Three Creative Fellows

Sidney Nolan

Arthur Boyd

Narritjin Maymuru

E P R E S S

DRILL HALL GALLERY

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Foreword

The Australian National University is committed to creativity as something extra to knowledge and talent, having an application across the arts and sciences. The exhibition *Three Creative Fellows* at the Drill Hall Gallery shows the University recognising the importance of creativity.

Art is a means of showing ourselves to ourselves. This truism applies to academic scholarship no less than to other areas of life. The three painters Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd and Narritjin Maymuru, whose works are displayed in the exhibition, have addressed the theme of creativity in different ways, and each with special fervour. That they were Creative Fellows of the Australian National University is a cause of great pride given the profound impression their paintings have had on the minds and memories of generations of Australians.

The Creative Arts Fellowships, now known as the HC Coombs Creative Arts Fellowships, began in 1964 as one of HC Coombs' initiatives and continue today. Therefore, the exhibition also honours Nugget Coombs, who saw a future for the University in making creativity its ultimate ambition. It was his foresight and breadth of vision that led to the creative fellowships that have contributed so significantly to various facets of the arts in Australia.

The Creative Arts Fellowships have been the catalyst for a corpus of work that ranks amongst the best visual art produced in Australia. Over six decades the University has built up a collection that reflects significant developments in Australian art. It is now custodian of part of Australia's patrimony and is committed to the ongoing development of this valuable asset.

The authors of the essays in the catalogue, Dr Mary Eagle and Professor Howard Morphy, are scholars of international standing in their fields. Dr Eagle, the curator of the exhibition, and a Research Fellow at the ANU, has written about Sidney Nolan's and Arthur Boyd's reflections on creativity. Professor Morphy, Acting Director of the Research School of the Humanities, has contributed a moving essay about the creation stories painted by Narritjin Maymuru.

The Drill Hall Gallery, through exhibitions such as this, in a selective program of high quality exhibitions of modern and contemporary art, links the University with the wider community locally, nationally and internationally.

Nolan's major work in this exhibition, his *Riverbend*, is in the ANU Art Collection. The National Gallery of Australia, the National Museum of Australia, the Nolan Gallery, the National Gallery of Victoria and private collectors have lent key works. We gratefully acknowledge their support.

Ian Chubb AC
Vice-Chancellor
Australian National University

Curator's acknowledgements

The exhibition has been researched with generous help from many people. Yvonne Boyd, David Chalker, Valerie Herbst, Clare Golson, Barbara Blackman, Felicity St John Moore, Derek Wrigley, Colin Ploughman, Sebastian Clark, Heather Rusden, and Jim Davidson provided invaluable information about the artists during the time of their fellowships. Howard Morphy — my co-writer — Pip Deveson, and Ian Dunlop gave advice and support on the subject of Narritjin and his paintings. ANU's archivists and Deirdre Ward found thick files and photographs relating to the fellowships. Curators Deborah Hart and Elena Taylor contributed insights into Arthur Boyd's Caged Painter series of paintings, and David Boon did the same about Nolan's *Riverbend*. The directors of national institutions, Ron Radford of the National Gallery of Australia, Cradock Morton of the National Museum of Australia, Gerard Vaughan of the National Gallery of Victoria and Peter Haynes of the Nolan Gallery, kindly agreed to lend key works from their collections. The ABC's gifted producer, Arthur Hill, made a short feature film about the Three Creative Fellows. Librarians of *The Canberra Times*, the National Gallery of Australia, the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Art Gallery of South Australia provided material from their libraries. Photographers Stuart Hay, Brenton McGeachey, Pip Deveson, George Serras and Dragi Markovic supplied high quality images for the catalogue. Mark Henderson and John Carr at the National Museum were most generous with their time. Bruce Egan, the Registrar at the National Gallery, smoothed some awkward transport problems. Martin Gascoigne took me to Toolamba and into the country around Canberra in search of appropriate photographs of landscapes. Phil Abbott brought his experience to bear in helping to give the catalogue a form suited to its content. Nancy Sever and Tony Oates laboured long and hard and tactfully to bring the exhibition and catalogue to fruition. I thank you all.

Mary Eagle

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Three Creative Fellows

One of Nugget Coombs's ideas for the Australian National University was that it should offer a series of Creative Fellowships through which the concept of the university as the nation's flagship for research in the sciences and humanities would be extended to the creative arts. Plans, drafted by May 1964, were ratified by the university's council at its meeting of 10 July.¹ Some months earlier Coombs had obtained Russell Drysdale's 'ideal of a Fellowship Grant.'² Presumably he consulted other artists, too, and among them Sidney Nolan: who told his biographer that he was first approached about taking a fellowship by Coombs.³ Although the university's negotiations with Nolan did not begin until August, and the formal letter of invitation is dated 8 November, he knew before leaving Australia in April 1964 that a fellowship was in the offing.⁴ The fellowships were to be by invitation to artists of two categories: longer-term residential fellowships for up-and-coming artists — the first of these was John Perceval; shorter term fellowships, with an option of only a minimal stay in Canberra, for creators (not necessarily in the visual arts; not necessarily Australian) who were prominent internationally — the first of these was Sidney Nolan.⁵

The 2007 exhibition celebrates three different interpretations of creativity by three senior fellows: Sidney Nolan (in 1965), Arthur Boyd (in 1971-72), and Narritjin Maymuru (in 1978).

* * * *

Sidney Nolan and his wife, Cynthia (née Reed), a writer, arrived in Australia on 8 March 1965 and in Canberra the following day, when it was arranged that his fellowship would commence on 20 March (on which day Nolan was in Sydney, on the eve of flying out of the country). Nolan's work during the fellowship was tied to the rhythm of his creativity, both its fieldwork and its solid results. True to his practice since settling in London in 1953, he did not paint a stroke while he was in Australia,⁶ but used the period of his fellowship for fieldwork. Very little time was spent in Canberra. His first project (with Cynthia) was to visit the highlands of New Guinea for a month. A holiday afterwards at Green Island off the Queensland coast was interrupted by the news that his father had died: he

flew to Melbourne for the funeral. In early May the Nolans took up residence at University House, where Cynthia decorated the apartment with New Guinea artefacts and enjoyed working in the library and walking in the bush. They visited Sydney and Melbourne for exhibitions and other events, accepted an official invitation to Grenfell for the Henry Lawson festival in early June, flew to the Simpson Desert for a week, and for two and a half months between 15 June and the end of August travelled to Indonesia, Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan and China. Nolan's contribution to the university community was two exhibitions. The first, of fourteen Antarctic paintings, was shown in the R. G. Menzies Library in June, and coincided with a conference about Antarctica.⁷ The second, of which the star work was *Riverbend* [Plate 1], was held at the Albert Hall between 26 August and 8 September, at the conclusion of the fellowship. The Nolans were in Peking. They did not return to Canberra.⁸ Nolan took serious note of the University's hope that the fellowships would contribute to creativity in Australia. Believing that Australia's context was Asian, he travelled in Melanesia and Asia. The reasoning was sound, even prescient of Australia's future, however the process of digesting the experience proved difficult for Nolan. In the event, his creative contribution did not relate to his study in Asia but was the breakthrough work he painted in anticipation, *Riverbend*.

He began painting this extended series of panels in London in late December, immediately after the official announcement that he had accepted a fellowship. The first panel was completed on 27 December, panels two and three were painted the following day, and panels four and five on 29 December. Whereas the first four panels had Ned Kelly as their subject, the second of that day's panels and the subsequent four continued the idea of a river landscape without human protagonists. Panel six was painted after the Christmas–New Year break, on 10 January 1965, the following two on 12 January, and the final panel two days later. At eleven metres long *Riverbend* was the first of several panoramic murals Nolan produced between 1964 and 1967. It proved to be pivotal in his career for integrating his grandest Australian themes, those of the nineteenth-century outlaw Ned Kelly (now given overtones, among other things, of the explorers Burke and Wills), and the primeval Australian scene. Reviewers of *Riverbend* noted how the landscape dwarfed the human drama within it. Nolan himself described *Riverbend* and the 25 smaller works that preceded it, not as 'Kelly' paintings but as 'Wimmera landscapes'.⁹

In *Riverbend* he conjured up a watery paradise. Australia, during his visit in the summer of 1964 had been in the first stages of a drought that finally ended in 1968. In the context, the image was therapeutic. The eye pans across a stretch of river with a thick fringe of tall young trees growing on the banks and in the water. The river is so thoroughly accompanied by saplings along its meandering course that there is no clear distinction between the water and shore. They meld together, milky brown water adjacent to closely toned banks, the water without perceptible flow and the trees growing thickly in the water as well as on the banks. The scene is identifiable as an area of frequent inundation, reminiscent of the Barmah lakes on the Murray River near the outlet of the Goulburn River, more specifically a bend in the Goulburn at Toolamba near Shepparton. The marriage of those places happened serendipitously when Nolan's 1964 Christmas card to Albert Tucker, explaining that he had been '[d]igging deeper into my early memories', crossed with Tucker's Christmas note to him, 'the only sustaining thing is the bush — just come back from a few days in the Barmah forests on the Murray, a swamp.'¹⁰

Nolan identified the *Riverbend* as the scene of boyhood visits from the city into his father's home country:

'The painting is a combination (in my mind) of the Goulburn River, at Shepparton, where I spent my boyhood holidays, and the Murray. It is very much my father's country... I can still evoke in myself, in my studio on the Thames, the river that I saw as a boy. A big long river, with the sun coming through the leaves, the vertical leaves of the gum tree. I've never seen it anywhere else.'¹¹

The memory had accompanied Nolan for decades. Indeed, it had informed his first (1945-47) series of Ned Kelly paintings. In 1945, planning one of the preliminary paintings of the series, he contrasted the gelid winter light of boyhood holidays at Toolamba with the 'transparent light' of the Heidelberg School's high summer:

'[I]t has to have an opposite quality, rain & mud & cold mornings that are also typical of the country. This is probably one aspect that Roberts, Streeton, [&c] did not touch in their preoccupation with exploring the transparent light. I can remember winter holidays at Toolamba in which mud and impassable roads & floods seemed to be the only visual constant. The dreaming that [D. H.] Lawrence said belonged to our landscape is not summed up in simple terms, even in wet conditions the same essence persists.'¹²

In memory, the sunlight filtering through pendant leaves flickered disturbingly on the muddy flanks of the river. How to reproduce the kinetic effect had preoccupied him throughout the latter months of 1964 when he painted around twenty-five Kelly subjects on 48 x 60 inch masonite panels before launching into *Riverbend*. During one of his and Arthur Boyd's regular visits to the National Gallery in London, Nolan took note of how the problem had been dealt with by Cézanne in *Dans Le Parc du Chateau*.

