CAPO as being 'unique in Australia' as it raised funds from local businesses and individuals and dispersed those back to the local arts community. Humphries acknowledged the \$500,000 raised since 1983 as an 'extraordinary amount of money for a city the size of Canberra' and encouraged the continued flow of private monies to the sector:

Last year, the statistics showed that the arts are good business. Vigorous arts activity helps to create business for a number of different industries ... [B]y supporting CAPO, those industries are helping to support themselves ... The Alliance Government will continue to assist the arts in Canberra. However, arts organisations will increasingly require additional assistance.⁷⁹

As the national capital experienced the slowing of business that gripped the rest of Australia by the mid-1990s, the rewards available to bidders became more moderate. In the mid-2000s the board elected to change the evening's format from the expensive gala banquets to a smaller cocktail party and auction. Reflecting the ascendancy of visual art within the Canberra community, the bulk of items available at auction by then comprised artworks donated by the region's senior and emerging artists,

77 *Canberra Times*, 'Bid for your own star', 26 April 1985, p 7.

78 Reminiscing on the first years of self-government on his last sitting day in 2004, Bill Wood asserted, 'Self-government is a success, not without a large number of bumps, bruises and broken limbs along the way. Richard Madden was the first Under Treasurer. Wayne Berry, and I think Bill Stefaniak – not in the same cabinets – would remember the downward graph that he presented at budget time. "This is where we are folks," he would say. "This is where we have to get to." The only cabinet decisions in those times were where we would cut' (Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, Australian Capital Territory, 26 August 2004, 4323).

79 Gary Humphries, 'Message from the minister', *Canberra Times*, 19 July 1990, p 24.

many of whom attended the auctions. The evening became an opportunity for collectors and art enthusiasts to mingle with and to buy the work of local artists at a reasonable cost.

By 2013, CAPO had dispersed more than \$2 million of non-government funding to the ACT arts sector over 30 years. Although the awards are, as they have always been, open to the broader arts community, the largest group of funding recipients since the 2000s have been visual artists. In this way, CAPO has become a not-for-profit funding entity auctioning donated visual artworks to visual arts consumers and returning the majority of funds raised back to visual arts practitioners. Whether it is sustainable for visual artists to continue to support their own in this way remains to be seen.

The third unique concept, EASS, emerged from CSA. It was envisaged by the school's second director, David Williams, as a 1988 bicentennial project designed to 'complement the landmark International Master Workshops and Symposia' held at the school that year.⁸⁰ As the advent of both self-government and Australia's bicentenary approached, CSA was graduating in excess of 70 students annually, a cohort that was increasing each year, across 10 workshops.⁸¹ The growing number of contemporary visual arts graduates and others not associated with CSA required more support than federal or local government could provide. Concern over the lack of appropriate artist studio space and the small number of suitable contemporary art exhibition venues was exacerbated by uncertainty due to the expected tightening of Commonwealth funds in a time of economic downturn and the unknown effects of impending self-government.

That Williams was able to attract support from individuals, businesses, art organisations and institutions indicated that, by 1988, CSA was deeply embedded in the Canberra community. As Canberra's population continued to grow and local arts infrastructure continued to expand rapidly from the early 1990s, EASS grew along with it. EASS extended opportunities to CSA graduates in the form of acquisition awards, cash endowments, materials grants and many exhibition opportunities, and provided concrete examples of widespread community support for

80 David Williams, foreword to Agostino, 2009, p ix.

81 In 1986, the first year that CSA offered bachelor's degrees, 74 students graduated. In 1987, 79 students graduated. In 1988, 62 students graduated, marking the only decline in numbers since 1978; and, in 1989, 81 students graduated. The 10 workshops were: printmaking, graphic investigation, painting, sculpture, textiles, wood, leather, gold and silver, glass and ceramics (Agostino, 2009, p ix).

emerging artists and the school. Then, as now, awards were conferred during the annual end-of-year graduate exhibition/open studios celebration, which is a highlight for the broad arts community of practitioners and workers, and the extended community of the national capital. The efforts of EASS to make staying in Canberra more viable and to continue a valued and supported arts practice played a vital role in reversing the flow of young artists to other cities.

Canberra music and theatre commentator Ken Healey opined in 1985 that, given the size of Canberra's community, 'innovation and experimentation [should] not be funded at the expense of emerging professional activity in established areas'.⁸² In fact, Canberra's unique environment required that funding address both the innovative and experimental as well as the emerging professional; these two categories often overlapped. Clearly more money to support the growing sector was urgently required, and EASS and CAPO played critical roles in extending non-government opportunities for funding.

