CHANGING THE ART CULTURE OF NEWCASTLE:
The contribution of the Low Show Group of artists

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research, the greater part of which was completed subsequent to admission of candidature for the degree.
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ABSTRACT

Beginning in 1961, the Low Show Group was an active collective of women artists, exhibiting in Newcastle. The group members were Norma Allen, Mary Beeston, Betty Cutcher (Beadle), Elizabeth Martin, Lillian Sutherland and Rae Richards. Madeleine Scott Jones and Lovoni Webb also exhibited in later Low Show Group exhibitions. These artists continued to work independently and Richards is still making and exhibiting art.

This study examines the context in which the group was formed and how this impacted on their decision to form a collective. Their contribution to art and craft, art education and the cultural life of Newcastle is documented through their exhibitions and careers. The theories of Howard Becker regarding art as a collective action are used as a framework to examine the success of the Low Show Group. Through a discussion of shared and individual careers as practitioners, their community service and their role as teachers, their influence is shown on the artistic practices of their students and colleagues and on the art world of their time.

Newcastle’s background as a convict settlement and an industrial centre had developed a working class culture with a strong masculine influence. While some individual women artists were able to develop a career in fine arts, there was a long battle to establish a city art gallery and in 1961 there were no commercial galleries. The formation of the Low Show Group is shown to be as much about the society in which they lived as their artistic ambitions.

The development of the Newcastle Technical College Art School, and the formation of the Newcastle University College, was identified as the catalyst for the initial flowering of fine art. The experience of the Low Show Group artists first as students of this new art school,
and in some cases as teachers, was the impetus for their desire to develop careers as professional artists.

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INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on a group of women artists from the 1960s onwards, who are known as the Low Show Group, to consider the development of the art world in the provincial city of Newcastle. These artists, together with their students, supportive professionals such as art writers, gallery owners, and gallery directors, joined with the general public to create a lively art world. The influence of this time underpins aspects of the current strength of the fine arts in this city.

Howard Becker, the American sociologist, in his study *Art Worlds* posited that for an artist to produce artworks of a certain standard, and to show and sell their work, the support of a broad network was required. He said:

> the existence of art worlds, as well as the way their existence affects both the production and consumption of art, suggests a sociological approach to the arts. It is not an approach that produces aesthetic judgements. … It produces, instead, an understanding of the complexity of the cooperative networks through which art happens.¹

I intend to use Becker’s idea of the need for a supportive art world, to allow artists to function effectively as the basis of this study to show how the absence of such support was a catalyst for the Low Show Group of women to join together and how the development of such support was pivotal in their success.

Newcastle was the home of the Low Show Group and as Marcus Westbury wrote “as Newcastle sought its post-industrial road map, the idea of culture began to figure prominently

in it.”² Westbury recollects that when growing up in the 1970s, it was a “city engaged in a long, slow debate about what its culture was or should be.”³ To understand the place of the fine arts in this debate of how to establish and grow a cultural community in Newcastle, it is important to examine the history and sociology of the life of Newcastle. This city’s development as a colonial settlement and industrial centre explains the early conservative approaches to the visual arts and the consequent omission of the evaluation of the importance of women’s contribution as visual artists.

There is no exhaustive study of fine arts in Newcastle. Local historians have completed a large number of comprehensive examinations of many aspects of Newcastle, ranging from the convict settlement to the creating of a ‘coalopolis’.⁴ Sociologists have examined the development of the city since its establishment as a convict settlement and concluded how those developments have directed the growth of Newcastle as it is now in the twenty-first century. There is documentation of several male artists who established successful careers, despite their early days in Newcastle. For women artists there has been no such documentation and their stories are absent primarily because they were not considered important. As Kerr points out:

the assertion that women were incapable of producing art of lasting significance has long justified their omission in any but token form in general art histories, surveys and public collections.⁵

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³ Ibid.
⁴ Nancy Cushing, Creating the Coalopolis - Perceptions of Newcastle 1770-1935 (PhD, University of Newcastle NSW, 1995).
Despite their limited national recognition, it is important to document the careers of the Low Show Group women, not only for the contribution they made to the fine art community in Newcastle but also for their production of several works of lasting significance. For as Grace Cochrane in her book, *The Craft Movement in Australia: a history*, said that “in our world what is not documented does not exist.”\(^6\)

The perception of Newcastle as a city lacking in culture, particularly in fine arts, has been ongoing since the early colony period and in some ways this perception still exists, particularly by people outside the region. However, there is an alternate story. The breadth of a study to address this story is too large for a single thesis and so I have chosen to narrow my research to the examination of a small group of women artists who came together to form a collective in 1961. A further compelling reason for this project is to record the story of the Low Show Group of artists and their contribution to fine arts in Newcastle before it is lost, as only two of the women in this study are still alive, and both are in their eighties.

Since 1970 there has been discussion about the need to write a ‘new’ sort of history, from a feminist or a critical political perspective. This research acknowledges the early neglect and disadvantaged situation of women during the settlement and development of Australia, particularly in strongly working class and masculinist environments such as that of Newcastle. Women’s participation in this type of culture is marginalised and frequently absent from history. Kerr acknowledges that:

> women had long proved their professionalism within the patriarchal world, yet longstanding prejudice was stronger than any evidence that they could compete with

and win plaudits over their male colleagues on the same terms – although they regularly did.7

In this kind of environment men’s interests are recorded and emphasized. For example, the nineteenth century and early twentieth century newspapers of Newcastle such as; The Newcastle Chronicle, The Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate, The Newcastle Sun and The Maitland Mercury each had extensive daily coverage of primarily male sports, while other publications relating to the history of Newcastle also contained large sections devoted to male sport. Newcastle has always been considered anecdotally to be a ‘blokes’ town’. These are strongly ‘male’ cultures usually with a corresponding neglect of ‘female’ interests, such as fine art.

Before 1961 some women artists had practiced their art in Newcastle, but they had done so in isolation and in a strongly working class and predominantly masculine culture. The careers of male artists with connections to Newcastle such as Jon Molvig, Thomas Gleghorn and William Rose, along with the better known William Dobell and John Olsen, have been documented 8 yet the history of women artists has not yet received the same attention. There is no study of the Low Show Group except for an unpublished essay on Mary Beeston, by Sonia Celtlan, in 1989, written for a lecture at the Newcastle Region Art Gallery. I began this research with the intention to redress some of this neglect and to contribute to the history of the fine arts in Newcastle. As Kerr points out “by redefining art as an activity within society – an integral part of everyday life, not a rarefied activity separated from it – not only are well-

known images transformed but a quite different range of artists-authors are allowed into the pantheon of the past.”

By using the model of sociologist Howard Becker, who considers art worlds as sites of collective action rather than that of the isolated individual talent, this study reinforces Kerr’s theory of the artists and society. Becker’s work thus provides a theoretical framework of a collective art world as the structure of the thesis for assessing the contribution of the Low Show Group as it can place these artists in a society, which was moving towards a change in attitude, and support for art. Through this the careers of the Low Show Group artists can be read against this interconnected set of relationships.

Becker creates a theoretical model based on his sociological theory, the concept of the art world “with its central focus on the collective, social, and conventional nature of artistic production, distribution and appreciation.” Becker’s theory emphasises similarities rather than distinctions between the artists and those employed in other activities and dispels the romantic image of the individual artist. In this model he confronts and “potentially undermines the romantic ideology of art and artists still dominant in Western societies.”

Larry Gross, in *Art and Artists on the Margins*, said that Howard Becker’s theory is no longer controversial in academic and intellectual circles despite the fact that the “near-worship of artistic genius” was seen in the tens of millions of dollars the auction sales of Vincent Van Gogh and Pablo Picasso produced in the late 1980s. Becker examines the aspects of what he suggests form the collective art world, including conventions, mobilizing resources, distributing art works, aesthetics, aestheticians changes in art worlds and reputation.

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11 Becker, *Art Worlds*. Page xxiv
12 Ibid
This thesis suggests a historical and sociological context rather than an aesthetic analysis of the individual artist’s work, which although valuable, is not within the scope of this thesis and would be valuable research for another study. As Becker states, the principle of his analysis is social organisation, not aesthetic.\textsuperscript{14} He does acknowledge that art worlds produce works and also give them aesthetic value, but treats aesthetic judgements as “characteristic phenomena of collective activity”.\textsuperscript{15}

This thesis although interdisciplinary, still falls within the area of the fine art research.

Becker implies that the art world must be there for the artist to succeed, however the Low Show Group artists created aspects of that world that were not present when they entered the art scene in Newcastle in the 1950s. This study distinguishes between the valuable support they received from each other and other aspects of a supportive art world and those they created for their benefit and of later artists of Newcastle, thus contributing to the growth of fine arts in Newcastle.

This thesis retrieves the history of these Low Show artists, examines their contribution to the cultural life of Newcastle, lists their extensive exhibition history and evaluates their position as agents for change in their contemporary period. The formation of a women’s collective group in a regional city, with these socio-economic conditions and the lack of support for the fine arts that existed in Newcastle, was progressive for this period. It also examines the events and activities of a larger number of people who made it possible for these women to achieve a professional career in the fine arts.

The six original members of the Low Show Group were Norma Allen, Mary Beeston, Betty Cutcher (Beadle), Elizabeth Martin, Lillian Sutherland and Rae Richards. Madeleine Scott

\textsuperscript{14} Becker, \textit{Art Worlds}. Page xxv.
\textsuperscript{15} Becker, \textit{Art Worlds}. Page 39.
Jones became a member of the group and exhibited in the second and subsequent exhibitions. Lovoni Webb, who was also an art student at the same time as the members of the group, exhibited in one of the Low Show exhibitions. These artists were important protagonists in the development of this ‘long, slow debate’ as well as significant contributors to the cultural growth of Newcastle from the period 1950 to the present.

In order to retrieve the history of this group of artists I have sourced material primarily by interviewing those artists still alive, their families, other artists and influential figures of the period.\textsuperscript{16} I have gathered relevant information from gallery archival files, newspapers, exhibition invitations and catalogues, archival records from the local studies section of libraries, council records and theses from the University of Newcastle; RMIT University; University of Sydney and the University of Technology Sydney.

Chapter 1 examines how this ‘cultural desert’ was a function of the particular development of Newcastle from its early settlement. Strongly working class and with a predominantly masculine culture it provided little support for artists, particularly women. This chapter briefly traces the development of this ‘man’s town’ from its early settlement and describes the situation of the few female artists prior to the formation of the Low Show Group.

Chapter 2 traces the development of the Newcastle Technical College Art School and the Newcastle University College and examines how it brought new creative and intellectual life to the city. This chapter explains how the women of the Low Show Group met as students

\textsuperscript{16} They all chose an interview where their responses were recorded in writing rather than an audio interview. The notes of the interviews are filed as required in the ethics approval. No H – 406 - 0407. April 2007, University of Newcastle.
and how their experiences influenced the group to further their careers as professional practitioners through the development of a collective.

The four Low Show Group exhibitions are described in Chapter 3, together with comments from the media and the response of the community.