'I noticed that Cézanne had very broken shapes that he cut through with the trunks of trees. The stereoscopic effect comes partially from the sudden placement of the straight edge against the mottled and divided background.'¹³

Viewers today are struck by another comparison. Very similar optical techniques to create effects of movement and shifting light are to be seen in bark paintings — in the geometric passages of 1960s-1970s paintings by Narritjin Maymuru, for example [see Plates 15-17, 19]. *Riverbend* had its first exhibition in Sydney in May 1965, when there were lengthy, highly appreciative reviews from newspaper critics. None, however, noted the (high modernist) optical tremor that Nolan had produced through interspersing the narrow stripes of tree trunks with the oblique stripes of tree-shadows and dappled spots of sunlight [see details, Plates 3,4]. Through 1965 Nolan continued to be preoccupied by *Riverbend*. He carried around an envelope of black and white photographs of the nine panels, and during the long Asia trip would often take out the photographs and look at them consideringly.¹⁴ In monologue conversations with Cynthia (noted down by her), he complained that art critics had not seen that light was the key to *Riverbend*:

'They don't get the fact that in River Bend the light is obviously stronger than those who shoot or are shot.'¹⁵ 'Well, and I keep repeating that for me the bush is "light". Have you noticed that on the tops of the trees it's menacing? Only when it's filtered it becomes beautiful — as opposed to light on olive trees. In Australia the light filtering through trees doesn't form shadows, but mottled forms of light.'¹⁶

In 1964 the Australian National University, on the strength of fifteen years' solid support from Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies, was at the height of its power as Australia's national university, with an emphasis on path-finding research. In response to his forthcoming Creative Fellowship, Nolan broached a new theme and a new format. The image of a generous river sustaining a forest of young trees was an optimistic

‘true’ image of Australian fecundity and growth — presumably Nolan was also thinking about Canberra as the seat of government and source of the life-giving funding that would have a fruitful outcome in research. *Riverbend* was exhibited in Canberra at the end of Nolan’s creative fellowship, and was acquired by the Australian National University two years later with money contributed by several large corporations. Nolan spent the first six months of 1966 in New York where he produced a second *Riverbend*, very like the first, for exhibition in that city. The twin work was acquired by Rupert Murdoch’s media corporation and hangs in the company’s boardroom in New York.

There was a deeper issue involved in *Riverbend* than Ned Kelly, landscape and light. Since 1962 Nolan had been reflecting on the nature of his creativity. The series on Leda and the Swan, exhibited in 1960, had been thought slick. Nolan abandoned polyvinyl acetate as a medium and painted his Africa series in oil paints. Those were likened to a tourist’s album of snapshots, the critic for *The Times* accusing Nolan of spreading himself too thinly:

‘If you are Leonardo [da Vinci] himself and you produce hypothetical Leonardo greeting cards and design a ballet and travel down the Nile for a magazine and thus produce sketches and appear in person in a Leonardo film on television — then suddenly the public will become weary and your image, overdisseminated and overworked will seem lacking in surprise or, more seriously, in any real meaning.’¹⁷

Visiting out-of-the-way places around the world, seeking scenes unfamiliar to his senses, Nolan travelled, he said, in the hope of catching sight of the totality of things. To the end of his life he tried to understand what drove him to scan foreign territory with “concentration” and return home periodically to renew his memory of the light. Self-examination merely brought the realisation that his creativity depended on seeing – a long-cultivated style of snapshot views, peripheral glimpses leading to offbeat observations – and a process of mental gestation that was inaccessible to his conscious thought. What follows is my attempt to give the context of Nolan’s thinking and imagining.

I’ll begin with his process of painting, which was swift and semi-automatic. *Riverbend* is painted in oils, and the oleaginous textures are typical of that medium, yet, as with the earlier paintings in ripolin enamel and polyvinyl acetate, the effects are of dragged and wiped paint, of

smooth and rough textures, transparency and a blind milkyiness. A peculiarity of Nolan's manner of working is that controlled and abstracted techniques were employed to illusory ends. One is never given a resting point in 'reality'; instead there is a teasing interplay between abstraction and representation.

The amount of time Nolan spent in thinking about his subjects was infinitely greater than the time taken to paint a work. Visiting Nolan's London studio in February 1965, soon after *Riverbend* was completed, James Gleeson learnt that 'the gestation of some paintings might take [Nolan] many months before the actual painting begins. ... He will keep turning the idea over and over in his mind, and then one day, no doubt, he will see in his mind's eye what he has been waiting to see — and perhaps in no more than a couple of hours, complete the process that has been occupying his attention for months.'¹⁸

Nolan described a semi-automatic process of painting:

'If the moment is right ... the paint itself, which is just an intractable material, actually begins to spread itself into forms; you think of a tree and a tree evolves; you think of a horse's head and that appears. ... If you are lucky enough to achieve this state, which might last for twenty minutes, something inexplicable happens and when you come out of it, the picture more or less is completed, or at least it can be finished quite consciously.'¹⁹

In 1962, he told Hazel de Berg:

'I really cook the images in myself until I've got them as clear as I can possibly get them ... but once I get in front of the canvas I'm very quick to get something down, and then I hope that something takes over for a brief period in the painting to melt all the images together. It is very difficult to do this, I think, intellectually and you are dependent on some rather irrational process at some point in the painting to weld the things together. I do lots of drawing but I don't do drawings for paintings ... I like to work against the clock, so to speak, wait for the bell lap and then race ... It's a bit difficult to put into words, but I think what painters try to get at, or what I try to get at anyway, is that a painting is an extension of yourself ... I believe in the past that Chinese artists working at their bamboo paintings would put their fingers right into the brush, the bristles of the brush, and work there in order to feel this kind of electric thing flowing through them, that they want to get as close as possible to the ink ... [T]he other obsession, or compulsion in a way, is that the growth [of a painting as part of oneself] will be something that other people can

recognise, that it has got a meaning for them, and I think this is the rather knife-edged thing that painters are on, that they want to produce something out of themselves but they want it to be something other people will recognise... you want it to be part of the common experience and to be recognised as such.²⁰

Nolan was clear about some of the ingredients that went into making *Riverbend*.

“I painted River Bend for my old man”, he said sadly, “he’s all mixed up with it”.²¹

Sidney Henry Nolan’s poor health may have been the reason Nolan undertook to base himself in Australia in 1965. From 1962 the artist had made one or more trips yearly to see his parents. In 1963 he paid for them, his sisters, and their husbands, to visit Europe, a trip his father enjoyed despite his heart condition. Nolan went to Melbourne on several occasions during February and March 1964. As his father’s health worsened Nolan phoned home weekly, then more frequently, from wherever he was in the world. Sidney senior’s health continued to decline through the later part of 1964 and he died at home on 20 April 1965, six weeks after the Nolans arrived in Australia.

Nolan’s Ned Kelly was a family story that over time became entwined with the artist’s reflections about himself and the human predicament. He told Elwyn Lynn, ‘I base my Kelly on my father’s brother [Bill] — a good axeman and terribly Irish.’ His original ambition in painting the story had been pride in his family’s working-class Irish-Australian heritage: ‘I wanted to prove that an untrained factory worker could look at modern art and it would come out of the country.’²² Twenty years later, in *Riverbend*, he had an ambivalent concept of Australia as a compelling natural setting for bizarre human acts:

‘Our light is pure impressionism, our life is expressionism — this explains a great deal of Australian art. In *River Bend* one tried for this... I wanted a dappled light in purity and a painting quite unclassical, [showing] a place that is used — occupied [and] used by our Irish Anglo Saxons with its discursive mode.’²³

He told Lynn that the outlaw’s story and the Toolamba landscape, two of the ingredients for this “modern art”, had been embedded in him when he was a boy. An anecdote he recounted in connection with his Uncle Bill (alias Ned Kelly) was particularly oblique, yet one recognises, in the story of violence flowering from a chance observation, the same inexplicable shock of disconnection that is typical of Nolan’s art. Nolan

told the story in three sequential snapshots collaged with some philosophical reflections and a quotation from Mao Tse Tung:

‘[Bill Nolan] saw a fish in the Goulburn River – will be in a narrow channel – the return with a gun – like knowledge and premeditation – resourcefulness – I’ve written a little poem – In the end I wrote the fish shows his fin and so like beginning and end of human speech – Mao – mouths of guns. Small genuine stories move you as a kid and you find a vehicle for them. The minutiae of all life.’²⁴

One of Mao’s sayings was that political power came less from words than from the mouths of guns. Nolan transposed the saying to the violence of Uncle Bill Nolan: a man with a gun, and a famous axeman in the forests at Daunt’s Bend, Toolamba. The connection of place and folk history with his family, via Nolan’s inward gaze, gave edge to the artist’s vision during the several weeks while he painted the *Riverbend* panels. The scene of life was the scene of death. His father was dying. A tiny fish (Christian symbol of death and regeneration) swims into the vicinity of Ned as he nurses the dead Scanlon in the first panel of *Riverbend* [Plate 2]. A boy, like a tadpole, appears in the foreground of a preliminary work, *Figures and wattle* 1964. *Riverbend* is a primeval Eden of water, mud, sprouting trees, mottled light and sprite-sized men of the same colour and nakedness as the trees. The disappearance into the scene of Nolan’s famous personage, Ned Kelly, makes *Riverbend* the most unusual of his many paintings that imagined the life and circumstances of the nineteenth-century outlaw. Camouflaged in the flickering light between the trees, Ned and Scanlon meld with nature. Kelly in particular is small, bare, vulnerable, and of ambiguous tenderness. When *Riverbend* was shown in Australia a debate sprang up in letters to newspapers, “Was Ned Kelly a homosexual?”²⁵ More appropriately, in the first panel he and Scanlon are a colonial *pietà*. Further downriver Scanlon’s swollen corpse floats like a dead fish on the water [Plate 5] but in the next panel he is shown drifting lightly from the trees, like a scarf of peeled bark [Plate 4]. As with the young airman in Rupert Brooke’s famous poem he is ecstatically diving to death, “into clearness leaping.” Death by flying, by falling and by water had especial meaning for Nolan who described the experience of travelling in a foreign country as, ‘like a dream in which you drown and fly at the same time.’²⁶

Robert Melville, in a catalogue essay written in early January 1965, while Nolan was finishing *Riverbend*, commented that whereas the first two series of Ned Kelly paintings had been accompanied by titles and

quotations from historical documents, ‘partly to affirm the factual basis of the series’: ‘they would not be suitable for the Kelly series he had just completed.’²⁷ In *Riverbend* the poetry is not localised. The outlaw and constable are joined in a quest for the meaning of life:

‘Kelly is still the man with the helmet-head but ... he is naked, and nakedness is timeless. He is no longer a bushranger but a man on a journey... When he struggles with another man it is as if they were dreaming the same dream, sleeping uneasily at different camp sites...’

Melville says the imagery would be well supported by lines from T. S. Eliot’s “The Wasteland” ‘which envisages a man watching himself from far off’:

When I count there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Wrapped in a brown mantle, hooded

and Eliot’s note that those lines were stimulated by the account of an Antarctic expedition; ‘it was related that the party of explorers, at the extremity of their strength, had the constant delusion that there was one more member than could actually be counted.’

Melville decided that the many journeys undertaken by Nolan – to the US, Egypt, Africa, Greece and Antarctica – had not dispersed his creativity. There was a profound continuity in Nolan’s art, which demonstrated, movingly, that the journeys had been one journey:

‘[I]n the paintings of the Australian journeys into the outback, where the bushranger Ned Kelly and the explorers Burke & Wills are always out ahead of him, like guides who keep their distance ... he seems to reach the heart of his intention.’