The Brickworks, Studio One and aGOG

The lack of studio space continued to be a problem for the annually increasing numbers of graduates from CSA. Waiting lists for studios within the Kingston Art Centre were long, and with no other suitable studio space available in the city, some local artists devised an ad hoc solution. From 1913 to 1976 the Yarralumla Brickworks, the first industrial complex built in Canberra, produced the bricks from which many of the city's homes were constructed. From the early 1980s, as the brickworks' buildings deteriorated, the site provided a number of visual artists with quasi-official studio space, available on weekly leases.

Four of these artists were recognised as leaders in their field in Australia and had some profile in Europe and the United States. From 2–26 October 1986, works from these four, together with works from three emerging artists who benefited from the support of their more experienced fellows, were exhibited in *Prime cultural estate*, at the ACG. The exhibition comprised Jay Arthur's paper works, Helen Wadlington's bookbinding, James Whitehead's photography, Gaynor Cardew's feminist cartoons (printed on fabric at Megalo Screenprint), Brigitte Ender's ceramics, Churchill

82 Healey, 12 May 1985, p 12.

Fellowship recipient Morgyn Phillips' silk and paper works, and glass works from CSA's head of Glass Workshop, Klaus Moje. Meredith Hinchliffe, in reviewing the exhibition, concluded that it 'shows how important artists are to the Canberra community. The work is exceptional in every case'.⁸³

The exhibition's title reflected the ongoing tussle between the local government's interest in developing the prime real estate that the brickworks represented, and the belief of the cultural practitioners using the site that studio spaces could be developed there with minimal expense. The development impasse remained unsolved until April 2019, when the ACT Government announced Canberra Developer DOMA as preferred tenderer for the renamed Canberra Brickworks Precinct. On 26 September 2019 contracts were signed. The redevelopment will include conservation of heritage values and comprise 380 mixed dwellings, a museum and recreational facilities. It is expected to be completed by 2024. The last artist to occupy the site, Canberra sculptor Peter Vandermark, who moved into a reclaimed studio space in 1989, left the site in mid-2019. Vandermark's national and international profile were forged over that 30 years within those historic kilns and tunnels.⁸⁴

Among the many smaller commercial galleries and art enterprises that opened and closed in the city during the decade were two that had lasting influence on the Canberra and wider Australian art scenes. Both initially opened in the Kingston Art Centre: Studio One (1983–2001), which was founded by Meg Buchanen and Dianne Fogwell, and Helen Maxwell's aGOG, which opened on 16 March 1989.

Studio One was an independent printmaking workshop servicing CSA graduates and providing printmaking facilities to the wider community. As evidenced in Chapter 4, the Printmaking Workshop at CSA encompassed two disparate printmaking cultures during the early years: head of the workshop and master printmaker Jorg Schmeisser's European and Japanese aesthetic and workshop tutor Mandy Martin's politically

83 Meredith Hinchliffe, 'Fragile tenancy but exceptional art', *Canberra Times*, 18 October 1986, p 7s.

84 Despite growing safety concerns around the site's deterioration, a handful of artists continued to make work there over the ensuing decades. These included furniture designers Tom Harrington and Mark Spain, sculptors Stuart Vaskess and Peter Vandermark, painter Marie Hagerty, furniture designer Thor's Hammer and Geoff Farquhar-Still's collaborative art/design studio Artillion. As well, Canberra's radical theatre collective Splinters used the brickwork's spaces for set construction, rehearsals and performances from 1989 to 1996 and an exhibition space, Gallery Fred, was also in use for a period of time. For more on Splinters see Gavin Findlay and Jose Robertson (eds), *Splinters Theatre of Spectacle: massive love of risk* (exhibition catalogue, Canberra Museum and Gallery, 2013).

charged poster aesthetic, which was fostered in Adelaide. These differing, though not exclusively oppositional, practices continued to play out post-graduation at Megalo International Screenprint and at Studio One, which coexisted for 18 years. Megalo, arising from progressive social activism and housed in the grungy surrounds of Ainslie Village, was broadly concerned with the poster as a voice for social cohesion and change. Studio One, initially specialising in intaglio and relief processes, was concerned with printing as fine art. Studio One, incorporated in 1987 as Studio One Inc, is regarded as having been extremely influential in Australian printmaking and, with the appointment of master printmaker Theo Tremblay in 1993, it became nationally respected for its work with many of Australia's best-known Indigenous artists.