In Chapter 4 the development of each of the Low Show Group artists’ art making practices and how their experiences of travel, landscape and materials shaped their artworks is examined. While there remained a strong thread of emphasis on painting and sculpture, many of these artists explored areas of craft.

The Low Show artists were a spirited group of individuals who frequently exhibited singly or in groups outside the Low Show Exhibitions. Chapter 5 describes their participation in group and solo exhibitions.

Several of the Low Show Group artists were also engaged in teaching as well as practicing as professional artists. In Chapter 6 their contribution to teaching from high school to tertiary level, as well as community teaching is noted. Their involvement in developing new courses and facilities is described, as well as their success as teachers in imparting their knowledge and techniques to the next generation of practitioners.

Chapter 7 establishes that the Low Show Group artists were significant contributors to the changing understanding of the fine arts in this city. They were active in the development of new venues to view art and pioneers in the shift from conservative academic art to new ways of seeing the world. The ideas of modernism inspired their work and gave access to new audiences. Their public art, commissions and charity work enriched the city. Above all their record of exhibitions marks them as singularly important in their time.
What was behind their success? Becker points out that artwork, like all human activity involves the joint activity of people.\textsuperscript{17} Chapter 8 considers the constitution of the collective art world around the Low Show Group with particular emphasis on their patrons, mentors and supporters. Their regional and gender limitations are also examined.

In the conclusion the Low Show Group’s provincialism and legacy is considered. I reaffirm my belief that these women, acknowledging they were not ‘great artists’ were able to overcome the restrictions of a poorly supported art world in Newcastle by coming together to make a significant contribution to the fine art community of the city.

Appendix A lists the Low Show Group artists’ individual curriculum vitae.

Appendix B contains additional biographical information of significant Newcastle artists and the supporters of the Low Show Group.

\textsuperscript{17} Becker, \textit{Art Worlds}. Page 1.
CHAPTER 1

EARLY WOMEN ARTISTS IN NEWCASTLE

While popular opinion may still regard Newcastle as the home of smoke stacks and first class footballers, its role in nurturing creative talent is now being recognised.¹ Many creative individuals and groups have thrived² despite an overall lack of support, particularly in the fine arts. John Olsen and William Dobell were born in Newcastle but like many other creative artists of this period soon left for Sydney. However, some artists stayed and contributed to the growth of Newcastle as a creative centre.³ The Low Show Group played a role in the establishment of fine art culture in this city as well as being the first collective of women artists in this area.

While some women artists had previously practised their art in Newcastle, they had done so in isolation and in a strongly working class, and predominantly masculine, culture. Despite the gradual progress that had been made in the strengthening of a strong fine arts community after 1950, a decade later there was still a void for those artists who wished to show and sell their work in Newcastle. Joan Kerr said:

No
do
ever
denied
d
e
xistent
of
the
creative
woman
but,
whether
1890
or
1990,
she
was
transformed
into
a
footnote
when
her
day
was
past
–
thus
confirming
the
myth
that
her
art
was
essentially
facile
and
did
not
endure.⁴

Examples are comedian John Doyle, Jonathan Biggins, Yahoo Serious, musicians Silverchair, The Screaming Jets, the Castanet Club, and the Tap Dogs.
² Ibid.
³ In 2009 there are over forty private galleries and art dealers and many more galleries in educational institutions.
This chapter considers why working class origins contributed to difficulties for fine artists while encouraging musicians and the theatre. It describes the careers of individual female artists who worked prior to the founding of Newcastle’s Low Show Group and the social conventions and restrictions which governed their lives.

Colonial Women Artists

This thesis is not an exhaustive study of women artists in Newcastle, although this would be a valuable project, as Susanna De Vries, in her book Great Australian Women, wrote: “Male prejudice is evident in Australia’s failure to give significant women the honours they deserve.” This was definitely the case in Newcastle. The historical recognition of only the male population in Newcastle’s accomplishments, in business, sport or even in art, and the failure to acknowledge female achievements, has been consistent with the ‘man’s town’ way of thinking which had developed over the years. Therefore, it is not surprising that there has been a failure to recognise the existence and achievements of the women artists of the area and to record their history. Although this failure to acknowledge women’s achievements was consistent with other towns in Australia, its negative impact, combined with other social problems in Newcastle further disadvantaged an almost non-existent art community.

Documentation of the achievements of female artists from the colonial period in Newcastle is not as accessible as that of their male counterparts. There was the argument that as these women were amateur, not professional artists, their life and work consequently were not as important. This is not accurate as their male counterparts of the time were also amateurs and

their stories do exist. Even the Low Show Group of women artists in the 1950s and 1960s, were not treated as equals of the male artists of the time. In her essay *No-Man’s Land*, Caroline Jordan redefines the term amateur, saying that it is not a derogatory term applied to women artists, but must be understood in the context of nineteenth century Australia.⁶

Without the research by Joan Kerr through her editing of the publication in 1995 of *Heritage-the National Women’s Art Book*,⁷ the story of two important colonial women artists, Dorothy Paty and Isabella Parry, who lived and worked in Newcastle, would not be recorded.⁸

The acknowledgement that these women worked as artists is important, for while it was not unusual to have women artists in the colonial settlements of Australia, Newcastle was established for the sole purpose of housing dangerous re-convicted convicts, and was initially ruled by harsh authority figures and not a place for the finer aspects of life.

When Dorothy English Paty (Burnard), the wife of the newly appointed deputy assistant-commissary to the colony, arrived in Newcastle with her husband in 1832, it was a harsh environment. In the four years before her death in 1836, Paty made some outstanding studies of the flora of the area, as well as interesting observations of the man-made built environment.⁹

One important watercolour painting, (plate 1) *Mr Paty’s Residence, Newcastle*,¹⁰ (or *Mr. Paty’s Station, Newcastle, New South Wales*)¹¹ painted in 1836, depicts the house she and

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⁷ Kerr, *Heritage*.
⁸ There is also a National Library of Australia website, of an online exhibition which was held at the library in 1995, titled Beyond the Picket Fence. References to these artists can be found in Nancy Cushing, "Creating the Coalopolis - Perceptions of Newcastle 1770-1935" (PhD, University of Newcastle NSW, 1995).
¹⁰ Ibid. Page 426.
her husband were assigned on their arrival for their stay in Newcastle, and provides valuable historic information about the changing face of the built environment of Newcastle at that time. This representation is dominated by a picket fence which extends diagonally from left to right, which could be there as a compositional device or perhaps as a symbol of the domestic nature of the fence as seen in English cottages, or the division between those in power and the convict population. The house also creates the focal point in the surrounding treeless environment, and the palette used is almost monochromatic.

Kerr explains that images such as these, by the non-professional painter, were a record of what life was like for them in Australia and often made for relatives in England. She points

out that these are unlike the romantic, softly coloured views of the professional (male) artists of the period, who had priorities of making ‘good’ pictures or pleasing a patron.12

Paty’s work was unique in her use of a large format to represent her subject matter. Over a period of just four years, Paty compiled two sketchbooks containing fifty-two large, strong watercolours, titled *Wildflowers around Newcastle, New South Wales.*13 One album measured 28.6 x 34.7 cm while one painting, *Crinum* was 42.6 x 54.4.14 Her subject matter was mainly of natural botanical specimens collected from the local area, all scientifically identified, dated and in many cases naming the collectors.15

![Plate 2 Gigantic Lily (Doryanthes excels), Newcastle, Dorothy Paty, 1835, watercolour, 28.1 x 34.4 cm, National Library of Australia.](image)

The *Gigantic Lily (Doryanthes excels)* in *Newcastle* painted in 1835 (plate 2) depicts a species native to the area around Newcastle.

The hardships of the early settlement did not prevent her from producing a considerable amount of work in the new colony. Paty’s observations and accurate rendition and attention

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to detail of her immediate world, in a time before photography, contributed to our knowledge of Australia and in particular Newcastle, through female eyes.\textsuperscript{16}

Isabella Parry arrived in Newcastle in the early 1830s. For another female amateur artist, the difficulties of a new settlement did not prevent her from making artworks.\textsuperscript{17} Her paintings showed architectural elevations, and landscapes dotted with the pit heads of coal mines, and belching smoke stacks.\textsuperscript{18} Parry’s artworks were made predominantly for her own pleasure and to send back to her family in England. However, these artworks were not images of a pleasing, idealized environment, but described the physical reality of her surroundings. She was concerned with producing images that showed the “beginning of the marks of the coal industry upon the Newcastle environment.”\textsuperscript{19}

Plate 3  Isabella Parry, untitled drawing, (no size given), 1831, Percy Haslam Collection, University of Newcastle Archives, NSW.

\textsuperscript{18} Cushing, "Creating the Coalopolis". Page 258.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
The artwork that best illustrated this theme was The Great Coal Strait of Australian Agricultural Company, 1833. It is also obvious in an untitled work produced in 1831 (plate 3), where Parry presents the viewer with a panorama of water and land. In the mid-ground a steamer is berthed at a coal loader, while in the background black smoke emits from a tall chimney stack adjacent to the construction of the pit head. The overall representation is almost depressing, with no attempt made to ‘clean up’ the image or romanticise the more negative aspects of the scene, as artists often did at that time. Parry was considered an inspiration to other artists, partly due to her high social status in the community for establishing a school and library but also for the interior design of St John’s Church Stroud in 1833 which has been attributed to her.

The need to romanticise the subject matter is not evident in Paty’s and Parry’s depictions of the built environment of Newcastle, as it was in the work of the male artists of the period. Unlike the women artists the careers of Austrian botanical artist, Ferdinand Bauer, the first notable professional artist to visit Newcastle and other colonial male artists, such as Richard Browne, Joseph Lycett, Captain James Wallis, and Lieutenant Thomas Scottowe, have all been well documented. In their paintings unattractive features of the landscape were often omitted or the scene was composed to avoid what might be considered unappealing aspects of Newcastle. Cushing wrote in Creating the Coalopolis that “each feature of the

20 Ibid.
22 Bernard Smith, Place, Taste and Tradition: A Study of Australian Art since 1788 (Sydney: Waite & Bull, 1945). Page 46
23 Cushing, "Creating the Coalopolis". Page 237.
25 Susan Marsden, Newcastle a Brief History (van Gastel Printing Pty. Ltd., 2004). Page 8. Lycett’s works of Newcastle have been collected and extensively researched. Documentation of this can be seen in the collection of the Newcastle Region Art Gallery and several publications.
landscape has been softened and smoothed in order to communicate the sense of progress and containment of nature.” 28 Yet in reality “it was a dirty infant of a town, consisting of parallel rows of convict-built slab huts and a barracks holding some 250 men considered dangerous.” 29 Kerr points out that “it was natural for women to depict their immediate environment although that always meant external views of home and surrounding countryside.” 30 These early colonial women artists however were less restricted by convention and formal etiquette than women in later years, where the role of women was further restricted. 31

However it was the early male colonial artists working in Newcastle who were important enough to be acknowledged in the early 1966 publication of the Art of Australia by Robert Hughes 32 and to be considered worthy of inclusion in the Newcastle City Art Gallery Collection. 33

The foundation of Newcastle as a masculinist culture, arising from its beginning as a convict settlement, and its heavily industrial nature from the 1850s, provided an unsympathetic environment for women. This provides an explanation of the historical and sociological context in which Paty, Parry and subsequent women artists have worked. The region was originally one of great beauty, but Newcastle soon developed into a dirty, polluted industrial city. This unattractive physical environment and the general poverty of its workers gave little

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28 Cushing, "Creating the Coalopolis”. Page 237.
31 Joan Kerr and Hugh Falkus, From Sydney Cove to Duntroon, first ed. (Richmond, Victoria: Hutchinson Group (Australia) Ltd, 1982), Page 44.
33 Also only male colonial artists are acknowledged in the early 1966 publication of Art of Australia by Robert Hughes. Ibid. In 1966 most of these early women artists were unknown and although their images of Newcastle are important in the visual history of Newcastle, it is only in the past few decades that they have been acknowledged.
support to the establishment of a flourishing cultural community. To be an artist required extraordi

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inary toughness particularly for those women artists.