Riverbend is a landscape of unmistakable presence. In it Nolan made an overt connection between his deep feeling for his Irish-Australian heritage and a concept of Australia as a primeval scene. The idea of timelessness or all-time had been first expressed by Nolan in the 1948–1950 landscapes of Northern and Central Australia and it influenced the 1964 images of the frozen Antarctic as well as *Riverbend*. Cynthia Nolan related a story Nolan told her in 1965.

‘Last night a professor of psychology and a psychoanalyst had been telling him what the nine paintings that comprised the River Bend panel were about. “You are preoccupied with death and violence. You have

accepted this and resolved it, ... [There] are signs of a castration complex in your paintings, they terrify me just as the Australian bush terrifies me,” [said the] professor... “But...you have realised...the meaning of the stars in space... these two experiences amalgamated and so you experience a kind of terrible joy. Your abstract knowledge fuses with ... the stars, millions of miles away, [which] may even not exist any more.”²⁸

Australia as a scene at the beginning of the world had been a trope since the late nineteenth century. Nolan’s interest in the idea could have been rekindled by his traveller’s search for meaning, his father’s declining health, conversations with his friend Alan Moorehead, indications of drought in the hinterland in March 1964 when Drysdale drove him and the Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Hal Missingham, to Adelaide, and a particular insight he was given during that journey. Drysdale wrote:

‘Today just before we entered Yass I drove a mile out on the Wee Jasper road. On a ridge on either side of the road is an outcrop of Silurian fossil deposits of coral reefs, which once grew in a warm Silurian sea. Hal & Sid were fascinated with [the contrast between the past and] the lovely blonde landscape rolling away around us.’²⁹

Nolan had a yearning for totality. In October 1964 he suggested to a sceptical Scottish broadcaster that it was indeed possible in modern times to paint a myth of Australia:

‘[E]ven if one had a completely urban upbringing, there always was, and there still is a terrific sense of a primeval landscape stretching for ever [T]he objective world is so strong there that ... one accepts it willy–nilly.’³⁰

Likewise, he’d found Antarctica ‘enormous and lethal’. However, to an artist of his time the sensation of sublime ‘awe and fear’ was insufficient; the existential flow of one’s perceptions had also to be tapped:

‘I must be able to place that kind of sequence of one emotion running over the other, find a concrete form for it ... I think this is a general preoccupation with all of us now that we are concerned with finding out what we are, because we have learned now that, in fact, we don’t know what we are.’³¹

Talking with Charles Spencer that month, Nolan tried again to describe his vision of creativity tied to a personal journey, and met with a sceptical response. The artist referred to Bertrand Russell’s hope that ‘before dying he would say something definitive about life — not any specific aspect ... the stuff of life, its totality.’ Spencer saw the quest for totality as a mark

of Nolan's provincialism: 'This need for solution, the optimistic belief that man can understand and master the confusion of life, is surely at variance with our 20th century despair of finding a cohesive pattern.' He asked why all the faces in Nolan's paintings based on Shakespeare's Sonnets were so 'enigmatically, unpredictably Australian.' Agreeing that his Shakespeare 'looked like a swagman,' Nolan wondered whether it wasn't part of the ungovernable egoism of creativity that Shakespeare, indeed the world, would be seen in terms of one's own experience? — 'In saying something powerful about yourself poetically, you become reconciled to it.'³² To Spencer, Nolan's 'outsidedness is really the equation of his Australianness.' To Nolan, on the other hand, 'outsidedness' was a condition of creativity.³³

* * * *

Arthur Boyd, the second creative fellow represented in this exhibition, spent the five months of his fellowship (21 September 1971 – 29 February 1972) in Canberra.¹ His home base since 1959 had been London, where Australian artists and writers had been having the effect of an 'antipodean' new wave. Their art was raw and uncompromising, and it expressed Australian realities that were exotic to international audiences yet touched on universal human myths.

When Boyd was approached by the Australian National University in early May 1970 he was fifty. Events during the past two or three years had put him in the position of considering the tenor of his art and life. In 1967 a first monograph, written by Franz Philipp, had pointed to the meaningful recurrence of motifs and stories in his work. The following year, returning to Australia on a visit, Boyd recovered his dead father's drawings (seeing in them much that resembled his own work) and travelled around the painting sites of his father, his grandfather, and his own early career. The university's letter of invitation arrived at the end of a major retrospective at the National Gallery of Victoria.² This phase of Boyd's self-reflection was to have a formidable outcome in the series of paintings that followed his creative fellowship in Canberra.

The paintings produced during 1972-73 were dubbed the 'Caged Painter' series by Ursula Hoff in her 1986 monograph on the artist; the name stuck, and was formalised by Janet McKenzie in a monograph published in 2000. Tom Rosenthal, an English publisher friend, has said

that the series was Boyd's 'way of talking out'. About what? Apparently about creativity itself. In Rosenthal's view any individual of such prodigious talent, having created the prosperous material circumstances by which many others lived and on which they relied would be burdened by a sense of responsibility – and Boyd was a man seemingly bound by an unusual personal humility, who would blame himself for the ills of the world, yet feel powerful emotions of anger and torment. Rosenthal said, Boyd 'mocks his friends and himself.'³ And Boyd said, 'I put myself in the cage ... instead of talking, I had my paint brushes'.⁴

Boyd, like Nolan, had a plan for how he would spend the time of his fellowship: 'His attitude is that what he is good at is painting, not talking, so paint he will.'⁵ In August, before embarking by ship, he forwarded painting materials: five boxes containing paint, brushes, palette knives and other equipment and one box of photographs of his drawings.⁶ In addition, he sent out a container-load of works of art: 91 paintings, 33 ceramic paintings, numerous drawings, and five tapestries — more than sufficient for a second major retrospective (this one selected by Boyd himself). For the first month of the fellowship, while preparations were underway for the exhibition – to open on 21 October — Boyd hung around in the Childers Street studio that had been assigned to him by the university, 'working on illustrations for a book of poems by Peter Porter, and a book of Nebuchadnezzar paintings,'⁷ and unpacking crates. The contents, as they were hung on the studio walls and propped against boxes, were so many mementos of his personal history. As well, he had the box of photographs of his drawings to reflect upon. It seems clear that Boyd had gathered together for Canberra the memories and objects that would help him to address the eternal questions: where am I?, where have I been?, where am I going?

'...the walls of the former efficient reading lab were lined with paintings representing virtually every phase of his painting life over the past 30 years. There were muted landscapes done when he was only 16, nightmarish paintings of the war years, paintings in which he had reworked Biblical themes made familiar by the old masters, portraits of family and friends, landscapes of the 1950s, work done in London in the years since he settled there in 1959, and canvases from his recent series based on the story of Nebuchadnezzar. Although his paintings range widely in subject, style and size, it is possible to trace reworkings of earlier ideas, the recurrence of certain motifs, the extraordinary colour sense culminating in the splendour of the Nebuchadnezzar series, and the

haunting sense of fear that pervades many of his paintings, relieved occasionally by a sly sense of fun.⁸

Rosalie Gascoigne, viewing the exhibition, saw the way in which it was a personal review:

'I spent quite a lot of time there & was amazed at how much I got out of the show ... I feel Boyd has travelled such a long journey to reach the point he is at now, that it is hard for the uninitiated to comprehend him. Like air travel. The soul follows on foot.'⁹

Boyd did not intend to spend his time in Canberra working indoors in a reflective mode.¹⁰ Five minutes from the university apartment at 30 Hopegood Place, Garran took him into the country where a remarkably blue sky rose endlessly above white-grey pastureland on which shadows were etched in black. Yvonne Boyd has explained that Arthur hoped, in Canberra, to paint his own outdoor versions of Manet's famous 'Lunch on the Grass' that showed men in contemporary dress picnicking with naked women. Driving to Canberra, the Boyds stopped for a picnic lunch and Yvonne posed nude, sitting on a bank, for a tiny canvas 8 x 10 inches. A number of *pleinair* paintings the same small size were produced during the fellowship. As well:

'Arthur must have painted several large canvases of around 3 x 4 feet in the Canberra landscape. They were the first of the blond landscapes with blue skies. He liked the way the ground was lighter than the brilliant sky. There was some wonderfully clear weather. The summer sun was fierce, and we were told the winter could be as shrill as in northern Germany. The days when I posed nude for Arthur were the blue days. I'd boil the billy (Arthur included the billy in some of the 'lunch on the grass' paintings and a number of the Caged Painter canvases [Plates 11,14]). I didn't enjoy posing at all, a matter of privacy, but it didn't matter when Arthur and I were together. Our young daughter Lucy came with us occasionally and my posing didn't bother her at all, if she even noticed. Mostly it was just me and Arthur on those occasions though I remember once, when Lucy Beck (Arthur's eldest sister) was staying with us, we boiled the billy by a creek, there was a cloudburst, it rained abundantly, the creek rose and we had to scuttle, collect our things and flee. Arthur and I returned another day to hunt for some brushes that had washed away.'¹¹

Boyd responded to the crystalline light.¹² Painting outdoors brought to his mind a comparison with the French Impressionists — the Australian light gave a sharp focus whereas the Impressionists with their 'fuzzy' atmosphere had responded to the vaporous air of Europe.¹³

Not all of the outdoor paintings were set in the crisp daylight. A number of elegiac landscapes, such as *Dam near Canberra, evening* [Cat.no. 24] pictured the withdrawal of the light at dusk, when the skies remain clear while the landforms accumulate a weight of shadow. Two tiny, dark canvases given to university friends were painted within a couple of months of arriving.¹⁴ Though painted in the open air their theme was of death and regeneration: an aspect of the Old Testament story of Nebuchadnezzar with which Boyd had “travelled a long way” in recent years. In one, Nebuchadnezzar floats at the edge of the sea, a pale blue-grey tree or bouquet growing from his stomach into the lavender sky. In the other, Nebuchadnezzar is on all fours in the spent light, his back pushing up the earth and plants of a Canberra landscape. Their subject of death, physical decay and rebirth, above all their darkening light, recalled for Yvonne the circumstances in which the works were painted after 16 October 1971:

‘The Herbsts took us to Bob and Rosemary Brissenden’s beach cottage on the coast. Bob was not there when we arrived and Rosemary and the children came out to greet us. We settled in, Arthur did some painting, Rosemary and I talked. Then Bob Brissenden came in from Sydney, bringing the news for Arthur that his cousin Robin had died that day. Robin was just one year older than Arthur; his first commission as an architect had been to design Arthur’s first studio; they were close, and Robin’s death came as a great blow.’¹⁵

She saw a connection between the dark palette of these paintings and an earlier time, ‘after his mother Doris died [1960], when Arthur painted huge dark canvases of falling figures. Sad paintings.’

In London, seven months after the fellowship ended, Boyd told a reporter that Canberra had “unsettled” him. He had now to work out what the experience meant, as he painted towards an exhibition:

‘[It was] to consist of about 40 paintings influenced by Boyd’s last visit to Australia: a six-months fellowship to the Australian National University. ... “I got a lot out of it, and it has been rather unsettling. You become attached or worn into a groove. You don’t mean to break out, but when you do it can be unsettling to an advantage or it can have a bad effect. In this case I hope it has been a great advantage.”