Maxwell's aGOG was established to redress the historical and contemporary gender imbalance that consistently saw more male than female artists in exhibition. Maxwell recalls that, when she decided to launch a gallery devoted to the work of women artists, '[a] number of people objected ... and said it was sexist'.⁸⁵ aGOG exhibited the work of Australian women artists, including Indigenous artists, from March 1989 to the end of 1998. The great success of the gallery over 10 years speaks to the breadth and timeliness of Maxwell's vision, with increased national research occurring over this time into the previously unwritten histories of Australian women artists of the twentieth century. Maxwell also required that works expressed each artist's personal politics, evidencing 'a stance that they are taking in their life' and, further, that '[the artist has] to know how to use their medium to successfully express their views'.⁸⁶ These requirements lent tremendous depth to aGOG's exhibition calendar. Additionally, Maxwell's experience as an assistant curator in Australian art at the National Gallery meant that her unique vision was underpinned with professionalism.

It is no surprise that Canberra was home to aGOG. Maxwell's requirement for work that expressed personal politics was apt in a city where social activism was demonstrated from the 1920s. As examined in Chapter 4, the national capital attracted feminists from around the country who participated in political lobbying, activism, forums and festivals. Art and politics were deeply entwined from the late 1970s. Additionally, BRG/

85 Roslyn Russell, 'Helen Maxwell', *The Australian Women's Register*, www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE2104b.htm, accessed 17 July 2014.

86 Russell, 'Helen Maxwell'.

CCAS, since its 1981 opening and in every year since, has consistently – against national and international trends – shown more female than male artists in exhibition. Women artists were highly visible in the city, and Maxwell and aGOG contributed enormously to their growing profile. After closing aGOG in late 1998, Maxwell re-entered the Canberra commercial gallery scene in 2000 with her eponymous Helen Maxwell Gallery (the gallery closed at the end of 2009) in the inner-city suburb of Braddon, exhibiting the works of both female and male artists, including many Indigenous artists.

The campaign for free admission

The campaign for free admission to the soon-to-be-opened National Gallery was a unique local campaign that highlighted the growing strength of the contemporary arts community in the capital. Launched by BRG members in mid-1982 in response to a decision to impose a \$2 entrance fee to the gallery, the campaign indicated the strength of political awareness and the commitment to political cultural causes among emerging arts practitioners in the capital.

The federal government's decision to establish a national gallery in Canberra was initiated by Prime Minister Robert Menzies in 1965, on the urging of the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board; it was formalised by Liberal Prime Minister Harold Holt in 1967.⁸⁷ In the second week of June 1971, the design – by architect Colin Madigan from the Sydney firm Edwards Madigan Torzillo and Partners – was publicly released.

87 'I turn now to the second important decision the Government has taken to encourage the arts in Australia. The House will recall that my predecessor Sir Robert Menzies and his Administration decided that a national art gallery should be established in Canberra and in 1965 appointed a committee of inquiry to consider what form it should take, what its function should be and how it should be controlled. This committee, under the distinguished chairmanship of Sir Daryl Lindsay, completed its work last year and I would like to acknowledge here how comprehensive the report is and how valuable it has been to the Government. It has contributed significantly to the Government's latest decision on the art gallery and is tabled in this Parliament for the information of honourable members. The Government has decided that work on the establishment of this national gallery will begin immediately. The National Capital Development Commission expects the planning, design and costing stage to take about 2 years. A site for the gallery is being considered. The gallery will house the national collection which at present consists of nearly 2,000 works of art. Future acquisitions will include Australian art past and present, art of the Asian and Pacific areas and art on a world-wide basis, beginning with the 20th century' (Harold Holt, Ministerial statement, House of Representatives, Procedural Text, 1 November 1967, 'Australian cultural activities', parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/genpdf/hansard80/hansardr80/1967-11-01/0077/hansard_frag.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf, accessed 22 May 2013).

James Mollison was appointed as acting director in October 1971 and as director in 1977. The gallery opened to the public in October 1982, eight years after its originally mooted 1974 completion date.⁸⁸

When the gallery opened, almost 235,000 people called the national capital home. The burgeoning visual arts landscape then uniquely included the nation's new national gallery and the nation's newest artist-run space, BRG, separated by a physical distance of just 2 kilometres. Though widely divergent in intent, Canberra was small enough to ensure that each was easily accessible to the other. Senior gallery staff were early and significant supporters of BRG including Mollison; the inaugural head of Australian Art, Daniel Thomas; and the inaugural curator of Australian Prints, Posters, and Illustrated Books, Roger Butler.