From Convicts to ‘Coalopolis’

Originally called King’s Town, and later officially named Newcastle, the settlement was established as a secondary penal colony in 1804 to take reconvicted convicts from Sydney. From the first camp in Newcastle, the conditions for convicts were appalling. By 1814 there were 704 convicts, 121 of which were women. For many years the males outnumbered females.

Ironically, in the convict world there was little distinction of gender in how men and women were treated. Women were treated as cruelly as the men. Captain John Morriset, the newly appointed commandant of Newcastle in 1819, had his own method of dealing with difficult female convicts. “It was to place an iron band round their necks, cut their hair and have them muster with the gangs, solitary confinement, or sent them to Limeburner’s Bay to sift shells for the kilns.”35 There was no leniency in the punishment of female convicts.36 The situation of the female convicts was an embarrassment to the commandants.37 No one was at ease with

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34 Janine Burke wrote that what these early colonial women artists were doing was “patiently recording the new land with naïve delight” while a great number of male artists were “anglicizing the Australian landscape and making it palatable for the English market and their homesick taste,” Janine Burke, "Australian Women Painters,” in Australian Women Artist One Hundred Years: 1840-1940, ed. Janine Burke (Melbourne: The Ewing and George Paton Galleries, Melbourne University Union, 1975). These early colonial women however were less restricted by convention and formal etiquette than women in later years, where the role of women was further restricted. Kerr and Falkus, From Sydney Cove to Duntroon. Page 44. Burke’s theory, the ‘innocent eye’ although positively acknowledged for the process of recognizing and re-evaluating women’s work of the 1970s has since been challenged for “presenting a much more regressive stereotype.” (Jordan, “No-Man's Land.” Page 359.) Burke wrote that the earliest women painters on record were a “hybrid mix of Victorian gentility, eccentricity – extraordinary toughness”. Burke, Australian Women Painters. Page 3.


36 J W Turner, Newcastle as a Convict Settlement: The Evidence before J.T.Bigge in 1819-1821, vol. No 7, Newcastle History Monographs (Newcastle: Newcastle Public Library, 1973). Page 235. On April 12, 1819, Florence McCarthy was given one hundred lashes for running away from the settlement, while, on April 24, William Wedlock was given seventy five lashes for the same crime.

37 Ibid. Page 25
the role of convict women in the settlement, as they were just another difficulty in a problem ridden society.\textsuperscript{38}

For the free settler, Newcastle was also a hard and dangerous location, with little in the way of physical or financial security. Unlike the rest of Australia, Newcastle immigrants tended to be from the coal mining areas of northern England and Wales. By 1838, 100 Irish miners and 40 Welsh miners had been brought in to work in the mines,\textsuperscript{39} which introduced into the settlement an unusually strong Celtic influence and a love of music. There was an overriding need for physical labour to work in the mines and on the waterfront, which meant that those who settled in Newcastle were primarily male workers\textsuperscript{40} prepared to work in a very dangerous job.\textsuperscript{41} Bernard Smith wrote that the unskilled labourers who migrated to Australia had experienced very little exposure to, or education in art, in the country of their origin. “It was not for such classes that the eighteenth century of art of England existed.”\textsuperscript{42} The majority of Newcastle’s population was made up of unskilled labour.

Being a free settler did not help the female population. The unemployment of young women became more of a problem, as there was little in the way of positions. Caroline Chisholm, working in the Newcastle and Maitland region, found work for these girls and even took them

\textsuperscript{40} Norm Barney, \textit{A to Z of Newcastle and the Hunter} (Newcastle: Newcastle Newspapers Pty Ltd, 1998). Page 32
\textsuperscript{42} Smith, \textit{Place, Taste and Tradition: A Study of Australian Art since 1788}, Page 18.
home. As the number increased she decided to open a girls’ home at East Maitland, which would give these young women shelter.\footnote{Judith Iltis, "Caroline Chisholm (1807-1877)," http://adbonline.anu.au.biogs/A010208b.htm (accessed 5 October, 2006). Caroline Chisholm (nee Jones), an English philanthropist, arrived in Australia in 1838. She had worked on other projects that helped females, but her major concern in 1840 was the plight of young girls who had immigrated to Australia. As New South Wales was entering a depression at that time there was little work for these girls in the cities. Page 1.}

By the late nineteenth century Newcastle was known as the ‘Coalopolis’.\footnote{Marsden, \textit{Newcastle a Brief History}. Page 15} Coal was the lifeblood of Newcastle, and indeed of the whole of Australia, but this “blood” that continued to flow to ensure a profitable return for those in control, was to the detriment of the workers and their families. Despite the benefits to the country there was very little benefit to the workers who made it all possible. John Stanley James recorded his observations in 1878:

Smoke rose from numerous tall stacks blackened by the sky, destroying, of course, much of the charm of the view according to the artists’ standpoint, but giving promise of employment for labour, and of useful production, which to lovers of humanity amply atones for the loss of the beautiful.\footnote{John Stanley James, "The Vagabond Papers 1843-1896," \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} 1878. Pages 106/7.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Plate_4_Settlement_and_Nobby's_Head_1864_photograph_Goold_Collection_Local_Studies_Section_Newcastle.Region.Library.jpg}
\caption{\textit{Settlement and Nobby’s Head, 1864, photograph, Goold Collection, Local Studies Section, Newcastle Region Library.}}
\end{figure}
The city in 1879 did appear prosperous, but this wealth belonged to a few. The impressive infrastructure of the port, contrasted with the cramped, crude constructions that housed the workers. Because little was given back by the companies to alter this imbalance, Newcastle became an impoverished city with a low standard of living for its workers, and very little in the way of beauty, comforts, or culture. In 1880, James Inglis wrote about Newcastle:

Newcastle, by its most ardent admirer, could not be called a beautiful town. But for the ever glorious sea rolling its billows on the sandy shore, there is in fact no animation in the landscape. A dense pall of smoke ever hangs over the town and district, and even far out to sea the captain of your steamer will point to the distant thick curtain of lowering smoke, and say, “There lies Newcastle.”

In Britain, rapid industrialization required huge quantities of coal to support such growth. This coal was to come from Newcastle, Australia. Newcastle’s future for the next two hundred years, for better or worse, was to depend on the political and economic influences of the world market for coal. In Newcastle, there was little in the way of large employers of workers other than the coal industry. The smaller manufacturing industries were mainly established as subsidiaries of the coal industry. There was the usual infrastructure that developed with the growth of the city, but it was not until the opening of the Newcastle Steelworks, by the Broken Hill Proprietary in 1915, that heavy industry was to become the

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46 John Ramsland, Newcastle as Coal City in 1879, (Newcastle: 2008). Page 1
The employment of 3000 miners, most of whom had migrated from Northumbria, the western counties of England and Wales required housing and the town began to resemble the confined coal-mining towns they had left. Newcastle historian John Ramsland described the scene that a visitor arriving in Newcastle would be confronted with. “Upon arrival of the steamer on a working day, the traveller will view a most busy scene of energetic labour. There are five miles of wharves and the largest sea-going vessels can be accommodated easily. On the principal wharf there are newly erected and magnificent hydraulic cranes lifting the coal and other cargo and depositing them efficiently into the hold of a dingy collier or an ocean mail boat or a larger sea-going vessel.”


48 Susan Marsden, Coals to Newcastle, First ed. (Wagga Wagga: Bobby Graham Publishers, 2002). Page 4
Marsden said: “Such exploitation and export of colonial resources was, after all, the main purpose of British imperialism”.

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next main force behind the growth of Newcastle, and the prime employer of this working class population.\textsuperscript{49} One of the factors in the decision by BHP to set up a steelworks in Newcastle was the surplus labour force created by the depression in the coal industry.\textsuperscript{50}

These economic highs and lows were part of the growth of Newcastle. In a world of competitive bargaining, the resources Newcastle had to offer were not always in demand. By 1918, the steelworks were at their peak, employing a huge number of men. This, unfortunately, did not last, as, with the end of the war overseas competition was high and British steel could be purchased for half the price of the Newcastle product.\textsuperscript{51}

Social and Cultural Development

In comparison with the cultural development of other cities, Newcastle appeared to be poorly served. Brisbane, like Newcastle, was settled in 1824, for the purpose of removing re-offenders to a more remote area where they would not present problems.\textsuperscript{52} Like Newcastle, the magnificent vegetation was obliterated by the convicts, not for coal mining, but to grow maize. However, the convict presence in Brisbane only lasted eighteen years and the area was then opened up for free settlement.\textsuperscript{53} These settlers were either farmers or developed

\textsuperscript{53} Further comparisons can be found in J. G. Steele’s book, \textit{Brisbane Town in Convict Days, 1824-1842}, Queensland University Press.
businesses in the city to cater for the pastoralists on the Darling Downs. Consequently a culturally sensitive middle class was developed.

European settlement in Wollongong started in 1815 as a place of agriculture, with timber-getting and land-clearing for farming. Wollongong was chosen as a settlement because of access to a fresh water lagoon and the 1828 census states that those in work in Wollongong were employed in agricultural activities. Convicts did arrive in Wollongong in 1837 to work on the construction of the harbour and a stockade was built to house the 300 convicts. Despite Wollongong’s development into an industrial city, there is little comparison between it and Newcastle with regard to the infrastructure that developed. Unlike Wollongong, there was no initial plan for the building of Newcastle at the commencement of the settlement. In contrast the Surveyor General in Sydney travelled to Wollongong in 1834 to lay a plan for the township. Wollongong initially had a convict beginning but, like Brisbane, the area was initially developed as farm land and Wollongong only later developed its industrial area.