‘Victoria [where he lived until 1959] had been his main inspiration until the last visit. Then he and his wife moved into a university house in the

Canberra suburb of Garran. “I could walk into the country in five minutes. It was quite marvellous: there was this undulating, rolling quality. And the weather – the blueness of the sky: I still can’t get the blue skies right. Oh, that’s really a joke, but the blue is so intense compared to the Victorian.”¹⁶

Self-deprecating though he was, Boyd conveyed his feeling of being poised for a breakthrough in his art. ‘You don’t mean to break out, but when you do it can be ... an advantage or it can have a bad effect. In this case I hope it has been a great advantage.’ With typical cautiousness he qualified, ‘You can delude yourself into thinking the next thing ... will be better.’

His feeling of having jumped a groove in Canberra was justified. A new idea had been born there that redefined his art. Through 1972 into 1973 as Boyd painted for the May-June 1973 exhibition at Fischer Fine Art the initial subject of the nude female figure picnicking in the distinctive blue, white and black Canberra landscape gave way to the theme of the frustrated artist, in the same landscape. Hence this analysis begins with the landscape. Surveying the Canberra-based works twenty years later Boyd saw that although, of course, ‘more a Canberra country’, there was also a ‘connection with the dry, sandy part of northern Victoria and a sort of Grampians country,’ and concluded that the scene was ‘fairly generalised ... not specific’.¹⁷ National Gallery of Australia curators Deborah Hart and Elena Taylor gave me insights into how the landscape operates in the Caged Painter series, Elena remarking that it is a stage on which the artist has put himself, and Deborah suggesting that the ‘excoriating’ light of the landscape-cum-stage is the artist’s sign for the stripping away of layers of the creative persona. Responding as well to Tim Fisher’s apocalyptic interpretation of the series for the 1999 touring exhibition *Arthur Boyd and the Exile of Imagination*, I have leaned towards a generalised interpretation: the dramas performed in the clear light of an open stage are about creativity itself.

The paintings confront viewers with an extremity of expressiveness. They are powerfully, even violently, worked.¹⁸ The attack of brushstrokes on canvas is matched by the explosive energy of some of the figures. By contrast, other figures are impotent, passive, pursued and possessed. Emotions of fear, guilt, lust, greed, intellectual pride, impotence and frustration come across. A painter appears in most images, caged, chained, cross-dressing, animalistic, in the guise of Rembrandt, pierced like Christ, sexually ravished. In two paintings, he is suspended over a

boiling billy (a pot-boiler), one hand holding his brushes upside down against the canvas, the other hand reaching forward to rake in a pile of money. In some of these equivocal images money doubles as faeces: a fertiliser. A ram mounts a dog. A muzzled dog mounts a painter-bride [Plate 11]. One image is of a *Woman injecting a rabbit* [Plate 6]: ‘she is in this wire-mesh hospital and she’s naked, and on her back is a painter, as a ram, dressed up and holding the brushes’.¹⁹ A second rabbit image, *Interior with black rabbit* [Plate 7] has a dwarf painter wearing a ruff — a Don Quixote-cum-Rembrandt — whose brushes are raised like a lance as if jousting with the room’s other occupant, a huge black rabbit, but on closer examination the brushes are seen to impale the hand of the painter who is ‘hypnotised with fear’ and clings for dear life to the legs of his model as she crawls out of the picture.²⁰ The dark interior of this hospital-cum-studio is located, suggestively, by the hot white landscape glimpsed through its wire-mesh window. A huge canvas *Paintings in the studio: ‘Figure supporting back legs’ and ‘Interior with black rabbit’* [Plate 14] encapsulates the two rabbit paintings plus a third, *Figure supporting back legs*. In it, the “wire-mesh hospital” doubles as a dark studio, lit from outside by the exposing light and inside by the white-hot coupling of the painter and his muse. The latter’s straining legs extend beyond the ‘picture within a picture’ into the space of the studio itself. In the words of the inimitable Ursula Hoff:

‘Against the grey wall of a dimly lit interior leans a canvas on which a painter is propelled along by a woman, much like the woman with the lame dog in a drawing of the forties. The painter is half beast, half man; his face reminds us of the young farouche Rembrandt. Antlers grow from his head, his legs are formless and end in claws; like Actaeon he is changing into a beast. He holds brushes in one hand and gold in the other. A fury-like muse supports, pushes and ravishes him.’²¹

The concept of creativity that recurs through the series is twofold. Creativity is the endless relay of picture within picture and creativity is demonic force. The theme was both personal to Boyd and universal in its concept of the creative drive as both imprisonment within art and possession from outside the self. The image of rape had an unlikely inception decades earlier in some wartime drawings of a kindly woman taking her partly paralysed dog for a walk, holding the dog’s back legs under her arms or over her shoulders and wheeling him before her. Almost all the motifs in the caged painter series had a life within Boyd’s past work. In a series of mutations flowers are feathers, are brushes laden

with colour, and spring like arrows from the head. The cave is hole is a crown. A windmill is a dragonfly is a bride. The ram is part ox (ram–ox is Franz Philipp’s term). Likewise the heavy boot, the bent–over tree, the lovers (dubbed ‘victims’ by Boyd), the figure outstretched on the ground, the watching figure, the dog, had descended in Boyd’s art through numerous incarnations. Boyd put down the roots of his equivocal imagery in the early 1940s, at a time when art historians were discoursing on the meaningful drift of motifs down long periods of time. As Daniel Thomas once said, ‘Boyd’s highly personal content becomes more extraordinary the more one ponders it. Surely he must be, for all his stylistic homage to other artists, one of the most original and inventive artists in the world?’²²

Boyd sought primal images, and did so two ways, tunnelling into his past and exploring the theme of the creative drive. In the Caged Painter series there is no resolution to the play of forces. Yet the blazing light, the openness of the landscape and Boyd’s stance of unreserve attest to an effort to achieve the utmost exposure and disclosure. The paintings’ disturbing effect is the turbidity of a violent story repeated over and over seemingly without cause or resolution. Creativity is presented as reasonless possession, inhospitable, graceless and rude. The imagery revolves around a conundrum. If you try to delve into the iconography to establish a first, foundational meaning, the picture within a picture merely repeats itself, as impossible to fathom as the origin of origins. In the composite imagery, the roles of victim and aggressor, animal and human, are mixed, not fixed. Frustration is not merely the passivity of a painter without his muse; it is integral to the pouncing, confrontational graphics dredged from the past, that do not resolve into a meaning or moral stance. The reason why the various attempts to explain the Caged Painter series have stayed with anecdote, iconography, and description is because the images are resolutely affective — ‘Instead of talking, I had my paint brushes.’

- The *Kneeling figure with canvas and black can* [Plate 11] is on a stark white ground against a blue sky. A muzzled dog flows over the man’s back. In its dark tone and adhesiveness the dog is like one of Boyd’s shearers, pinning down the white bride — indeed, this painter is dressed as a bride. The colours are beautiful in the details, with delicately-nuanced pale blue, pink-brown, orange-brown and beige touches.

- Behind the *Figure with red dog* [Plate 13] a eucalyptus sapling leans backwards and drops its bark as if straining to support the triangular framework that encloses the red dog and woman. The dog is of the same economical shape as the watching dog in Piero di Cosimo's hyperreal *Death of Procris* (National Gallery, London). The base of the triangle is a full-bellied woman lying on the ground and pillowing her head in her arms, the classic pose for a nude. Her head is lifted to watch her pregnant belly and the dog, too, seems to watch her pregnancy. The naked woman blends into the white grassland, which has been brushed in slow surges tinted with grey, blue, pink, a khaki yellow-green, and the fringe of trees outlining the hill is topped by the limitless blue sky.
- The *Figure resting* [Plate 12] is lapped by a quilt of blanched landscape delicately patterned with sparse vegetation. Near this man-in-uniform is another man who swims or crawls in the earth. In one hand the second man holds a bunch of violet-coloured flowers: death giving birth to life? Half man and half earth, the two men are versions of the same concept. The soldier is under a triangular shelter: his hand cups his cap in a gentle salute, and a bunch of paintbrushes beside him is equivalent to the flowers growing from the hand of the man swimming in the earth. Several things about this painting make me think of Manet. The exquisite bunch of violets, the pallor, the abbreviated modelling and sudden transitions from white to charcoal black. Above all, the theme of mortality tied to flowering is like the *nature morte* subjects Manet painted in his sickness.
- *Daphne and windpump* [Cat. no. 21] is a pretty picture whose title (exceptional for the series) promises the safe delivery of a classical story. I first saw the painting with others in the series in 1977 when my attempt to resolve a meaning for it foundered in confusion. I wrote, 'Like Primavera and Zephyr a springtime man rushes in from the right scattering flowers and foliage prettily on the white ground. Clutched in his hand – which is stretched out as far as the centre of the canvas – are some paint brushes (so he is an artist); he is proffering them like a bunch of flowers to a nude figure who cowers at furthest possible remove on the other side of the canvas. The pursued one is on her knees in an attitude of fear, crouching forward self-protectively and looking back over her shoulder — an awkward, eloquent pose reminiscent of those figures prostrated in the margins of Carolingian

manuscripts. I see now that I may have inverted the story because the full-cheeked Zephyr bursting into the picture from the right has a woman's breasts; moreover the embowering foliage is associated with Daphne, and with Primavera; in other words, with women. Now that I look again, the small cowering figure with one hand raised in protest and pleading could be a man. The pose of this terrified little figure echoes that of a tiny painter midfield who is crouched anxiously over a canvas on the ground. Zephyr-Daphne-Primavera is huge in the picture and a windmill with clanking sails on the left is almost as large: both of them exert wind and forcefulness. The windmill is one of Boyd's composites, part dragonfly, part bride, and reminiscent of the skeletal bi-plane in the Bert Hinkler works. In this picture it brings a small amount of water into a parched land. Spring's difficult re-birth? An oblique reference to T.S. Eliot's 'The Wasteland'? I can see how creativity – the paint brushes and the anxious painter – might tie in with ideas of water and spring sunshine stimulating the birth and leafing of plants. Daphne was pursued by the sun – Phoebus Apollo? None of these thoughts can be substantiated because the representation keeps mutating, just so many nudges to a wondering mind.²²³

One of the key themes, the woman injecting the rabbit, stemmed from a visit Arthur and Yvonne made to a laboratory at Maudsley Hospital in London, possibly in 1969. 'I went to see this chap, a research scientist who sticks electrodes into rabbits' brains and he finds the pleasure zone of the brain, and every time the rabbit presses the electrode it gets a surge of pleasure, so the more it presses the more shocks it gets and eventually it just goes batty.'²²⁴ The first time they went, there was a cat on the table, opened-up but conscious. It had to be conscious for the experiment, which they were told it would not survive. After watching for a while 'Yvonne had to leave; she couldn't take any more.'²²⁵ Boyd's analogy seems to be art's capacity to produce pleasure by means that may be as synthetic, experimental and outside conventional niceness as scientific experimentation using animals.

The tenor of Boyd's narrative images before 1971 had been humanist re-imaginings from Biblical and other stories and great works of art. Viewers could have recourse to the well-known sources when wondering about meanings. In Canberra in 1971, Boyd was reported as saying that all art was 'essentially illustrative in nature. In his case, the illustration is often of a literary subject, be it his own poetry, Biblical stories or a Hebrew

legend, but it is so personal in expression and has such a range and depth of implication, that one could never preface the word 'illustration' with the pejorative 'mere'.²⁶

"Illustration" would not remotely describe the series of paintings that followed Canberra. I have suggested that the train of events that led Boyd, in 1972, to take as his subject the creative drive itself went back some years. I do not, myself, see the theme simply in terms of self-disclosure. Boyd's friend Tom Rosenthal thought that the artist was inclined to take the world's guilt upon himself. David Chalker told me Boyd used the term 'mercantile'. One aspect of the Caged Painter images is the role the market plays in creativity.