In the lead-up to the opening, Press Gallery reporter Warwick Costin published a story in the *Sunday Telegraph* on 19 August, informing readers of a Cabinet decision to charge an admission fee. Cabinet was responding to the gallery council's recommendation to charge a \$2 entrance fee to all members of the public, excepting the unemployed, pensioners, full-time students, children under 15 and 'the handicapped'.⁸⁹ Canberra's socially progressive young arts practitioners were outraged and swiftly mounted the campaign for free admission that rallied the nation and galvanised the arts community. The campaign was initiated and managed by BRG member and part-time administrator Karilyn Brown (who was Noel Sheridan's assistant during the latter part of 1975 at Adelaide's Experimental Art Foundation (EAF)), and BRG members Dan Coward – the pseudonym of Megalo printmaker Raymond Arnold – and Toni Robertson. Robertson, a leading figure in Australian political printmaking, who exhibited in BRG's first exhibition in April 1981 as a member of the Earthworks Poster Collective, was at that time lecturing in printmaking and photo-media at CSA.⁹⁰ Although BRG was not mentioned by name in any of the materials concerned with the campaign, the return address for all such materials and for further contact was the BRG post office box. The campaign's leaflet pertinently asked:

88 For further information on the path to opening, see: Frances Kelly, 'ALP man says gallery delay "an insult"', *Canberra Times*, 13 May 1970, p 8.

89 Australian Government, 'National Gallery regulations 1982', Federal Register of Legislation, www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2004H02339, accessed 2 May 2014.

90 Based at University of Sydney's Tin Sheds in Sydney.

Should anyone be charged to enter what is a national institution, containing the National Collection, belonging to the people of Australia and paid for with our taxes?⁹¹

Brown wrote a letter to the editor of the *Canberra Times* on 14 September, beginning a campaign of letters from locals that continued until November of that year. Her letter reads in part:

The visual arts are an integral part of our cultural identity and the creation of the Australian National Gallery can contribute to promoting a more broadly based awareness, development and support for the visual arts in Australia, a process which will be greatly hindered if members of the public are to be charged for what should be freely accessible to them.⁹²

A deputation, including Brown, Robertson, Coward and Schmeisser – who ‘inscribed his personal plea to the Prime Minister to reconsider the decision to impose the \$2 fee on one of his large etchings of the Canberra garden-city landscape’⁹³ – met first with the Minister for the Capital Territory Michael Hodgman on 22 September. On 23 September, the deputation met with Tom McVeigh, minister for home affairs and the environment, who ‘refused to take their representation to Cabinet’.⁹⁴

Canberra commentators Ian Warden and Grishin joined the discursive fray in the *Canberra Times*. Grishin pointed out that, as opposed to those international galleries privately bequeathed to nations and sustained thenceforward partly by entrance fees, the National Gallery was built from taxes paid by the people who could not now be reasonably expected to pay additionally for its upkeep. Grishin also declared that he was opposed to an entry charge on three grounds: philosophically, because ‘art is an integral part of life and not something for viewing on special occasions’; economically, where, citing the short-lived introduction of entry fees at the National Gallery in London, he revealed that ‘administering the fees was more expensive than the revenue they brought in’; and thirdly because

91 ‘Campaign for free admission to the Australian National Gallery’, leaflet, CCAS archives.

92 Karilyn Brown, letter to the editor, *Canberra Times*, 14 September 1982, p 3.

93 ‘Campaign for free admission to the Australian National Gallery’, press release, 22 September 1982. This artwork, the press release reported, was left with Hodgman to pass on to the prime minister.

94 *Canberra Times*, ‘Gallery fee discussed’, 24 September 1982, p 7.