The growth of trade unions in Newcastle, from the first established in this city for the protection of miners in 1860, determined the future political directions of the region. It was also the basis for the solidarity that formed amongst the working males in Newcastle. This contributed to a strong tradition of mate-ship that grew and in some forms still exists. The unions brought together these workers, and provided a concerned body that had an amount of

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54 OurIndooroopilly.com, "Brief History of Brisbane City in the 19th Century." Pages 6-7. The population grew slowly and it was not until the 1860s, when 35,000 immigrants flocked to Brisbane, it increased. There was little industry and the city sprawled into suburbia.
55 Ibid.
56 Wollongong Library, "Wollongong History," www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/library/localinfo/wollongong/history.html (accessed 2 October, 2006). It was not until 1849 that the first coalmine was opened in the Illawarra at Mount Keira. The increase in coal mining was the incentive to enlarge the port to allow for more traffic in coal and coke.
57 Ibid.
58 This was seen when the BHP closed in 1999. Men rallied together to celebrate and commiserate and help each other find employment.
power in pursuing the interests of the (male) workers. These unions became amongst the strongest in the world 59 to give the workers better rights in a volatile industry.

Not all blame for the poor state of social conditions in Newcastle could be levelled at the industries, the city council and local government. There was also apathy amongst the population that contributed to the lack of culture in the city. In 1929, the then Mayor of Newcastle, Mr Wheeler wrote:

the citizens get the government which they deserve, for it is on them that the responsibility ultimately rests. If then, on looking back we may think that Newcastle in some respects has not progressed as we might have expected and desired, the entire responsibility of this must not be laid on the shoulders of the Municipal representatives, it is also largely attributable to that apathy and indifference which are characteristic of only too many of our citizens even to this day.60

This indifference was demonstrated in the lack of support by the working class people of Newcastle, for an institution that would provide education and culture for all members of the community. In 1835, The Newcastle’s Mechanics’ Institute was opened, however, due to lack of support it closed and its failure was put down to the fact that the working class felt it was exclusive and that only the elite of the population were able to join.61 When it opened again in 1844, it only survived for six years despite changes to the management. Difficulties continued and so in 1861 the School of Arts Committee was formed, but was also met with animosity and lack of support from the community. This lack of support was difficult to explain as there were successful institutes in much smaller and less busy towns than Newcastle and yet the School of Arts’ survival in this city was tenuous. The community’s

59 Marsden, Newcastle a Brief History. Page 14.
60 Newcastle City Council, City of Newcastle (Newcastle: Davies &Cannington Ltd and Reg. C. Pogonoski Ltd., 1929). No page numbers.
dissatisfaction with the running of the School of Arts was countered by the editor of *The Chronicle* when he stated that “the working class men could have nominated and voted for their own candidates if they had been interested enough to do so.” 62

**The Situation of Women**

As Newcastle developed, the plight of women in the workforce did not improve, as the majority of work still required strong male labour. Work, in short, was nearly always a man’s business. Most women would only work until married as the role of full-time wife and mother, child minder and housewife was the expected norm.63 The impact of this belief meant that there was a lack of concern for the young single female’s employment prospects. Education was not seen as being important and training was thought to be a waste of time and money. The consequence of this was that the majority of females from a working class background were employed in factories and retailing until they were old enough to marry and leave. Again, like many other aspects, this was not unique to Newcastle. However, this situation exacerbated the problems associated with a predominantly working class town.64

If employment became scarce, it was acceptable for males to leave home to look for work elsewhere, but not so for a female. This created deeper problems for the unemployed female as there was always a lack of suitable positions and the public’s perception automatically conjured up the picture of immorality if she left. These women faced possible starvation, unwanted pregnancies and social stigma.65

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64 Docherty, *Newcastle*. “Had there been no coal found in NSW, almost every source of wealth in Australia could have been stunted”, wrote author and traveler Anthony Trollope in 1876.
The unfortunate situation of these women in Newcastle was not unique to this city, but combined with the other aspects of a depressed economy and lack of opportunity contributed to the power of the ‘man’s town’.

The right to vote did not change the circumstances of working class women in Newcastle. Few major reforms that benefited women were made, as most women voted the way they were directed by their husband or father. In Newcastle women’s participation in other community organized activities was also slow in evolving. The history of the Mechanics’ Institute and the School of Arts reveals little on the involvement of women in this learning environment. Despite this, it is documented that their participation was encouraged from the start. At the opening of the new School of Arts building in 1870 the President, Mr Keene, told the audience it was:

not only our duty but our interest to help them (women) in their endeavours – striving to attain a more eminent position in social life and to enter our colleges and compete with us for the more general acquisition of art and science – because the very basis of education, the education of childhood was in their charge.

34. An appraisal of the plight of women in the early 1900s, made by Gray, in her book said: “Newcastle’s industrial structure had long presented difficulties for women who needed work, and the depression made it worse as the employment opportunities decreased and the number of women needing work increased.” (Page 31). Indeed many young women were forced into a life they would otherwise have been appalled at, but there was no choice, it was do or die from hunger. The unfortunate repercussions that eventuated from these desperate actions included unwanted pregnancies, and social stigma. There was a lack of information and availability of contraception for these women, and many of their married sisters. In the 1920s and early 1930s the common birth rate for these women increased while in the more affluent groups it decreased. It appeared that contraception was only used by women in the small high income group. The women from the low income groups and the unemployed were often forced to have children they could not afford or to submit to forms of abortion, all of which further lowered their quality of life. Page 34.

66 de Vries, Great Australian Women. Page xi In 1902 there was an article in the Newcastle Morning Herald entitled ‘Women’s Suffrage’. It stated that women were entitled to vote under the women’s suffrage clauses of the ‘Amended Electoral Act’ and that they could obtain their rights by calling at the office of the registrar at the Newcastle Courthouse. It also said that this privilege had been extended to women the previous month and that not one application had been made in the district. The newspaper article was not prominent and could have been easily overlooked. Even when women gained the right to vote it made very little difference to the lives of women at the time.

The examinations for the ‘University Extension’ and ‘Technical Education’ courses were available to both men and women through the School of Arts. “History, English Literature and Drawing were favoured by the women, while scientific and practical subjects were ignored or discouraged.” A separate reading room for women was opened in the School of Arts in 1886. Records show that women used the library frequently, but their participation in the management of the institution was minimal. In 1895 two women nominated unsuccessfully for the Committee.

This lack of female participation in the management area again was not unique to Newcastle but it was another element that weakened their position and narrowed the opportunities for them. Consequently various sociological and historical factors meant that there was limited opportunity for those interested in a career in art, particularly for those women who wished to be professional artists.

The Isolation of Women Artists

There were three significant women artists in Newcastle in the mid-19th century. All came from a privileged background, but worked without the support of a local art community. Like Paty and Parry their stories were not told until the late twentieth century.

Marrianne Collinson Campbell (nee Close), was born in 1827, in Morpeth at Morpeth House, a busy town on the Hunter River north west of Newcastle. She was of the same lineage as

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68 Heaton, "Aspects of the School of Arts Movement." Page 32
71 These three artists were selected as suitable examples from that period, and are important to the history of women artists in Newcastle.
the artist Sophia Campbell, and married her cousin, George Campbell, the fourth son of Sophia. Her era was quite different to that of Sophia Campbell, Dorothy Paty and Isabella Parry.\textsuperscript{73} Theirs was a time of isolation. Marrianne Campbell was a typical Victorian gentlewoman and had many ‘accomplishments’ characteristic of her class, education and time.\textsuperscript{74} However, she did stand out from her peers, for at an early age she was painting flowers that were recognised as demonstrating a most professional standard. This could be attributed to her early tuition by the famous colonial artist, Conrad Martens, who gave lessons to the daughters of Sydney’s elite.\textsuperscript{75}

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\textbf{Plate 5}  
\textit{Waratah, (Telopia speciossima)}, Marrianne Collinson Campbell, 1877, watercolour, 28 x 30.4 cm, National Library of Australia.

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\textsuperscript{72} Kerr and Falkus, \textit{From Sydney Cove to Duntroon}. Page 54. Joan Kerr and Hugh Falkus wrote about Marrianne Campbell’s life and work in their 1982 publication. Campbell’s parents built and then occupied ‘Morpeth House’ until their death.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid. Page 49.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. Pages 50-51.
Campbell’s early works as a teenager were mainly of English flowers, yet she began to paint and draw Australian native flora, which was unusual at the time. Although they were considered interesting, they were not as ‘pretty’ as English flowers, and therefore not appropriate subjects. It was later in her career, after her marriage at twenty-seven and her departure from Morpeth, to ‘Duntroon’ in Canberra that she became more entranced with Australian native flowers, (plate 5) along with the panorama of the Australian landscape. Despite her work being of a very high standard, she never attained a professional standing or recognition at a time when there were many painters of Australian flora.  

Working in the same period as Campbell were two other female artists who were also from a privileged environment. The Scott sisters, Harriet (1830-1907) and Helena (1832-1910), lived on Ash Island on the Hunter River. They put their knowledge of their environment to use by collecting specimens for the leading colonial scientists of the time. They were able to correspond with these scientists and this, combined with the interesting and educated visitors to their Ash Island home, was invaluable to their continuing education. It was their contact with these learned people and their welcome seclusion on the island, that allowed them the time to study, to think, to observe and to produce the art works that reflected their considerable ability. This way of life was unusual for females at that time, as they did not have the interruptions typical of their status. Despite

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76 Kerr, *A Singular Voice: Essays on Australian Art and Architecture*. Page 103. This lack of recognition is also indicated by the failure to recognise the work of other talented women artists of the time, such as Alice Norton, Margaret and Maria Thacker, and Henrietta Octavia Smith.


78 Nancy Gray, “Scott, Helena (1832-1910),” Australian National University http://www.abd.online.anu.edu.au/blogs/A060509b.htm (accessed 11 January 2007). Their father, a man of the Enlightenment with scholarly interests, educated them at home on Ash Island, thus enabling them to acquire an extensive knowledge of Australian insects, animals and plants along with many other areas of scholarship.

79 Ibid.

their isolation from a collective art community in Newcastle these women achieved a level of competence in their art making, much higher than would be expected.

The gap in the history of artists, from the mid nineteenth century to the early twentieth century in Newcastle, is not confined to women artist, but also extends to male artists of that period. In her thesis, *Creating the Coalopolis*, 1995, Cushing wrote:

Newcastle lacked the wealthy class which could support resident artists. Like many literary accounts, post convict graphic images of Newcastle tended to be created by artists traveling through the town on the way to somewhere else.81

**Music and Theatre**

Unlike the activities of the solitary fine artist, music and theatre “involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number of people.”82 The musician and actor were part of the growing cultural scene of Newcastle. From 1877 to 1944, there were 893 articles and notices about music and theatre in the *Newcastle Morning Herald* compared with 80 references to art.83 These statistics further support the theory of a lack of a supportive community for the Fine Arts.

The first theatre productions were staged by visiting performers in the old court house on the corner of Bolton and Hunter Streets. The Newcastle Philharmonic formed in 1845, and held their monthly concerts in the same building. In 1852, James Croft established Newcastle’s first permanent theatre in a converted building at the rear of the Commonwealth Hotel in Watt Street. “It was a crude structure but its repertoire was wide and varied. It ranged from

81 Cushing, *Creating the Coalopolis*. Page 245.
Shakespeare to vaudeville, from melodrama to magicians."  

In 1859 the Theatre Royal, opened in an converted hay shed, also in Watt Street. It held four hundred people and became the main theatre until the New Victoria Theatre was opened in 1876. This time was described as “a new era of theatrical history in Newcastle.” Other venues such as the King’s Hall; the Lyceum Hall; the Imperial Theatre and the Methodist Mission were established for live performances. Newcastle also had a Drury Lane for a brief period. Newcastle’s first music hall, the Princess Theatre, opened in 1860. However, it did not continue operating and was converted into a boxing saloon. Music performances were held in the other theatres. 