'He had feelings of guilt about making money. His father, whose work he admired, had not made money. At first, Boyd had been the same; then the money started rolling in and with it, a feeling of guilt. He tried to square accounts by giving away his possessions.'²⁷

Yet Boyd did not despise the market.²⁸ In his imagery money is a fertiliser. If we interpret the theme as reflecting Boyd's career, he had found that his most marketable art was the Wimmera landscapes which would sell and sell, and had an audience and an appeal that transcended his more creative output. He deferred to this taste, as he deferred to all the judgments and interpretations of his art. His attitude of accepting (instead of judging) the conditions given to him, laid Boyd open to the charge that he succumbed to market forces — though he could not be accused of sinking his creativity into the marketable strand of his production.

Some of the imagery seems to allude to acrimonious criticism made by Australian artists of the 1960s generation who accused their seniors Drysdale, Nolan and Boyd of hogging the limelight with their repetitive story paintings and throwing a shadow over the younger "abstract" artists.²⁹ Boyd referred to the wider historical context in which that accusation was made: the supposed death of painting in the West. By the later 1960s it was widely held in Western art circles that the reductive tendency in modernism had led painting to a dead end. Hence Boyd's artist is caged and impotent. He paints a tree (brushing the tree itself) [Cat. no. 17] and a shadow [Plates 8,10] (the shadow serving — briefly — as the painted image). Meanwhile, his model leaves the scene [Plate 8], bringing about the end of the subject. As he said, the paintings 'are about coming to a dead end, or thinking you've come to a dead end, and then making use of the fact to rekindle the batteries.'³⁰

There was yet another aspect to how creativity was debated at the time, which certainly bothered Nolan and possibly played a part in how Boyd conceived these paintings. He alluded to it when he summed up: 'The whole series of them is about a painter painting in the landscape, and exclusively an Australian landscape.'³¹ Expatriate Australians of Boyd's generation had to cope with the nationalist idea that they owed their international success to Australia. Their reaction to this favourite theme of journalism was the same as creative women and indigenous artists have when their success is credited to their gender or race. If creativity is to be evaluated by factors outside the field of creativity, its very basis is called into question. In the columns of some 1960s newspapers the terms of the creative fellowships acquired a flavour of bringing them home, as if the university, with antipodean condescension, were repatriating Australia's prodigal sons so that they could renew their creativity.³² Nolan reacted strenuously against this concept, spending most of the period of his fellowship in neighbouring countries, and explaining that Australia would be most clearly seen in the image refracted by its northern neighbours.³³ The idea that the painter was merely a tool for the creative expression of nation, race or gender did not please Boyd either. In 1965, when asked by Hal Missingham, 'what do you want for your art?', he had finally replied that he would like to be free of the "Australian" (national) and "Expressionist" (art movement) labels. He did not deny personal responsibility; what he produced was 'mine, if I can make it that way', 'but ... I'd like it to be a much more universal sort of thing' and 'much less typed ... just ... good painting rather than ... something that comes from somewhere.'³⁴

* * * *

Narritjin Maymuru's fellowship followed seven years later, in August 1978. Nearly seven years had intervened between Nolan's fellowship and Boyd's. The interval was sufficient for changes to take place that affected the way the three artists thought about their work. The trajectory of Boyd's and Nolan's careers followed a path between Australia and the art centres of the West. In 1965 Nolan bore the brunt of a backlash by young artists against the achievements of the postwar expatriates. Boyd, in 1972-73, addressed the issues that appeared to threaten the creativity of the

generation after that. For Narritjin the context was different again. He came to Canberra on the eve of a *Renaissance* in Australian Aboriginal art (a revolution that continues). By and large, Nolan and Boyd had the same career: born three years apart, they lived and worked in Melbourne where they had an early success. Moving to London in the 1950s they had a similar international success. They were friends. Narritjin, on the other hand, worked in the far north of Australia, outside the community of Western art, in an enclave of art production that was much better known outside Australia than inside. Canberra meant, for Boyd and Nolan, the inspired funding of research and education that had been Robert Menzies' greatest achievement during his Prime Ministership. Canberra, to Narritjin, was the political ground of a diplomatic effort to bring about a change in his peoples' status.

Narritjin Maymuru: "Artistfella"

When Narritjin Maymuru, together with his son Banapana, was awarded a Creative Arts Fellowship at the Australian National University in 1978, it was the culmination of a lifetime's achievement as an artist. It also provided another opportunity for him to engage with the wider Australian community in persuading them of the value of the Yolngu way of life to ensure that their rights were recognised. This essay provides a brief overview of Narritjin's life and then enters into one of his paintings as a way of introducing readers to the ways in which meaning is created through his paintings and the complex representational processes involved.

Encountering others

Narritjin was born in Yolngu country to the north of Blue Mud Bay around the time of the First World War. Eastern Arnhem Land remained beyond the colonial frontier for more than another decade. Occasional clashes took place on the periphery, a few visitors came from outside, but on the whole Yolngu remained in reasonable control of their own world. The first European to stay for any length of time on the east Arnhem Land coast was Fred Gray, who set up a camp to collect and process trepang on Caledon Bay in 1932. He had previously been a bodyguard to the Malay captain of the pearling fleet at Broome, but always had the

demeanour of a quietly spoken English gentleman. Before leaving Darwin in his boat, Fred had been warned of the warlike nature of the Yolngu and in particular of the lethal nature of their iron bladed shovel nosed spears. Fred Gray told me that early on in his stay at Caledon Bay he heard the clink of metal behind him and his blood ran cold. Turning around anticipating warriors with shovel nosed spears, he instead saw Narritjin cleaning the dishes that they had just eaten from. While the story itself may have been modified to make it into a parable, it says much about Narritjin's willingness to engage with visitors to his land from the very beginning. It may have been chance and his own curiosity that set him out on this path, but Yolngu also have another explanation. Wonggu, the great leader of the Djapu clan who for long resisted the occupation of his land by outsiders, recognised Narritjin's ability and encouraged him to act almost as a liaison officer with the newcomers.

In Fred Gray's words, Narritjin immediately 'put himself on' and for many years worked in turn for him or for the missionaries who subsequently established the settlement of Yirrkala on what became the Gove peninsula. Narritjin led an exciting life in these early years of European colonisation. He spent some time in Darwin as a witness in the trial of the Yolngu who were convicted of killing the crew of a Japanese fishing lugger in Caledon Bay in 1932.¹ Fred Gray remembers walking the streets of Darwin with him, and in particular that Narritjin took every opportunity to teach him to speak the Yolngu language. During the war he worked for the mission and on one occasion hitched a ride on a naval patrol vessel the Patricia Cam from Elcho Island back to Yirrkala.² The boat was sunk by Japanese bombers off the Wessel Islands in January 1943. Narritjin went down with the boat but managed to free himself and played a major role in rescuing the survivors. Sadly, the Reverend Leonard Kentish was taken away in a Japanese sea plane and beheaded on Dobu in the Aru Islands. A report on the sinking notes that at the time of the bombing Kentish was being taught to speak Yolngu by Narritjin. Teaching other people about the Yolngu way of life and Yolngu culture was to be one of the continuing themes of Narritjin's life.

Becoming an artist

After the war Narritjin's career as an artist developed both within Yolngu society as a ceremonial leader, and outside as a performer, bark painter and sculptor. The earliest known paintings of his were collected

by the anthropologist Ronald Berndt in 1946. He was one of the main artists who worked for Charles Mountford in 1948 and 1952. These early works are now nearly all in national collections. He made very few paintings for sale from the mid 1950s until 1960. According to the missionary Doug Tuffin, Narritjin was dissatisfied with the returns from bark painting and worked at other jobs on the mission. As a consequence he did not form part of the group of artists led by Mawalan Marika and Mungurrawuy Yunupingu who, in the late 1950s, produced the superb series of large bark paintings commissioned by Tony Tuckson and Stuart Scougall for the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Indeed Tuffin in this case reports that Narritjin at the time disapproved of the large scale of the paintings, arguing that they were out of proportion with the human body that had previously been the measure for the size of sacred paintings. However by the time of Tuckson's last visit Narritjin had begun painting again and he too began to produce works of considerable size.

The early 1960s was the time when Yolngu art works began to have an impact on the outside world, and Narritjin himself became fully engaged in the process. The Reverend Edgar Wells built a new church at Yirrkala in 1962, and on Narritjin's suggestion two panels representing the sacred paintings of the Yolngu clans from the region were made to stand on either side of the altar.³ Yolngu at this time had also become aware of the threat to their land from mining exploration. Yirrkala was situated at the heart of one of the world's great bauxite deposits. Following a visit in 1963 from two labour Members of Parliament, Kim Beazley senior and Gordon Bryant, two copies of a petition mounted on separate sheets of painted bark were sent by Yolngu to the Commonwealth Parliament. The designs on the final petition were painted by Narritjin. In that same year Narritjin led a group of Yolngu dancers on a tour of Melbourne and Sydney organised by the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. It was on this visit that Narritjin went to the Art Gallery of New South Wales and saw the Yolngu paintings exhibited in an institution devoted to art. The experience had a great impact on him since it revealed the high value that was given to art by Europeans, and he felt a sense of achievement from the fact that Yolngu art works were exhibited in the same institution. There has been much controversy as to whether Indigenous artists have a similar concept of art to European artists. As far as Yolngu artists are concerned there is no evidence that this has ever been a problem.

From the 1960s until his death in 1982 Narritjin saw himself as a practicing artist. The award of a Creative Arts Fellowship at the

Australian National University in 1978 jointly with his son Banapana was one of the highlights of his career.⁴ He referred to himself as an ‘artistfella’, a word that conveys to me the idea of a person whose life revolved around his art. He was always at work, and one particular image of him is indelibly fixed in my mind. Late at night, when others had gone to sleep, Narritjin would be there on his concrete veranda, sitting on a blanket, bent over a sheet of bark, resting on one elbow, systematically infilling a painting with cross hatching, eyes straining in the glow of a bare light-bulb suspended above his head.

Into the paintings

Narritjin was deeply schooled in the traditions of Yolngu art but, as with his contemporaries, his paintings developed in interaction with the growing market for Aboriginal art. He painted to earn money and gain recognition for his work, but he also painted as a means of teaching people about Yolngu beliefs and persuading them of the value of his way of life. Yolngu art is an expressive medium and a means of knowing about the world that can be used for many different purposes, from transporting the souls of the dead, to asserting the rights of a clan, to teaching about history, to marking any special event. At the centre of Yolngu art is the creation of meaning. Narritjin developed his art in two different but complementary directions, representing Yolngu myth and ceremony in figurative narrative paintings and condensing meanings into highly complex dense imagery, sometimes apparently entirely geometric in form. The processes of abstraction can be seen working their way across his entire *oeuvre* rather than being expressed in a particular individual painting.