'it seems a peculiar act of discrimination against the National Gallery' when art displays in other national institutions such as the National Library of Australia or Australian War Memorial were free.⁹⁵

Warden commented that, as the \$2 collected was to be used to develop the collection, the public might be more amenable to the plan if it was known for sure that 'one's two dollars had paid for the left nipple of the fifth nude bather from the right in a Renoir fleshscape' and that, while acknowledging there were those who were fee-exempt:

Mr McVeigh might also exempt another tiny, oppressed minority, the citizens of Canberra, on the grounds that they should be able to treat the Gallery as a local amenity to pop into on impulse at lunch time or of a weekend when they have no adultery or gardening lined up.⁹⁶

The campaign rapidly gained a national following. On 27 October 1982, Geoffrey Brown, president of the Contemporary Art Society (Australia) (CAS) wrote, 'for and on behalf of the Council, Administrative Staff and 350 members of the CAS':

The Contemporary Art Society supports the Campaign for Free Admission and is in complete agreement with their stand that the Australian National Gallery belongs to the people of Australia, their taxes having been used to pay for the Gallery ... Together the art community, voices united, may help reverse the Government's decision.⁹⁷

Letters of support arrived from, among others, local schoolteachers, the University of Queensland Department of Fine Arts, and Nancy Underhill – then head of the Art Museums Association of Australia, who wrote, 'I have sent telegrams to both the Prime Minister and Tom McVeigh deploring the imposition of charging at the ANG'⁹⁸ – and from the Artworkers Union (NSW), which stated that they were 'collectively surprised and disturbed'.⁹⁹ Blacktown City Council, a leader in Australian community arts practice, wrote:

95 Sasha Grishin, 'Visiting the National Gallery: should owners pay twice?', *Canberra Times*, 19 September 1982, p 7.

96 Ian Warden, 'Getting our \$2 worth', *Canberra Times*, 22 September 1982, p 21.

97 Geoffrey Brown, letter to Campaign for Free Admission (BRG Post Office Box), 27 October 1982, 'Campaign for Free Admission', CCAS archives.

98 Nancy Underhill, letter to Campaign for Free Admission, undated, CCAS archives.

99 Artworkers Union (NSW), letter to Campaign for Free Admission, undated, CCAS archives.

The arts are by the people for the people, and it is the right of every Australian to have admission to these works, free of charge, to view our heritage.¹⁰⁰

BRG members were aware that their campaign had an international precedent. A user-pays pricing approach in visual arts was trialled previously in Britain with a similar response from museum professionals and the public. In early 1971, director of the Art Gallery of South Australia John Bailey wrote to the art critic of the South Australian *Sunday Mail*, Ivor Francis, enclosing a photostat of a December 1970 statement from the eight trustees of the Tate Gallery and the gallery's chairman, Robert Sainsbury. The statement was delivered to British Prime Minister Edward Heath, MP Lord Eccles and the Chancellor of the Exchequer Anthony Barber, following their decision to impose admission charges to national museums and galleries, a decision the trustees viewed 'with dismay':

We believe that this decision is entirely contrary to the spirit which has guided these great institutions for generations. Once the principle of free entry has been over-ridden a unique and precious attribute of our national lives will have been destroyed for small return.

'I am,' wrote Bailey to Francis, 'naturally concerned about the principles involved in the enclosed discussion.'¹⁰¹

In spite of a concerted nationwide effort, the campaign did not succeed in changing Cabinet's decision. It was not until 1997 that the gallery's third director, Brian Kennedy, introduced free admission to the National Gallery, with the exception of entry to major exhibitions.

The members of BRG were active in the community and were therefore more aware than most of the impact that an entry fee would have on the wider Australian population. Additionally, the imposition of charges for that which should have been freely available to all Australians for study, inspiration and relaxation, was antithetical to the spirit of open access to arts and culture that was envisaged by prime ministers Holt, Gorton and Whitlam in relation to the ANG. Although many BRG members,

100 Patricia Parker, Community Arts Officer, Blacktown City Council, letter to Campaign for Free Admission, 12 October 1982, CCAS archives.

101 John Bailey, letter to Ivor Francis, undated, CCAS archives. See also 'Arts Workers' Coalition: statement of demands' (in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), *Art in theory – 1900–2000: an anthology of changing ideas*, Malden MA, Blackwell Publishing, 2003, p 926): 'Admission to all museums should be free at all times and they should be open evenings to accommodate working people'.

by virtue of their status as students, or as poor, unemployed, Canberra-based artists, were exempt under the regulation, they knew that those affected by the charges would be ordinary Canberrans.¹⁰² That BRG began as an alternative to established spaces, and that members then fought for the rights of Australians to be able to freely enter the newly established space, successfully galvanising a national population, was a powerful marker of the growing relevance of the emerging contemporary art sector in the capital.