One reason for a strong and continuing music community in Newcastle originated in the background of the participants. Most of the immigrants came from Northern England, where music and theatre had been activities they had participated in back home. Many of the male immigrants had been members of bands in Britain. The Welsh miners had a cultural history of choirs. The number of Welsh immigrants in Newcastle was six times that of the rest of the colony, and the eisteddfod, “the most Welsh of institutions” was formed in 1886. The public’s participation in art and music continued to be markedly different. In August 1930, a ‘Music Week’ was held in Newcastle. During that week over 8,000 people attended performances and musical activities that included bands, choirs and a symphony orchestra. Barnes said that: “the Newcastle people strongly supported cultural events in the city, especially those involving music.”

By 1944, Newcastle could boast a Newcastle Philharmonic Society; Newcastle Musical Union; Newcastle Choral Society; Newcastle Musical Society; Newcastle Operatic Society; 

84 Barney, A to Z of Newcastle and the Hunter. Page 151.
85 Ibid. Page 151.
86 Ibid. Page 151.
87 Newcastle Region Library, "Herald Newspaper Index."
88 J.C. Docherty, Newcastle. Page 121.
89 Ibid.
Newcastle Music Association; Newcastle City Band, and a Suburban Male Choir. They celebrated music weeks, eisteddfods, jubilees, and had many visiting orchestras, bands, choirs, operas, soloists as well as local performances, recitals and concerts. It was in the late forties that the idea of the establishment of a professional system of music tuition in the form of a conservatorium of music was seriously considered. The plan was that it would offer the students of music the same benefits experienced by students in Sydney. The establishment of this institution, in 1952, eventuated through the support of the Newcastle City Council, five years before the city finally had a city art gallery.

The Fine Arts

When we examine the milieu of the industrial, working class ‘man’s town’ of Newcastle from the mid nineteenth century to the 1950s, it is apparent that the support created by a fine art community was not there for artists, either male or female.

When the landscape artist Alfred Sharp arrived in Newcastle from New Zealand in 1887, his interest in Newcastle was more about the cultural life of the city than its material advancement, and he was disappointed that there was not a stronger art community. He continued to make artworks and also worked to establish a more creative environment for artists. He was an outspoken campaigner for a public gallery in Newcastle. He once overheard a remark made by a Sydney gentleman that, “Newcastle was merely a collection of mud-hutted underground savages and their hangers on.” Sharpe worked hard to defeat the

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91 Newcastle Region Library, "Herald Newspaper Index."
93 Cushing, Creating the Coalopolis. Page 270.
94 Ibid., page 275.
negativity, displayed in both Newcastle and other cities, in relation to Newcastle’s position in the world of fine arts.\textsuperscript{95}

A network of support for artists can be achieved through the establishment of local groups, such as the formation in 1922 of the Newcastle Photographic Association, for photographers from the region. But it was not easy in Newcastle to achieve continuing success with cultural societies. The Newcastle Art Society was formed in 1933 to foster and encourage art generally, within the Newcastle and Hunter Region. It had a membership of twenty-two and its first president Reg Russom,\textsuperscript{96} is credited with its foundation.\textsuperscript{97} However, the few records available for the period from 1933 to 1945 indicate that the membership dropped dramatically during that period. When Tom Ninness was elected president in 1942, he did manage to keep the society going during the remaining war years, despite having only six members. This increased steadily to thirty-six by 1944.\textsuperscript{98} In the same year, the secretary of the society said that the aim of their coming 10\textsuperscript{th} members’ exhibition was to “foster art in Newcastle, and that after the war the society would make every effort to secure establishment of an art gallery in Newcastle.”\textsuperscript{99} He also emphasized the importance of cultural activities in an industrial city, “where hard work is the order of the day.”\textsuperscript{100} Ninness, commented at the exhibition opening, that “there was a great future for art in this community” but that the society “had not had the encouragement it deserved in the past.”\textsuperscript{101}

The society continued to have periods where the membership fell so low that its future was in jeopardy, while other times the membership would increase and members were willing to

\textsuperscript{95} Several of his works can be found in the Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

\textsuperscript{96} Reg Russom’s bibliography is in Appendix B

\textsuperscript{97} Ernest Kelly, \textit{The Story of Newcastle Art Society} (Valentine Newcastle: Newcastle Art Society Inc., 2008). Pages 9,16


\textsuperscript{99} Ibid. Page 2.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid. Page 2.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid. Page 2.
become part of the committee, to lift the group out of the doldrums. The peak years he said, were in the late 1960s to 1970s, but during the following year there were considerable disputes between the committee and a breakaway group, the Newcastle Society of Artists was formed. The Low Show Group artists, Mary Beeston and Elizabeth Martin, were involved in this group.

Kelly wrote that he was unable to remember the membership being anything but small. As with others wishing to hold exhibitions in Newcastle, members of The Society of Arts had to deal with the lack of exhibition venues to show their work. Consequently they staged exhibitions in open air spaces including a park at South Newcastle, near the beach, another in Gibson Street and even in the grounds of members’ homes. For indoor exhibitions they had to rely on the generosity of banks, stores, church halls, and the Trades Hall Newcastle. The pattern of seeking alternative spaces was continued by the Low Show Group artists.

Despite the difficulties the members of the Society of Arts had to overcome, their support and promotion of the visual arts in Newcastle was a valuable contribution to a change of perception of art and its value to society. Prizes were awarded at most exhibitions. Their exhibitions were opened by well-known art identities from outside the city which served a twofold purpose. Firstly, to have credible representatives of the art world come to Newcastle to judge the work and to support the artists whose works were being exhibited, and, secondly, to give the public an opportunity to hear what professionals had to say about art.

103 NMH, “Ambitious Show - Newcastle Art Society Exhibition,” Newcastle Morning Herald, 11 November 1939, page 8. In November 1939, Mr. Frank Medworth, lecturer in charge of the art department at Sydney Technical College opened the Society of Arts exhibition at Scott’s Ltd Department Store. The following day the newspaper printed the article. The review of the exhibition commends the artists on their technical ability.
Reg Russom, not only founded and supported The Society of Artists but also made a significant contribution to establishing a wider fine art community in Newcastle. He also fought the narrowness and parochial attitude of the citizens of Newcastle towards art. His students and members of the Newcastle Art Society battled constantly for the privilege of using a nude model in class. Rachael Samuels, local sculptor and founding member of the Society of Sculptors, wrote that the nude was considered unmentionable at that time for:

indeed, even a nude model for window dressing gave cause for complaint if the blinds were inadvertently not drawn. A nude body was a lascivious thing, so the highest form of creation, with its marvelous mechanism, strength and beauty, was lower than the dust. So much for parochial ignorance and indifference. Newcastle was an industrial city and it did not need Art.\textsuperscript{105}

**Greener Pastures**

The lack of galleries to exhibit fine art in Newcastle was only part of the paucity of support experienced by artists in the community. Anyone serious about a professional art career felt forced to leave Newcastle to study and work. For the male there was more opportunity to leave Newcastle than their female counterparts, who were often financially dependent on their family or discouraged from leaving the security of their home.

When we examine the history of male artists in Newcastle, rather than stay in Newcastle to help establish a collective art world, many chose to leave and join established art communities in Australia and overseas. The loss to the Newcastle cultural community was considerable. After the beginning of the twentieth century many male artists left Newcastle

and, despite successful careers, were not acknowledged by their home town for their achievements. 106 Bruce Robinson, born in Newcastle in 1872, a generation ahead of William Dobell, left Newcastle around 1896 to live in Scotland to pursue a painting career. In April 1916, Robinson returned to Newcastle for a visit and an exhibition of his work, held in the lecture hall of the Newcastle School of Arts. At the opening of the exhibition the Mayor said, “Newcastle had produced something else besides coal, an artist of high distinction.” 107 This was the only recognition for this artist who had become a prominent figure overseas, and in the Sydney art world.

Like many of the same period, Ronald Steuart, born in Newcastle, New South Wales, in 1898, and moved away from the area to study and work. Very little information is available in Newcastle about his career, yet he was a significant Australian artist. 108

Another to leave Newcastle was the painter Norman Lloyd, who was born in Hamilton, Newcastle, in 1895 and who moved to Sydney in 1911 to study with Julian Ashton and James R Jackson. He had an outstanding career and died in 1983. 109

For John Parkinson, born in 1921, his early training in Newcastle was as a junior commercial artist prior to World War Two. When he returned from serving overseas, he studied three years of life drawing classes at Newcastle Technical College. He then decided to study in Sydney, where he completed the course at East Sydney Technical College. He won

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106 NMH, "A Name Etched in History," Newcastle Morning Herald, 13 January 2001, An article in the Newcastle Morning Herald in 2001 said: “Before Dobell there was another highly lauded Novocastrian, Bruce Robinson a ‘forgotten man’ of art in Newcastle. If you asked people to name the first important artist to be born in Newcastle, most would almost certainly say William Dobell.”

107 ———, "A Newcastle Artist (Bruce Robertson),” Newcastle Morning Herald, 6 April 1916. It is in the review of this exhibition, he is called Bruce Robertson.


109 His life and artworks are extensively documented on the website www.normanlloyd.com.au and other sites.
recognition in local New South Wales art competitions and the Miranda Watercolour Award in 1979.\textsuperscript{110}

While this is not an exhaustive list, it shows the need for some male artists to leave Newcastle. This practise continued even though the fine arts community was growing, and it would be many years before Newcastle could offer the support needed for a professional career. In the 1950s the most negative aspects for the cultural community were the inadequate facilities of the art school and the absence of a city art gallery, which would provide a network of support as well as a venue for exhibiting professional works by local, national and international artists. This exodus of male artists continued into the 1950s and included William Dobell, Jon Molvig, John Olsen, Ross Morrow, Tom Gleghorn and William Rose all of whom achieved success in the wider art world. These artists, like the earlier male artists, worked as comparatively isolated individuals and sought the support they needed to study, produce, show, and sell art, from more established art worlds. They were not necessarily concerned with contributing to an art community in Newcastle.

Dobell did reconnect with Newcastle when he returned to live at Wangi, near Newcastle. He attended openings at the Newcastle City Art Gallery and judged local art competitions. He became a source of pride for the people of Newcastle.

Conclusion

While early colonial artists were active in responding to the landscape and natural features of the settlement of Newcastle, the rapid and significant expansion in heavy industry and international coal exports led to a consequent emphasis on economic progress and less on the cultural aspects of the community. The continued expansion of the heavy industrial

\textsuperscript{110} Campbell, \textit{Australian Watercolour Painters}. Page 311.
environment guaranteed that Newcastle, like other similar centres, gained a reputation as a particularly ugly city, with a strong masculine ethos. With the exception of the captains of industry, the owners of businesses and professional people, there developed a basically low socio-economic group of people whose standard of living for the majority offered limited options and was even more restricted for most women.