Narritjin was one of the pioneers of the episodic genre of Yolngu paintings in which the details of a myth were developed in figurative form with a series of episodes of the myth being integrated into the structure of the paintings as a whole. Precursors of these paintings can be seen in some of the earliest paintings he produced for Ronald Berndt. While Yolngu sacred paintings — paintings that are made on the bodies of initiates — are predominantly geometric in form, they are in fact condensed forms of narratives that are sung in accompanying song cycles, danced out in ceremonial performances and experienced through following ancestral journeys while travelling through the landscape that they created. The narrative paintings combine elements of the sacred

paintings with a figurative tradition of Yolngu art — used sparingly in the sacred paintings but which predominated in the more secular art of the bark huts — in order to produce narrative accounts of the journeys of ancestral beings, mythological events and associated ceremonial performances.⁵

In Narritjin's case the narrative paintings reached their most developed form in representing a series of semi-sacred stories, moral tales centred on Djet the sea eagle and Bamabama, a trickster spirit being. The central theme of his 1967 painting *Djet, the Sea Eagle at Ngärri in Baniyala* [Plate 26, and illus. this page] is the story of the transformation of a greedy boy into a sea eagle. The boy Djet was camping at Ngärriwuy on Blue Mud Bay with his father and grandfather. While the latter prepared for a fishing trip, Djet collected sandcrabs and, using them as bait, caught some fish for himself. He cooked the fish and began to eat them. His father asked for a share but the boy refused to give any up and consumed the lot. The men then went out to sea in their canoe to the reefs off shore and came back with a catch of parrotfish (*yambirrku*). The boy asked for his share, but to teach him a lesson they refused to give him any. The boy then began to cry and lose his temper. He became apoplectic with rage. He jumped up and down and his skin began to feel itchy. He scratched his skin, and where he scratched feathers grew. Gradually he transformed into the form of a bird. His father and maternal grandfather too changed into birds in order to join him, and when his mother and grandmother returned they too changed, becoming an emu and a crow respectively.

The painting *Djet at Ngärri* can be read as a representation of the events that took place. The bottom panel shows the men preparing to go out fishing. We can see a spear thrower and fish-spear, paddles and the boat. The man on the left is making a length of rope from tree bark. In the panel above to the left the women are shown with their dilly bag and digging stick out collecting yams. Other panels include images of fish and sand crabs, a reef heron that the men saw fishing on a rock off shore, different kinds of spears, the emu and crow. The central ellipse represents the fire in which the men cooked the fish and the anvil shapes at either end the smoke that is rising from the fire. The central story of the transformation of Djet into a sea eagle is represented in a vertical sequence on the left of the fire and surmounting all are images of the eagles with their talons extended.

The complexity of the imagery, however, suggests that we have only begun to interpret and appreciate the painting. Although it can be read as

Narritjin Maymuru, *Djet, the Sea Eagle at Ngärri in Baniyala* 1967 (Cat. no. 35)

a linear narrative its structure suggests quite otherwise. The painting is centred around the elliptical image of the fire and different components seem almost to circle around it and recur in different positions. The painting conveys the sense of movement and chaos as the world is turned upside down, as spears are thrown, as boats are tossed about in the waves, as tempers rise and as shapes change. But there is also a stability to the painting. The painting is about a place, Ngärriwuy, where it is possible today to see the casuarina trees on the shore under which the spirit men prepared to go fishing (top panel), the boat is marked by a depression in the dunes and the boy Djet can be seen transformed into a rock on the shore where the reef herons fish to this day. The painting moves between these places.

However the painting also alludes to the connected mythology of the *yingapungapu* sand sculpture and a set of practices associated with Yolngu mortuary rituals. The central ellipse is the shape of the *yingapungapu*. *Yingapungapu* sand sculptures are used in burial ceremonies to contain the pollution associated with death. They are made to contain the temporary shelter in which a dead body is placed or they may be constructed after the burial to perform a series of purificatory rites — smoking the participants and ceremonially washing them so that they can resume ordinary life. The original sand sculpture was made by ancestral women, the Wuradilagu, who interacted with spirit people such as Djet and his parents and grandparents. The Wuradilagu used to bury the remains of the fish that they had eaten in a scooped out elliptical hollow in the sand. When one of their spirit brothers was drowned out at sea, his boat was overwhelmed in the storm, they laid his body out in a sand sculpture of a similar shape. In burial ceremonies the events of the past are acted out in imagery appropriate to death, the fate of the soul and the purification of the living. The storm at sea, for example, provides the context for washing the participants, and cooking the fish they caught in the fire introduces the smoking ceremony.

A multiplicity of sub themes is played out. A key image is that of the daily cleansing of the beach from all signs of activities of the day. The fish remains that are left on the sand are eaten by maggots and scavenging sand crabs. Birds of the foreshore then eat the maggots, and at the end of the cycle the tide comes in and washes the beach clean. To Yolngu these images are signs of renewal but also signify the process of washing away painful memories of the dead. Sorrow abates just as the tide sweeps away the footprints in the sand.

The mythology of the *yingapungapu* provides a different interpretative perspective on the painting. The anvil shapes represent the clouds out at sea, a harbinger of death, a sign of the gathering storm. The boat is on its side, the paddles are floating free, the sand crabs are stretching out their limbs, and the dashed pattern represents the maggots and food debris. It can be seen now that the central figure of the *yingapungapu* accumulates a multiplicity of references: it is the hearth where the fish are cooked, it is the scooped out hollow where the fish remains are placed, it has the shape of the boat that the spirit men used and that was overturned in the storm and it is the shape of the sand sculpture used in burial ceremonies. It has many other meanings too. We can see how, in this painting, Narritjin develops elements of stories in a narrative fashion while simultaneously condensing meanings in particular symbols or representations. His paintings often include a series of visual puns or extremely condensed images which, when unpacked, reveal a series of symbolic interconnections that lead to the metaphysical heart of the Yolngu world view.

The Djet paintings belong to the most public level of Yolngu art. They are illustrations of cautionary tales — instructional yet entertaining. Yet as is the case with all Yolngu art, the sacred is always continuous with the profane, the outside always leads inwards. Many of Narritjin's paintings were variations on the sacred paintings of his Manggalili clan country of Djarrakpi, centred on a lagoon set behind the steep coastal dunes of Cape Shield. The paintings are maps of the mythological topography of the landscape and its origins in the actions of the ancestral beings who made it the spiritual inheritance of the Manggalili clan. The land was created by the *marrngu* (possum) and *malwiya* (emu) ancestors, led by the *gunwak* (koel cuckoo). The structure of the landscape can be represented entirely in geometric form [see Plates 15, 16 and detail Plate 17], but Narritjin usually marked particular places with figurative representations associated with them. The lake is where the *malwiya* scratched about looking for water, the native cashew tree at the head of the lake is where the *gunwak* rested. Yet it is the conceptualisations underlying the geometric elements that generate the diversity of Yolngu art. Narritjin would always stress the importance of the *marwat* — the brush of human hair — that creates the final effect, emphasising the role of the mind in art. The background patterns that lie between the figurative representations are the designs set by the ancestral beings. Each is unique to a place — they are the bones of clan, the centre of its identity. And it is the cross hatched infill, painted as

the final act with the *marwat*, that creates the effect of *bir'yun* (shimmering brilliantly), endowing the paintings with power.

Yolngu art involves a continual dialogue between the expressive and the representational. While guided by an ancestral template that connects it to particular places, the artwork is always relevant to the present moment and provides a surface for reflection. Towards the end of my first long stay at Yirrkala Narritjin produced a beautiful painting of the Marawili sacred object. The designs on it represented the waters of the lake at Djarrakpi. The lake is a source of conception spirits of the Manggalili clan. Times were difficult. The mining town of Nhulunbuy had been established and alcohol was beginning to affect the community. His oldest son had recently died and he was deeply troubled by the direction in which the Yolngu world was going. He spent hours infilling the lake, creating an intricate pattern within the overall effect of the design. The pattern was irregular and black lines, rarely used in cross hatching, intruded at intervals. Looking at the effect he had produced he said: 'you can see in the lake, the good and the bad mixed together, you never can be sure how things will turn out.'

When Narritjin took up his creative art fellowship at the ANU he saw it as an opportunity to teach people about his culture in the political heart of Australia. He loved teaching as he loved painting, whether he was teaching students at the ANU about the significance of his art or teaching his own children and those of related clans about the principles of Yolngu art.

Endnotes

pp. 7-10

Sidney Nolan

- ¹ ANU Council Meeting, 10 July 1964, Minute 8, paper 1266/1964; see also 'Report of a committee set up to make recommendations on the establishment of Fellowships in the Creative Arts, 13 May 1964'; and 'The Australian National University Fellowships in the Creative Arts, Preliminary Information for Enquirers,' memo 1373/1964, August 1964, ANU Archives.
- ² Drysdale letter to Maisie Purves Smith, Friday [21 February 1964] p. iii mentions a lunch with Nugget Coombs who was 'Pursuing my ideal of a Fellowship Grant. Much ground covered.' Maisie Drysdale papers, National Library of Australia.
- ³ Nolan was at lunch with Nugget Coombs at the Reserve Bank on 13 February 1964, and spent time with him at the Adelaide Arts Festival in March; he told his biographer Brian Adams, that 'Dr H.C. Coombs first suggested the [Creative Arts Fellowship] position,' Brian Adams, *Sidney Nolan: Such is Life* (Melbourne: Century Hutchinson Australia, 1987) p. 177.
- ⁴ Patrick White letter to Sidney Nolan, 14 May 1964, from Dogwoods, 'It is wonderful to think you will both be coming out here [next year]. I hope you will feel you can come to see us in the beginning until you have put your own house in order'; Patrick White letter to Ben Huebsch, 12 June 1964, from Dogwoods, 'I hear quite often from the Nolans, who are returning next year as the result of an idea I gave him for a new series of paintings', in David Marr (ed), *Patrick White letters* (Sydney: Random House Australia) pp. 259, 261. One of the ideas White had given Nolan was contained in a poem, or rather lyric for a song, "To Watch the River". Another was for a series of paintings of a man falling into a volcano. These may have fed into *River Bend*.
- ⁵ See letters Manning Clark (London) to Professor Partridge, 11 August 1964; Donne Sherwin (ANU Chancelry) to Vice-Chancellor Sir Leonard Huxley (in London), 18 August 1964; Leonard Huxley letter of invitation to Nolan, 8 November 1964; Nolan's cable of acceptance, 9 December 1964; etc; in Sidney Nolan file, 3087 2005/25 100; and statement about Nolan's fellowship, ANU, [March 1965], 2000/15 Box 26, 5/65/261, ANU Archives.
- ⁶ Nolan told Elwyn Lynn in 1971 that he had 'never painted a stroke in Australia since leaving there in 1953', Notebook inscribed Nolan 1, p. 25, Elwyn Lynn papers, Art Gallery of NSW Library Archive.
- ⁷ ANU Press Release, 'Exhibition of Paintings of Antarctica by Sidney Nolan, R.G. Menzies Library, 17–26 June 1965'; review by Donald Brook, *Canberra Times*, 17 June 1965. *River Bend* had its first exhibition at David Jones' Art Gallery, Sydney, 5–22 May 1965. The Kelly paintings that immediately preceded it were shown in New York in January 1965 and in London in May 1965.
- ⁸ An exhibition of Nolan's 'Asian and Promethean' sketches, was held at the R.G. Menzies Library from 27 September 1967, in association with Musica Viva's spring festival, *Canberra Times* 28 September 1967, pp. 1, 27; correspondence between Nolan and the ANU about the exhibition, July and August 1967, in Sidney Nolan file, 3087 2005/25, ANU Archives.
- ⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald* 9 March 1965 p. 8. Interviewed the day he arrived back in Australia, Nolan said he had spent the previous year painting 'landscapes of the Antarctic, and the Wimmera district of Victoria' and the latter would be shown at David Jones' Art Gallery in May 1965.
- ¹⁰ Nolan to Tucker, posted 10 Dec 1964, Tucker to Nolan, 16 December 1964, in Patrick McCaughey (ed) *Bert & Ned: The Correspondence of Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2006) p. 235.
- ¹¹ *The Listener* (London) 13 November 1969.
- ¹² Nolan letter to Sunday, n.d. [c1945 or 1946], on back of a gouache painting c. 8 x 10 inches. (seen by author in the Reed house; probably now in Reed papers, State Library of Victoria).
- ¹³ Elwyn Lynn and Sidney Nolan, *Sidney Nolan — Australia* (Sydney and London: Bay Books, 1979) p. 130.
- ¹⁴ Cynthia Nolan's journal for 1965 published as *A Sight of China* (Macmillan & Co, 1969), incorporated into *Outback and Beyond* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1994) p. 371.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 328.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 333.
- ¹⁷ *The Times* (London), article quoted in 'Me a