The Drill Hall Gallery

In concluding this chapter, it is important to recognise the critical role played by the National Gallery between 1985 and 1991 in bringing the best contemporary art exhibitions to Canberra audiences. As inaugural director, Mollison determined to add a temporary exhibitions gallery, dedicated to showing contemporary Australian and international art, to complement the permanent collection spaces of the National Gallery. The Drill Hall, on the ANU campus, was built in 1940 as a World War II training hub for soldiers and provided the solution to this need for an alternative space.¹⁰³ In 1985, in an arrangement with the ANU and after an extensive renovation program that yielded four discrete exhibition spaces, The Drill Hall Gallery opened, with Michael Desmond as curator.¹⁰⁴ During the period it played host to an average of 10 exhibitions a year, which was around a third of the National Gallery's overall exhibition program.

Generally acknowledged as providing a string of groundbreaking exhibitions, its proximity to the CSA made it particularly accessible and useful to students. Amongst the memorable exhibitions were those drawn from the National Gallery's permanent collection including, from 4 December 1985 to 23 February 1986, *Lightworks: works of art using*

102 By June 2011, six months after the opening of MONA, his private museum in Hobart, David Walsh realised that he would need to charge admission fees to assist with covering costs. Importantly, he exempted Tasmanian residents from that charge.

103 For more on the history of the Drill Hall, see Gary Estcourt and James Collet, 'The Australian National University: Heritage Management Plan: Drill Hall Gallery: Australian Capital Territory', services.anu.edu.au/files/document-collection/drill_hall_gallery_hmp.pdf.

104 Desmond is an independent curator and writer who, after six years as curator of the Drill Hall Gallery, was appointed senior curator of International Paintings and Sculpture at the National Gallery, then manager of collection development and research at the Powerhouse Museum and, then, at the National Portrait Gallery, senior curator and then deputy director until 2012.

light as a medium,¹⁰⁵ which included works from American artists Dan Flavin, Bruce Nauman, Joseph Kosuth, Edward Keinholz and Robert Rauschenberg.¹⁰⁶ Grishin reviewed *A first look: Philip Morris Arts Grant purchases 1983–1986*, for the *Canberra Times*, marking it as ‘the most important exhibition of contemporary Australian art to be held in recent times ... succeeding where the Sydney Perspecta have failed’.¹⁰⁷ Artists from Brisbane and Adelaide, and Melbourne artists including Susan Rankine, Jon Cattapan, Andrew Ferguson and Sarah Faulkner, ‘displayed a hedonistic joy in the use of materials’, with the show as a whole ‘suggesting a powerful resurgence presently taking place in Australian art that is quickly overtaking the relative barrenness of the 1970s’.¹⁰⁸

In 1991, the National Gallery’s second director, Betty Churcher, facing staffing cuts, and under increasing budgetary pressures from the federal government, released the Drill Hall Gallery to the ANU. The Drill Hall’s final exhibition, from 6 July – 22 September 1991 was a 20-year retrospective of costumes, furniture, posters and jewellery from Australian artist Peter Tully. Tully’s work overtly referenced popular culture and *Urban tribalwear and beyond* utilised everyday items and unexpected elements including holograms. For Desmond, the exhibition was a ‘conscious choice as the gallery’s final ... an eye-dazzler ... we wanted to end on a spectacular note’.¹⁰⁹ In commenting that ‘Visitors to Canberra tend to have a limited amount of time, so the Drill Hall really had a local audience’, Desmond succinctly foregrounded the gallery’s important contribution to the local scene.¹¹⁰

105 Sonia Barron, ‘Light as the medium’, *Canberra Times*, 1 February 1986, p 6.

106 The exhibition was advertised as ‘Presenting ten very bright ideas ... a very exciting, very different exhibition of work using artificial light as an important component’ (*Canberra Times*, 18 January 1986, p 6).

107 Sasha Grishin, ‘First look of high quality’, *Canberra Times*, 14 October 1986, p 14.

108 Grishin, 1986.

109 Jodie Brough, ‘Gallery goes out in spectacular style – the Tully style’, *Canberra Times*, 7 July 1991, p 1.

110 Brough, 1991. Since that time, the renamed ANU Drill Hall Gallery, under consecutive curators Nancy Sever and Terence Maloon, has exhibited works from the extensive ANU collection. As well, and paired with scholarly publications, the gallery stages exceptionally fine retrospectives and exhibitions of new works in photography, painting, the decorative arts and printmaking from Australian and international artists.

This text is taken from *How Local Art Made Australia's National Capital*,
by Anni Doyle Wawrzyńczak, published 2020 by ANU Press,
The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/HLAMANC.2020.02