The lack of a city art gallery, or any form of professional commercial gallery, meant that there were few opportunities for artists to exhibit their work or for the citizens to gain an appreciation of the fine arts. Consequently many male artists moved away from Newcastle to further their careers. Women artists had less opportunity to relocate while their work was generally regarded as inferior.

While there were isolated individuals and groups who tried to enrich this city culturally, in general the situation was bleak in the area of fine arts until the period around the middle of the twentieth century. Social and economic change then challenged the emphasis on heavy industry and induced professional classes to move into this city.

The next chapter follows the formation of the Low Show Group in the 1960s. Several of the members of this group of women artists were not born in Newcastle, but decided to work here as artists. In part their success was due to changes in the cultural environment of Newcastle and their decision to form a collective to exhibit. Their commitment to building a supportive framework for other artists and educating their audiences assisted the development of the fine arts in Newcastle.
CHAPTER 2

FORMATION OF THE LOW SHOW GROUP

The lack of stability in the coal and steel industries in Newcastle between the establishment of the convict settlement and 1950, impacted negatively on the majority of the population who depended on these industries for their livelihood. The First World War\(^1\) and the depression devastated whole suburbs, as the people lived close to the breadline and any conditions that had been won were degraded.\(^2\)

However, the establishment of the Newcastle University College brought new creative and intellectual life to the city as did the upgrading of the Newcastle National Art School. This chapter describes how the women of the Low Show Group met at art school as students and how these experiences influenced them to further their career as professional practitioners.

**Prelude**

Measured against the first 150 years of the settlement of Newcastle, the 1950s dawned with a brighter future despite the national coal strike of 1949 and the ‘ugly duckling’ image of the city.

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It was not long after the great strike that the coal trade was restored. This strike had not only impacted on the national economy, but in particular Newcastle whose dependence on coal for economic stability was important, as it was one of the main sources of income in the region. The success or failure of the coal industry also impacted on the other smaller industries in the region and the port facilities. The economic upturn in Newcastle was also due to the booming exports and radical changes in technology in both ships and the port facilities in the harbour. The steel industry experienced an upturn and this combined with the re-establishment of the State Dockyard ensured that there was work for all.

The outcome of this expansion was a labour shortage in Newcastle and also in other areas of Australia that were also experiencing booming times. The scarcity of workers prompted the administrators of the BHP to establish an immigration scheme, to fill the vacant positions in their Newcastle steelworks and to expand the workforce to further boost the production of steel. Prosperity was increasing and the steel works were forced to continue their expansion and modernization of facilities.

The resumption of coal mining also meant that the waterside was again a busy point of arrival and departure. The expansion of industry was strong, yet prosperity did not automatically advantage the cultural community of Newcastle. Docherty in *Newcastle: the Making of an Australian City* said: “it takes something more than business and industry to make a city great”. Yet the largest employer in Newcastle, BHP, had a policy

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3 Ibid. Page 16. The demand for exports was due to the fact that Japan (Australia’s enemy in World War II) which had formally been Australia’s competition, was to become its saviour by, its own increased demands for coal. (Ibid. Page 16)
5 Ibid.
of not supporting the arts and stated that they would make no exception to the rule.\textsuperscript{6} It appeared that at this time the captains of industry were not interested in supporting the development of the intellectual and creative potential of Newcastle.

\textbf{The Newcastle University College}

The history of the establishment of a university in Newcastle is similar to that of the indecision surrounding the establishment of a Cultural Centre and subsequent City Art Gallery, but this time it was the Government that failed to acknowledge the need for a university in Newcastle. Newcastle was a Labor Party ‘stronghold’ but instead of it being an advantage, in this case it actually worked against the city. Docherty explained that when Labor was in power Newcastle would always remain a ‘stronghold’ due to the support of its working class population so they could do nothing in certain areas without opposition. The members of the non-Labor parties knew that helping Newcastle would gain them nothing and so they could ignore or exploit the city with “impunity”.\textsuperscript{7}

Novocastrians had agitated for a university as early as 1912. This was rejected and the idea was put on hold due to World War 1, and then later because of the depression. In 1940 a committee was formed to lobby for the establishment of a university. The idea was supported by the Trades Hall and the unions whose members donated money for a university library.\textsuperscript{8} Still the committee was unable to gain the support of the Government and disbanded in 1948 after years of struggle.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{7} Docherty, \textit{Newcastle}. Page 164.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.
In 1949 the Newcastle Teachers’ College was established, using the facilities at the Technical College, and in March 1952 the university opened under the title of Newcastle University College with the first intake of students.\(^{10}\) From its inception this institution attracted teachers and administrators, who left a profound mark on the university and Newcastle. One identity who became important for the university and indeed cultural Newcastle was an Irish immigrant, James Auchmuty. He became the Foundation Vice-Chancellor of the University of Newcastle and showed a determination to achieve high standards in this provincial city.\(^{11}\)

Many of the academics and administrative staff came from other major Australian cities and from overseas to fill the positions. With them came their partners and families, who were also familiar with the cultural expectations of a middle-class community and the importance of these for a fulfilling lifestyle. Despite the College being in its embryonic stage and suffering from a lack of facilities, there was a strong bond in adversity between the staff which generated enthusiasm for the growth of cultural activities. Jill Stowell, whose husband lectured at the Newcastle University College at the time said:

> this period in Newcastle around 1960 was suddenly full of poetry. The new University College under the guidance of J.J. Auchmuty had attracted a charismatic and dedicated group of creative academics; among them Brin Newton-John, Norman Talbot and the now legendary Harri Jones, the Welsh poet, whose portrait Richards painted. The time was thick with reference to mythological archetypes and the epic heritage of the past.\(^{12}\)

\(^{10}\) Ibid. Page 157. This institution became autonomous in 1965, when the name changed to the present title of the University of Newcastle. (Ibid).


Although amateur theatre groups had been strong at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, the coming of the silent movies saw a decline in interest in live theatre audiences. From the early twentieth century until the 1950s, local theatre struggled to survive. However, with the growth of interest in cultural activities in Newcastle in the 1950s, assisted by the formation of four groups that regularly performed in the Newcastle area, the Newcastle Dramatic Art Club; Newcastle Repertory Club; the Newcastle New Theatre; and the Theatre Arts Guild, the theatre began to flourish again.¹³ These relative newcomers to the city then rallied together to lobby for a cultural centre in Newcastle.

Initially the move to Newcastle proved disappointing for many. For Margery Biggins, who arrived in 1956 with her husband Dennis who was about to take up a position at the University College, her first impressions reflected the culture shock that others like her experienced on their entry into what appeared to them to be a very ‘primitive’ place. She said that:

> When we emigrated from Britain and came to Newcastle in 1956, my culture shock was profound. Nothing had prepared me for what was then an ugly industrial city with no place (or much desire) for trees. As for the arts, professionally produced music, drama, art, ballet – forget it, this was Newcastle in the 1950’s (sic) and, for the first time in my life, I had shirt collars to scrub. I absolutely hated it.¹⁴

Biggins said that she was extremely unhappy but she agreed to a compromise. Her husband signed a two year contract after which, if she was still not happy, he agreed they


would go home. However, despite these difficult first months she came to love Newcastle, for she said “Three years later, I remembered our pact and laughed. And we never left.”

She continued:

Two things made a difference. One was the overwhelming friendliness we met, not just among colleagues at the University College, but elsewhere. A welcome into the community that I’d never come across anywhere else. The other was discovering the strength of the do-it-yourself arts scene in Newcastle that produced so much talent in all branches of the arts, and being able to take part in, and contribute to it.

Both Dennis and Margery Biggins were eventually to play a very important role in the cultural life of Newcastle as both were avid supporters of theatre and the visual arts in the area. Their collection of artworks by local artists is extensive.

The difficult working conditions meant that not all the newcomers to the university fared well. Harri Jones, who had a considerable impact on the cultural community of Newcastle through his poetry and his mentoring of others, found it hard to adjust. When he first arrived in Newcastle in 1959 to take up a position he had a romantic view of what coming to the colonies could offer him and his family. In his biography *Artist in Exile*, 2001, Bernard Jones and Don Dale-Jones said:

T.H. Jones would express few doubts about what he ironically styled his ‘exile’ in New South Wales, and it was in a mood of powerful optimism and creativity that he boarded the MV *Oceania* in April 1959. The New South

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15 Margery Biggins, Fax, 13 November 2006.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Harri Jones was the husband of Madeleine Jones who became a member of the Low Show Group in the second and subsequent Low Show Group exhibitions.
19 His wife Madeleine became a member of the Low Show Group and established the Ceramic Department in The Newcastle National Art School. Her contributions will be examined in depth in following chapters.
Wales that waited the Jones family was not the almost virgin garden whose vision had fired the imagination of Australia’s first settlers.  

The reality that awaited him is described:

When Harri arrived…the Faculties of Arts, Economics and Commerce, and the Library were still housed in an ex-machine-shop of the Technical College, with flimsy partitions dividing the offices, which were all shared, often by different people from different disciplines. Noisy hammering from the next-door metal shop punctuated poetry readings. A spartan common-room allowed for communal morning teas and lunches and the occasional evening sherry party.

His optimism soon gave way to despair as he found it difficult to adjust to life in Newcastle. However, through the support of the university and its teachers, this microcosm of culture expanded to embrace other groups, and a supportive interactive collection of like minds developed.

Another educational institution, the Newcastle Technical College, containing the National Art School, expanded during the 1950s. It was the growth of this art school that impacted on the art community of Newcastle.

**The Newcastle National Art School**

The Newcastle Technical College opened in 1896, but it was not until 1928 that the National Art School, Sydney, established a regional campus in Newcastle. This was the first institution to offer education in fine arts in Newcastle. Unfortunately, its facilities and location reflected negative visual and social aspects of this industrial city. It was

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21 Ibid.
housed in a smoke-covered building next to the main railway line into Newcastle and there was a constant battle with the dirt and grime, fallout from the industries, the noise of the steam trains and coal loading on the port at its door. In addition to this depressing outlook, its lack of facilities was a deterrent to both students and teachers alike.

By 1952, the art school had slowly run down and with the death of head teacher Reg Russom, a replacement was needed. Teachers at the Sydney National Art School were reluctant to come to Newcastle because of the poor conditions. However, Paul Beadle was given the position of Teacher-in-Charge and later became Head Teacher, at the Newcastle campus. This was a blessing for the cultural life of Newcastle. Andrew Greenhough in his study of Paul Beadle said Beadle “was to become an important figure in the fight for a city gallery and the promotion of all aspects of the arts in Newcastle.”