- Commercialist? What bosh says Mr Nolan', *Sunday Mirror* (Sydney), 1 March 1964.
- ¹⁸ *Sun-Herald* (Sydney) 14 March 1965, p. 94.
- ¹⁹ Brian Adams (1987) *op.cit.*, pp. 156-57.
- ²⁰ Sidney Nolan, interview with Hazel de Berg, Sydney, 11 December 1962, National Library of Australia.
- ²¹ Cynthia Nolan (1994), *op.cit.*, p. 332.
- ²² Sidney Nolan interview with Elwyn Lynn, 2 August 1971, *op.cit.* p. 2; for Uncle Bill in 1965 see Cynthia Nolan (1994) *op.cit.*, p. 331.
- ²³ Elwyn Lynn interview 4 August 1971, *op.cit.* p.29.
- ²⁴ Elwyn Lynn interview 2 August 1971 *op.cit.* p. 2.
- ²⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 August 1966; 23 August 1966 p. 2.
- ²⁶ Brian Adams (1987), *op.cit.*, p. 185, quoting from Cynthia Nolan's notebooks.
- ²⁷ Robert Melville, 'The Poetry of Painting', in exhibition catalogue, *Sidney Nolan*, Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York, January 1965; republished in exhibition catalogue, *Sidney Nolan Recent Work*, Marlborough Fine Art Ltd, London, May 1965.
- ²⁸ Cynthia Nolan (1994), *op.cit.*, p. 332.
- ²⁹ Drysdale letter to Maisie Purves-Smith, from Narrandera, on the way to Adelaide, [3 March 1964], pp. ii, iii. Maisie Drysdale papers, National Library of Australia.
- ³⁰ 'Painting a Myth', *The Listener* (BBC, London) 8 October 1964 p. 551.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² Charles Spencer, 'Speaking with Sidney Nolan: the Australian heroic dream', *Studio*, (London), November 1964, pp. 204-208.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- Arthur Boyd
- ¹ Yvonne Boyd recalls that Boyd had been approached once or twice before about an ANU fellowship. 'Kim Bonython (one of Arthur's agents) phoned to the ship when we were on our way home, nearly home. Arthur was not in the frame of mind; he was returning from seven or eight months in Australia [1968] and was geared for the U.K. He wasn't prepared to turn around.'
- ² Letter from the ANU dated 6 May 1970, Boyd's reply dated 14 May 1970: ANU Archives, 4.2.4.2 2005/25 94. The exhibition *Arthur Boyd's Australia* was on display at the NGV 2 April — 4 May 1970.
- ³ Tom Rosenthal, quoted in Janet McKenzie, *Arthur Boyd: Art and Life* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000) p. 158.
- ⁴ Boyd interviewed by Janet McKenzie in the painting store of the National Gallery of Australia, June 1993, transcripts NGA Library.
- ⁵ Peter Smark. 'A recharge for Boyd's batteries', from an interview in London, *Sunday Australian* 14 March 1971, p. 17.
- ⁶ Typed list, London, dated 1 August 1971, listing the contents of a container load of works of art and materials for painting: ANU Archives 4.2.4.2 2005/25 94.
- ⁷ DDK Hodgkin's note for file, 21 September 1971, in ANU Archives 4.2.4.2 2005/25 94. Boyd's studio for most of his time in Canberra was (as was his habit) the largest room in the family home. In Garran this was the living room on the ground floor (Yvonne Boyd to author, May 2007).
- ⁸ 'Arthur Boyd Works on Show', *ANU Reporter* (Canberra), vol.2, no.17, 22 Oct 1971.
- ⁹ Rosalie Gascoigne, letter to her son Martin, late October 1971, in Mary Eagle (Ed.) *From the Studio of Rosalie Gascoigne* (Canberra: Drill Hall Gallery, Australian National University, 2000) p. 32.
- ¹⁰ 'His aim, while here, is to see a lot of the countryside and to do several paintings — he would expect to complete between 20 and 40 paintings during the term of his fellowship.' DDK Hodgkin's note for file, 21 September 1971, *op. cit.*
- ¹¹ Yvonne Boyd to author, May 2007.
- ¹² Boyd found the Canberra light foreign. When he returned to New South Wales in 1974, to live beside the Shoalhaven River and summarize that region of river, abrupt cliffs and trench-like gorges in a grid of horizontals and verticals, he experienced that landscape, too, as a 'foreign' country: 'It's a foreign place to me — as foreign as any place in the world except Victoria'. *Bulletin* (Sydney), 31 July 1976.
- ¹³ Boyd, quoted in *The Times* (London), 19 February 1977, p. 14.
- ¹⁴ There were more paintings of this small size; these two I have seen and thought about.

- ¹⁵ Yvonne Boyd to author, May 2007. Robin Boyd died on 16 October 1971. One of the Boyds' close friends, the philosopher Peter Herbst, was on the ANU staff. In Melbourne in the 1940s, Peter had been a partner in the Murrumbidgee pottery with Boyd and John Perceval: it had been his job to tote around a suitcase of pottery for sale to shops in Melbourne. Herbst was a member of the ANU committee that recommended artists for the fellowship and Boyd's decision to accept the offer of a fellowship seems to have depended on encouragement from him. The Herbsts and Boyds saw a lot of each other during the five months of the fellowship, giving the Boyds a much needed sense of social continuity. Valerie Herbst joined one of the painting excursions: 'We went out by car into the country near Canberra, and Yvonne and I stripped off to give Arthur something to paint.' (Valerie Herbst in conversation with author, May 2007). Other Canberra friends included Clare and Jack Golson, and Dymphna and Manning Clark. The Boyds spent 'a weekend' with Frank McDonald at Bundanon between Christmas and New Year 1971, when Boyd painted a canvas in the open air and his oil paints melted in the sun; and they visited the Brissenden and Clark families at their beach houses on the coast for some weekends, when Boyd produced several paintings; however the landscape Boyd painted most was within an hour's drive of Garran.
- ¹⁶ Boyd interviewed by Rosemary Munday in London, published in *National Times* 9-14 October 1972, p. 11.
- ¹⁷ Boyd interviewed by Janet McKenzie, June 1993, *op.cit.*
- ¹⁸ 'When he paints it's like a potter getting his hands into the clay. He has a direct physical relationship with the raw material. He mixes his own colours and they seem to have come out of the earth itself...we watch Boyd complete a five metre by four metre oil painting in one day.' *Age* television guide, in reference to an ABC/BBC film about Arthur Boyd, shown on Sunday evening, 16 March 1978.
- ¹⁹ Boyd interviewed by Janet McKenzie, June 1993, *op.cit.*
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ Ursula Hoff, *The Art of Arthur Boyd* (Andre Deutsch: London, 1986) Part III, 1971-1983, pp. 65-66.
- ²² *Sydney Morning Herald* 13 February 1977.
- ²³ Notes made during and after visiting the exhibition *Arthur Boyd Paintings 1972 & 1973*, University Art Gallery, University of Melbourne, July 1977.
- ²⁴ Boyd, quoted by Grazia Gunn, *Arthur Boyd: Seven Persistent Images* (Canberra: Australian National Gallery, 1985) p. 64.
- ²⁵ Yvonne Boyd told the author that they met the two scientists through their Suffolk landlady, Mrs Ahearn, (which gives an earliest date of 1969). They visited the laboratory twice; the first time a cat was being tested; subsequently one of the scientists wrote a book about the pleasure zones. The quotation is from Arthur Boyd interviewed by Janet McKenzie, June 1993, *op.cit.* Maudsley Hospital, a psychiatric hospital in Middlesex, London, was founded with money donated in 1907 by the Melbourne doctor, Sir Henry Maudsley.
- ²⁶ *ANU Reporter*, vol.2 no.17, 22 Oct 1971.
- ²⁷ David Chalker to the author, May 2007: he worked closely with the artist after 1981.
- ²⁸ Boyd interviewed by Janet McKenzie, June 1993, *op.cit.*
- ²⁹ For example, in London in 1961 at the opening of the Whitechapel Exhibition of Australian contemporary art, 'inhibitions loosened, until some of the Australian artists began making pointed remarks about Nolan's successes and he found himself facing some unpleasant attacks on himself and those close to him [Boyd]. He was made to feel in no uncertain terms that he was fooling himself to imagine he had been carrying the flag for the past few years, with one drunken painter pointing out that all he had achieved during that time was to muddy the waters, blocking the public's acceptance of real Australian artists who had not compromised their integrity...' Brian Adams, *Sidney Nolan: Such is Life* (1987) p. 152.
- ³⁰ Boyd interviewed by Janet McKenzie, June 1993, *op.cit.* Brian Adams, *op.cit.*, p. 152, gives an amusing instance of an argument used by a

younger painter: 'Whiteley said he despised Nolan's picture plane. This had nothing to do with misplaced chauvinism or opinions about the uniqueness of Australian art. Flatness of the picture plane was the theory behind the success of contemporary New York painters and extended back through the early years of the modern movement... All painters in the twentieth century were supposed to have a flat picture plane.'

³¹ Boyd interviewed by Janet McKenzie, June 1993, *op.cit.*

³² Sir Leonard Huxley's press release had stated fairly that the fellowships had been established 'to stimulate the output of creative work in Australia'. This became twisted into, for example, 'The offer of a Fellowship by the ANU is an imaginative act which may effect "a reconciliation" between Nolan and Australia, and, more important, may trigger off a new burst of creativity in his painting which some critics believe has suffered by his long separation from his native country.' (*Canberra Times* 23 December 1964, p. 2). The concept that the expatriate artists took their creative energy from Australia was John Olsen's, who had argued that Nolan's Leda and the Swan series of paintings demonstrated the danger of artists losing their roots in the country which gave them inspiration. Nolan at his best was 'the greatest lyric painter the country has ever produced' but this quality would be lost unless he returned to the source of his inspiration: John Olsen, writing for the Sydney *Sunday Mirror*, quoted by Brian Adams (1987) *op.cit.* p. 154. Patrick White wrote to a friend, 12 June 1964, 'I hear quite often from the Nolans, who are returning next year... Expect the Ns will hate Australia and the Australians are waiting to back them good and hard as compatriots who went away and became a success.'