What Beadle did in the next few years, with the assistance of the other full-time staff member Janine Tayt, would lift the school out of the ‘doldrums’. Beadle implemented many changes and additions to the curriculum of the art school. He was a successful sculptor in his own right, and a founding member of the Society of Sculptors and Associates in Sydney in 1950. Previously there had been no teaching of sculpture at the art school. He battled red tape and within a few months of his arrival in Newcastle a sculpture class was formed and accommodated in a disused room at the Wood Street College. Forty students selected this class, a large number for those times.

Beadle continued to expand and improve the facilities at the art school and the addition of

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22 Andrew Greenhough, *Paul Beadle* (Master of Arts in Art History, University of Auckland, 1986). A copy of this thesis is in the Newcastle Region Art Gallery library. (It does not contain page numbers.)

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.


26 Ibid.
talented staff lifted the standard even more. Beadle’s influence secured the employment of Brian Cowley, Peter Sparks and the eminent Australian artist, John Passmore to the staff of the school, greatly enhancing the status of the school. Wendy Solling, also known as Sister Angela, taught sculpture at the art school for a period of time.\textsuperscript{27}

In 1954 the introduction of a full-time diploma course established Newcastle as the only college outside East Sydney to offer such a programme.\textsuperscript{28} Beadle’s revitalisation of the art school was not the only contribution he made to the art scene in Newcastle. He worked for the establishment of a Newcastle city art gallery.

**Art and Industry**

The establishment of the university college and the improvements to the art school were major factors in the expansion of a creative community in the 1950s. This was the beginning of a turnaround in the profile of a cultural community and in particular of the fine arts in Newcastle.

There is irony in the situation that all of the initial six artists of the Low Show Group had a strong connection to industrial Newcastle despite BHP’s initial lack of support for the arts. Mary Beeston’s arrival in Newcastle as a baby was due to her father’s appointment to set up one of the major subsidiary steel industries in Newcastle.\textsuperscript{29} Norma Allen

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid. Page 58.
\textsuperscript{28} Greenhough, *Paul Beadle*. Unfortunately, the lack of students enrolling in the course in the following year and the poor retention of students in the intermediate year and beyond meant that the full time course was abandoned after 1955, and only reintroduced in 1962. Beadle had worked hard to get this course approved and it was disappointing that there was not enough interest in Newcastle to sustain its continuation.

\textsuperscript{29} Ian Cutcher, interview with the author, 13 April, 2008. Lillian Sutherland’s husband was employed in the factory “on the floor” and Elizabeth Martin’s in middle management. Rae Richards’ husband was a scientist brought to Newcastle from Melbourne to work in Research and Development.
married a marine engineer who was employed on the large BHP ships that plied between Newcastle and their overseas customers. For three others their connection was with an English firm John Lysaght, set up in Newcastle to be close to the source materials to produce metal products. Three of the Low Show Group artists’ spouses worked at the Newcastle John Lysaght plant and another had professional associations with the company. It was through this network that, in 1957, Rae Richards first met the group of women that would later make up the group.\textsuperscript{30}

The company, John Lysaght Australia, did not consider itself ‘Australian’. Many of their professional employees in Newcastle were born and had studied in England and had been selected for expertise in their specific areas. Many of their skilled tradesmen were also exported to Australia from their works in Cardiff and Bristol.\textsuperscript{31} There were also strong connections between the University of Newcastle and Lysaght, through the Engineering and Metallurgy Faculty, which at the time, was the largest faculty at the university.

\footnotesize{Rae Richards, interview with author, 12 November, 2007. Betty Cutcher’s husband was with a firm of accountants who were employed by Lysaght.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{30} John Lysaght (Australia) Pty had its beginnings in England. The Lysaght family began fabricating galvanised iron products at their factory in Bristol in 1857. A significant amount of galvanised sheeting and wire was exported to Australia in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The demand for these products increased during the First World War and the availability was decreased due to the supplies being cut off by the war-time dangers on the high seas. In 1918 John Lysaght (Australia) was founded to serve the expanding Australian building and construction industry. The unique Australian style of architecture developed over the years was partly the result of their galvanised iron. The rural landscape was and is still noticeably dominated by these high quality coated steel building products. The production at Newcastle commenced in 1921 and it was the Lysaght company, that pioneered modern steel coating technologies and continued to do so in their Australian works. (Bluescope Lysaght, "Lysaght: Our Heritage," Lysaght, www.lysaght.com>Home>About (accessed 15 December, 2009))}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{31} Jill Stowell, interview with the author, 11 November, 2007. The staff at the BHP referred to them as the ‘silver tails’. There was a slight connection between John Lysaght Australia and the fine arts. Teddy Lysaght, who inherited the company from his father was a painter and had been to Paris to study. In Newcastle there were also links. Rankin and Nathan was the legal firm for Lysaght in this city. Paddy Rankin, daughter-in-law of Rankin Senior was a close friend of Robert Hughes the art critic and author and was part of his art community. In the early 1960s, Vincent Wardell, Production Manager for Lysaght, was a strong supporter of the arts. (Jill Stowell, 11 November 2007. Interview with the author.)}
Despite their earlier decision not to support the arts in Newcastle, BHP had a change of policy in the late 1950s. Essington Lewis, who had worked hard to advance the prospects of the BHP became strongly involved in the community and made important links with members of the University of Newcastle faculty. His daughter-in-law, Mary, worked with Norma Allen in the Newcastle Water Board Drafting Department, and his son, Jim, was later to show and sell his bonsai arrangements in one of the Low Show Group exhibitions.

**Influences as students**

The Low Show Group women, when they enrolled from 1953 to 1955 at the Newcastle campus of the National Art School, were fortunate as great improvements had been made in the structure of the courses, facilities, and the teaching staff. Like many other students the Low Show Group became students of John Passmore. Elizabeth Potter points out: “During his brief stay in Newcastle, Passmore was to have a lasting effect on the work and artistic vision of many Newcastle artists”32 His stylistic influence can be best seen in the early work of the Low Show Group artists. Through his teaching Passmore introduced his students to modernism, therefore the Low Show Group artists were made aware of the shift to modernist painting inspired by Cezanne that Passmore had studied in Europe.

Passmore found inspiration in Newcastle and did some of his best works here. Pearce wrote: “The atmosphere he had absorbed and the work he had done in Newcastle was to sustain him for a very long time.”33 He depicted fishermen and children on beaches, wharves and piers, along with the other images which also appear in the work of the Low

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Show Group artists. 34 While Passmore’s abstraction was then described as “highly sensitive pastiches of Cezanne” 35 his major contribution was the investigation of Cezanne’s discovery that “we do not experience an object from one viewpoint.” 36 This method of seeing and working Passmore had brought back to Australia and revealed to his students in Newcastle in 1954.

It is possible that initially it was not only Passmore’s style of painting that influenced the Low Show women artists, but also their affinity with the subject matter of the ocean and harbor. However their interpretation of this subject matter was different to that of Passmore’s. Only Norma Allen continued with this theme in later works.

In the Students of Passmore exhibition in 1992, Allen’s early portrait of Norman Talbot, demonstrated the influence that Passmore had on her work at that time. Margaret Eley wrote in her review that “Passmore insisted on hard work and he imparted a total commitment to art…once Passmore’s lessons were learnt, interest in them faded but in a subtle way, his influence flows on.” 37 This was more relevant to Allen’s art making practice than the other students included in the exhibition.

Norma Allen

In Norma Allen’s retrospective exhibition in 1995 it was noted that a group of the works exhibited reflected “not only the surface ultimately derived from Cezanne, but

36 Ibid. Page 207.
Passmore’s favourite subjects of fishermen, gulls.” 38 It was not only Passmore who influenced Norma Allen. She studied drawing with Paul Beadle and Peter Sparks and design with Brian Cowley until 1958. In 1961 she enrolled in the newly established ceramic course, with Madeleine Scott Jones as teacher. Yet her interactions with Passmore were to have a profound influence on her career as an artist.

Contrary to other student’s often difficult relationships with Passmore, Allen’s experience was rewarding and not problematic, because of her enthusiasm and natural ability. Passmore was well renowned for ignoring students who had not pleased him or reducing them to near tears with his acid tongue. It was claimed that “most people respected him as an artist but were terrified of him as a person. He had an instinct to put the pins exactly into anyone’s individual weakness”. 39 In a letter to Allen after his departure from Newcastle he explains the difficulty he had with students even in Sydney:

Of course down here is no different. Students think lessons are the secret of progress. I can teach students to want to learn and work themselves. I hope to discover a way with those who merely sit on their buttocks. 40

Of all of the artists of the Low Show Group, Norma Allen was “most profoundly influenced by the persuasive teachings of John Passmore and his style of painting in which realistic subjects were broken down into an increasingly abstract grid of colour and brush-strokes.” 41 Yet, it is apparent in her later mature work that she developed her own

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41 NMH, "Retrospective Exhibition."
style, taking what she felt was relevant, and using that as part of her art making practice.

It appears her relationship with Passmore was the catalyst for her aspiration to a professional career in fine arts.

In an interview in 1985, Allen recounted her memories of Passmore, not as a difficult individual but one who had a sense of humour, although he did say “You have to laugh or you might cry”. Passmore expected full dedication from his students and could not imagine the combination of painting and domestic life.

Students remembered Passmore emphasizing the drawing of the skeleton and not the flesh and to ‘push the figures around.’ This technique of drawing can be seen in Allen’s early paintings which reflected Passmore’s influence both in the drawing of the human form as in Plates 6 and 7 and in the painterly style he was passionate about.

Allen’s drawing in Plate 8, shows her representation of the human form in 1960.

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42 Norma Allen, "John Passmore in Newcastle," Artemis, Newcastle Regional Gallery Journal, no. October-December (1985). (No page numbers). She recalled that there was usually an edge to his laughter but fondly remembered one incident “One day, while drawing in our garden, he found the lawn hilarious, remembering his own mower hurled into Sydney Harbour and the ensuing freedom”.

43 Ibid.

44 Pearce, "John Passmore 1903 to 1984." Page 17. When Passmore went out on drawing trips he did not make sketches on the spot, but would return to his studio and draw the figures from memory. These would be then incorporated in larger drawings or oil paintings.

45 This work by Allen, Newcastle Art Gallery and Conservatorium Committee Meeting, 1960, ink on paper, was purchased in 1960 by Gil Docking and later presented to the Newcastle Region Gallery in 1992.
Plate 6  *Anatomical Drawings of me* (sic) *leg*, John Passmore, date unknown, pencil on newsprint, 50.6 x 37.8 cm. Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

Plate 7  *Sandfight*, John Passmore, 1956, detail of drawing, ink on paper, dimensions not given, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
Plate 8 *Newcastle Art Gallery and Conservatorium Committee Meeting*, Norma Allen, 1960, drawing, ink on paper, 25.5 x 37.2 cm. Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

Plate 9 *Lake Holiday*, Norma Allen, 1963, gouache on paper, 45 x 61.5 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
Allen’s gouache on paper painting, *Lake Holiday*, 1963, shows the style of breaking up the form influenced by Cezanne, which Passmore used and taught his students (plate 9). Even after Passmore departed Newcastle to take up a permanent position at East Sydney Technical College, Allen kept in touch through correspondence and trips to Sydney where they would visit galleries and discuss exhibitions.\(^{46}\)

At the time of her retrospective exhibition she reflected on her career as an artist and described that the main influence was her teacher and mentor John Passmore and said “you may have the talent to be an artist but it takes a good teacher to bring it out.” \(^{47}\) In 1960 Allen wrote in an artist statement that her principal aim was “to discover and learn”.\(^{48}\) This philosophy sustained her through her career.