³³ Cynthia Nolan *Outback and Beyond* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1994), incorporating her journal from 1965 published as *A Sight of China* (Macmillan & Co, 1969), p. 333, where she quotes Sidney Nolan 'we'll go and look at China; from there perhaps we'll see what sort of a country Australia really is'.

³⁴ Hal Missingham interview with Arthur Boyd, London, 22 September 1965 (National Library of Australia).

Narritjin Maymuru

¹ A summary of Narritjin's life is contained in Howard Morphy, Pip Deveson and Katie Hayne's *The Art of Narritjin Maymuru*, CD Rom (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2005). The best account of the Caledon bay killings and their aftermath is Ted Egan's *A Justice All Of Their Own* (Melbourne University Press, 1996).

² For an account of this episode read Jeremy Long: Narratjin: Sinking of the Patricia Cam, *Aboriginal History*, (Canberra) vol.16, 1992.

³ See Anne Wells, *This is Their Dreaming*, (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1971)

⁴ The fullest account of Narritjin's fellowship is Ian Dunlop's film *Narritjin in Canberra*, (Film Australia, 1981).

⁵ For a detailed account of Yolngu art see Howard Morphy, *Ancestral Connections: Art and an Aboriginal System of Knowledge* (Chicago, 1991).

Catalogue list

Sidney Nolan

- 1 *Riverbend* 1964-65
oil on composition board
nine panels, each 153 x 122 cm
Australian National University
[Plates 1 - 5]
- 2 *Kelly and Sergeant Kennedy* 14 March 1945
ripolin enamel on composition board
63.6 x 76.4 cm
Nolan Gallery, Canberra
- 3 *Kelly and Scanlon* 1945
ripolin enamel on composition board
63.6 x 76.1 cm
Nolan Gallery, Canberra
- 4 *Kelly in bush* 1945
ripolin enamel on composition board
63.6 x 76.1 cm
Nolan Gallery, Canberra
- 5 *Burke and Wills expedition* 1948
ripolin enamel on composition board
91.4 x 122.3 cm
Nolan Gallery, Canberra
- 6 *Central Australia* 1950
ripolin enamel on composition board
91.4 x 122.3 cm
Nolan Gallery, Canberra
- 7 *Carcass* 1953
ripolin enamel on composition board
91.9 x 121.8 cm
Nolan Gallery, Canberra
- 8 *Burke and Wills at the Gulf* 1961
synthetic polymer paint on composition board
122.2 x 152.6 cm
Presented for Claire Pitbaldo by Sunday Reed
1972
National Gallery of Victoria

Arthur Boyd

- 9 *Paintings in the studio: 'Figure supporting back legs' and 'Interior with black rabbit'* 1973
oil on canvas
316.3 x 435.7 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.188
[Plate 14]
- 10 *Figure supporting back legs* 1973
oil on canvas
114.0 x 109.0 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.158
- 11 *Interior with black rabbit* 1973
oil on canvas
151.5 x 122.0 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.120
[Plate 7]
- 12 *Woman injecting a rabbit* 1973
oil on canvas
152.0 x 122.0 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.117
[Plate 6]
- 13 *Artist in a cave and shoes and model's leg* 1973
oil on canvas
114.5 x 109.0 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.150
- 14 *Kneeling figure with black can* 1973
oil on canvas
152.0 x 122.0 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.127
- 15 *Kneeling figure with canvas and black can* 1973
oil on canvas
114.3 x 109.5 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.153
[Plate 11]

16 *Chained figure and bent tree* 1973
oil on canvas
152.4 x 122.0 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.116

17 *Figure painting a shadow* 1973
oil on canvas
114.3 x 109.0 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.157
[Plate 8]

18 *Figure painting a tree* 1973
oil on canvas
114.3 x 109.0 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.148

19 *Figure resting* 1973
oil on canvas
152.0 x 122.4 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.130
[Plate 12]

20 *Caged figure with dogs* 1973
oil on canvas
152.4 x 122.2 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.119

21 *Daphne and windpump* 1973
oil on canvas 152.5 x 122.0 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.112

22 *Caged figure with shadow* 1973
oil on canvas
152.0 x 121.6 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.133
[Plate 10]

23 *Figure with red dog* 1972
oil on canvas
91.4 x 99.1 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.161
[Plate 13]

24 *Sketch of dam near Canberra, evening* 1971-72
oil on canvas
90.8 x 98.0 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.165

25 *Running figure held by shadow* 1973
oil on canvas
114.3 x 109 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.154
[Plate 9]

26 *Rocky landscape with two figures* 1973
oil on canvas
152.4 x 121.8 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.111

27 *Riverbank [Shoalhaven]* 1971
oil on canvas
58.2 x 86.0 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.164

28 *Pregnant woman in a starry landscape with artist*
1969-70
oil on canvas
182.5 x 175.0 cm
The Arthur Boyd Gift 1975
National Gallery of Australia 75.3.144

Narritjin Maymuru

29 *Manggalili Clan design* 1948
natural pigments on bark
100 x 46 cm
National Museum of Australia NM 1985.67.91
[Plate 15]

30 *Fight between Crocodile men and stingray men*
natural pigments on bark
95 x 63 cm
National Museum of Australia
NM 1985.118.11 (Ex collection Karel Kupka.)
[Plate 18]

- 31 *Creation Stories of the Mangalili Clan* c.1965
natural pigments on bark
224 x 77.4 cm
National Museum of Australia NM 1985.242.1
[Plate 25]
- 32 *Crabs and Guluwitpitj Birds* 1965
natural pigments on bark
63 x 35.6 cm
National Museum of Australia NM 1985.259.414
[Plate 20]
- 33 *Milky Way* 1966
natural pigments on bark
120 x 65.5 cm
National Museum of Australia NM 1985.259.82
- 34 *Guvak, Marawili Tree, with Possums and Cicadas* 1966
natural pigments on bark
104 x 52 cm
National Museum of Australia NM 1985.259.410
- 35 *Djet, the Sea Eagle, at Ngarri in Baniyala* 1967
natural pigments on bark
151 x 55 cm
National Museum of Australia NM 1985.132.74
[Plate 26]
- 36 *The Journey of the Guvak* 1967
natural pigments on bark
57.5 x 110 cm
National Museum of Australia NM 1985.259.393
- 37 *Wurrathithi* c.1970
natural pigments on carved wood
113 x 10 x 8 cm
National Museum of Australia NM 1985.259.419
Mourning post made by Narritjin and used in his brother Nanyin's mourning ceremony
- 38 *The three digging sticks* 1971
77 x 36 cm
natural pigments on bark
Private collection
- 39 *The story of Wurudidi, the Spirit Woman* 1970s
natural pigments on bark
114.5 x 43 cm
National Museum of Australia NM 1991.24.4622
[Plate 23]
- 40 *Sea monster, Fish trap* 1972
natural pigments on bark
77.5 x 43 cm
Collection Howard Morphy [HM AO 478]
[Plate 22]
- 41 *Guvak, Possum and Emus at Djarraḱpi* 1974
natural pigments on bark
104 x 69 cm
National Museum of Australia NM 1985.258.12
- 42 *The hunted Emus* 1976
natural pigments on bark
106.5 x 38.5 cm
ANU Art Collection [ANU 1048]
- 43 *The Marawili: the Djarraḱpi landscape* 1976
natural pigments on bark
144 x 52 cm
Collection Howard Morphy [HM AO 468]
[Plate 16 & 17]
- 44 *Djarraḱpi: the Wurrathithi* 1976
natural pigments on bark
115 x 66.5 cm
Private Collection
- 45 *Dukurrurru painting* 1978
natural pigments on bark
145.5 x 66.5 cm
National Museum of Australia NM 1985.294.1
- 46 *The Tree of Life*
natural pigments on bark
163.3 x 53 cm
National Museum of Australia NM 1991.24.4625
[Plate 24]
- 47 *A Journey from Groote Eylandt to Yirrkala*
natural pigments on bark
106 x 54.5 cm
National Museum of Australia NM 1985.259.390
- 48 *The Giant Sea Creature* c.1980
natural pigments on bark
147 x 66 cm
National Museum of Australia NM 1991.24.4624
[Plate 19]

Plate 1 (loose insert) Sidney Nolan, *Riverbend* 1964–65 (Cat. no. 1)

Plate 2 (opposite) detail, *Riverbend*, from panel 1

Plate 3 (following pages) detail, *Riverbend*, from panel 7

Plate 4 (following pages) detail, *Riverbend*, from panel 4

Plate 5 (following pages) detail, *Riverbend*, from panel 3

Plate 6 Arthur Boyd, *Woman injecting a rabbit* 1973 (Cat. no. 12)

Plate 7 Arthur Boyd, *Interior with black rabbit* 1973 (Cat. no. 11)

Plate 8 Arthur Boyd, *Figure painting a shadow* 1973 (Cat. no. 17)

Plate 9 Arthur Boyd, *Running figure held by shadow* 1973 (Cat. no. 25)

Plate 10 Arthur Boyd, *Caged figure with shadow* 1973 (Cat. no. 22)

Plate 11 Arthur Boyd, *Kneeling figure with canvas and black can* 1973 (Cat. no. 15)

Plate 12 Arthur Boyd, *Figure resting* 1973 (Cat. no. 19)

Plate 13 Arthur Boyd, *Figure with red dog* 1972 (Cat. no. 23)

Plate 14 Arthur Boyd, *Paintings in the studio: 'Figure supporting back legs' and 'Interior with black rabbit'* 1973-74 (Cat. no. 9)

Plate 15 Narritjin Maymuru, *Manggalili Clan design* 1948 (Cat. no. 29)

Plate 16 Narritjin Maymuru, *The Marawili: the Djarrakpi landscape* 1976
(Cat. no 43)
overleaf: **Plate 17** detail of above

Plate 18 Narritjin Maymuru, *Fight between Crocodile men and stingray men* (Cat. no. 30)

Plate 19 Narritjin Maymuru, *The Giant Sea Creature* c1980 (Cat. no. 48)

Plate 20 Narritjin Maymuru, *Crabs and Guluwitjipitj Birds* 1965 (Cat. no. 32)

Plate 21 Narritjin Maymuru, *Gurwak, Possum and Emus at Djarrakpi* 1974 (Cat. no. 41)

Plate 22 Narritjin Maymuru, *Sea monster, Fish trap* 1972 (Cat. no. 40)

Plate 23 Narritjin Maymuru, *The story of Wurudidi, the Spirit Woman* 1970s (Cat. no. 39)

Plate 24 Narritjin Maymuru, *The Tree of Life* (Cat. no. 46)

Plate 25 Narritjin Maymuru, *Creation Stories of the Mangalili Clan* c.1965 (Cat. no. 31)

Plate 26 Narritjin Maymuru, *Djet, the Sea Eagle, at Narri in Baniyala* 1967 (Cat. no. 35)

Three Creative Fellows:

Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd & Narritjin Maymuru

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