Mary Beeston

Mary Beeston commenced classes in 1954, but it was not painting and drawing that was her first choice. Initially she wished to study ceramics and, as a course in that discipline had not commenced at the Newcastle National Art School, she signed up for the six year art course in the painting class taught by Joy Ewart.\(^{49}\) When Ewart resigned due to illness,

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\(^{46}\) Edmund Capon, Letter, 13 February 1996. Personal Correspondence to Norma Allen acknowledging the receipt of letters between Allen and Passmore. (Archives, NSW Gallery). Early in her association with John Passmore, Allen was entrusted with a portfolio of drawings by that artist. She had had a special bond with Passmore and she made the decision to donate these drawings as a gift to the Art Gallery of New South Wales. In February 1996 she received a letter from Edmund Capon thanking her for her generous gift and said that it doubled their holdings of drawings by this “most important Australian artist”. Along with the drawings she also included a group of letters Passmore wrote to her in the 1950s. These were placed in the Passmore archives, part of the collection at the Art Gallery of NSW. These generous gifts reflected the period when Passmore was in Newcastle at a very important time of his life and career.


\(^{48}\) Norma Allen, "Generic Questionaire (Schedule D)," ed. Newcastle Region Art Gallery (Newcastle: Newcastle Region Art Gallery, 1960).

\(^{49}\) Ewart was instrumental in the establishment of the Willoughby Art Centre in Sydney.
she was replaced by John Passmore. For Beeston, “John Passmore’s teaching was the beginning of everything.”  

As with other students taught by Passmore, both in Newcastle and Sydney, she acknowledged that he was a difficult man but also a highly influential painter and teacher and she “could learn as much from him in thirty minutes as from most other teachers in a week.” “He somehow made you feel that if you managed to please him, even the tiniest bit, that what you have done is worthwhile.”

Beeston believed that Joy Ewart wanted her class to imitate things and so Beeston just “puddled along.” In contrast, Passmore “was forthright, hard and terribly demanding” which suited her. For eighteen months as a student of Passmore, Beeston painted nothing else but bottles and apples. She did not question this, but did what was asked of her. She said “I’ve always been the sort of person who, if someone made demands on me, I’ve responded to the demands more than if someone smoothed me down.” This may have been because she respected Passmore and that “he gave of himself unstintingly.”

During her six years part time at the art school Beeston was exposed to a group of teachers that all had their particular strengths. Paul Beadle taught drawing and she was made “aware of line in his class”. She felt Sparks was a “real throw it away type teacher – grasp what you could”.

When Beeston, along with other former students of John Passmore, was invited to exhibit in the Influences of John Passmore Exhibition at Maitland City Art Gallery in 1992, she

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52 Celtlan, "Mary Beeston Painter and Designer." Page 4.
53 Mary Beeston, 1989.
54 Celtlan, "Mary Beeston Painter and Designer." Page 4.
55 Mary Beeston. 1999.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
talked publicly about the influence of Passmore on her work. She recollected on the early
days of her association with Passmore and how he expected nothing but the students’
maximum effort. For Beeston this was to be a benchmark that stayed with her in
whatever she did.58 This was one of the aspects of her training with him that she valued
most. The other she said, was that she “developed a love of oil paint for its own sake, no
other painting medium has given me the same satisfaction”.59

However, Beeston does not contribute all of her influences to Passmore. She said that she
only really understood what Passmore was proposing when Brian Cowley, in his design
class, introduced her to the use of colour, hue, value and intensity as a means of creating
a sense of three dimensional forms.60 She said:

> It is difficult to estimate the influence of one teacher, to know how much of it remains when his
tuition has been overlaid by many other influences. I regard ‘Potteries’ as showing the strongest and
purest evidence of Passmore’s influence in any of my work. I believe it is still apparent in ‘Blue
Gums’.61

In several of Beeston’s early works in *The Influences of John Passmore Exhibition*, his
style is evident, but she claims it is not in her paintings of 1992.62 It was 1992 before
Beeston moved away from this view of modernism. Michael Hedger wrote in *The
Newcastle Herald* that “she had moved into a new romanticism. Her pastels show delight

59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid. This work is in the Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
62 Ibid.
and grace in the mundane through a more naïve approach”.  

However the influence of Passmore and modernism, in her case, was to last nearly forty years.

It was also Brian Cowley whose teaching had a huge impact on Beeston. She said “he wore himself to a frazzle with his teaching, he gave himself totally.”

Her love of learning for art was fed by Cowley when he introduced her to a broad spectrum of art including Oriental, Islamic, Indian and European.

Beeston said that:

She remembers going to see an exhibition of contemporary art in Sydney with Brian Cowley and him standing her in front of three black paintings. He said ‘just stand still and look at those three paintings – look at them.’ She looked and looked and finally saw green areas and red areas appear.

Beeston said Cowley started her on “being fascinated with colour”. She said that he also guided her to approach colour “with a scientific, not just a poetic approach”.

When Gil Docking was writing about the Beeston painting he purchased for the Newcastle City Art Gallery Collection in 1969, he said “the painting was an example of finely adjusted and balanced shapes with emphasis on the linear aspects of the composition,” and that it was well organized and carefully thought out. This still life certainly showed evidence of the linear qualities taught by Cowley, and the influence of Passmore’s focus on subject matter. Alan Farrelly, art critic for The Newcastle Herald discussed the “cerebral approach” of Beeston’s work and her remote rather than emotive

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65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
response to subject matter, when this work was again exhibited in the Newcastle City Art
Gallery in 1972,\textsuperscript{71} as “it was the modernist’s concern with transparent colours to develop
variety and flexibility in the interplay and balance of rhythm and shape”.\textsuperscript{72}

Betty Cutcher

Betty Cutcher was first inspired by the sculpture by Wendy Solling\textsuperscript{73} which she had seen
in an exhibition in Maitland.\textsuperscript{74} Cutcher’s interest in art commenced long before she
became a student at the Newcastle National Art School. While a student at Newcastle
Church of England Grammar School she studied art in fourth and fifth year.\textsuperscript{75} Cutcher
came from a creative family\textsuperscript{76} and spent much of her time as a child in the creative
environment with her maternal grandfather who was a well respected architect in
Newcastle.\textsuperscript{77}

The advent of the Second World War changed the direction of Cutcher’s life. After
leaving school she enlisted in the Women’s Australian Air Force and became an
electrical fitter in Deniliquin working on the Wirraway aircrafts. At the end of the war
she came back to Newcastle and worked for a short time at Stewarts and Lloyds, before

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Patricia Brennan, "Sr. Angela Solling Osc : Anglican Nun, Priest, Sculptor 1926-2002," \textit{Australian
Religious} (2002). Page 8. Solling had attended the now famous Slade School of Art in London, where in
the early 1950s she was recognized as “one of Australia’s more promising young sculptors. Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} NMH, "Sculptress Chosen to Exhibit at Festival," \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald}, 4 June 1959.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Robert Wilson, \textit{This Is Lake Macquarie} (Sydney: Landsdowne Press, 1983). Page 38. Her mother later
became a spinner and a keen gardener making all her dyes for her fleece from seeds, leaves and
flowers from the garden.
\textsuperscript{77} Ian Cutcher, 13 April 2008. \textit{Interview with the author}. Her sister Joyce Cliff became a well known potter
in Newcastle and a brother a painter.
marrying in 1946. Her son Ian said he thought her experiences and freedom during the war made her discontent with the role of wife and mother.\textsuperscript{78}

In 1953, when she commenced classes at the Newcastle National Art School, she gained experience in 2D art making but it was the sculpture tuition from Paul Beadle, and later from David Tolley, that inspired her.\textsuperscript{79} This was to have an impact on her career and her life in general.\textsuperscript{80} In 1959 she commenced the pottery course at the art school with Madeleine Scott Jones, which influenced her choice of medium later in her career when her main output was pottery and bronze medallion making.

Elizabeth Martin

Elizabeth Martin, who was born in England, commenced her art education before she was a teacher at the Newcastle National Art School. She attended art school in Exeter in Devon, and then in London, with the idea of becoming a commercial artist. She attended Westminster Technical College and Chelsea Polytechnic, where the training was conducted along similar lines to Exeter. Martin became a painter, sculptor and printmaker. She married in 1939 and came to Australia in the same year. She joined the Newcastle Art Society, where she met Reg Russom who asked Martin to be his assistant teacher at the Newcastle National Art School.\textsuperscript{81} She later became a student of John Passmore, but of all the Low Show artists she and Cutcher were the least influenced stylistically by his teachings. Martin had by then developed her own individual style and choice of subject

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} NMH, "Sculptress Chosen to Exhibit at Festival."
\textsuperscript{81} Elizabeth Martin, Handwritten notes 1986. Archives of Charles Martin. She was still teaching at the art school when Russom left due to ill health and Paul Beadle was appointed as head teacher in 1954. She then chose to become a part-time student as well as assistant teacher.
matter long before she met Passmore. Her early work was illustrative and even then portrayed the fantasy images that she would develop later.

Rae Richards

Rae Richards joined the class at art school several years after the other five artists, initially in the night classes and then, when there was a vacancy, she transferred over to the day classes. She became an accepted member of a dedicated group of students rather than a part-timer.

Richards’ experiences and influences at the art school were not unlike Elizabeth Martin’s in that she felt the teacher who had the most impact on her understanding of concepts was Brian Cowley, and to a lesser extent Paul Beadle. The form of abstraction that Richards used was not that of Passmore but of Brian Cowley. When Richards joined the class in 1957 she immediately recognized his worth as a teacher. She believed that he “gave his students a thorough grounding in painting techniques and in the disciplines, both intellectual and technical, required to turn the landscape into the highly structured oil paintings on the threshold of abstraction.”

In an interview with Stowell in 1996, Richards said:

82 Her first contact with the growing art scene in Newcastle was through her association with Rosemary Ramsey, a friend from Melbourne, who had returned to Newcastle. Through her, Richards met Paul Beadle, who was then head of the Newcastle Campus of the National Art School. She also became acquainted with Betty Cutcher, who was a student there. It was due to her association with them that her interest in art was rekindled, which then prompted her to join the evening classes at the Art School. She gained entry into two night classes a week. This was not easily achieved, as these classes had become very popular and it was difficult to gain a place. She said she had to talk her way into being admitted to the classes and perhaps the fact that she had come from Melbourne helped persuade the powers that were. (Rae Richards, Interview with the author, 26 April, 2007).
83 Rae Richards, Interview with the author, 26 April 2007.
84 Brian Cowley arrived in Australia in 1952, having studied painting, drawing and mural painting in Birmingham. He taught at the Newcastle National Art School from 1955 to 1969. Cowley left Newcastle to take up the position as Head of Canberra Art School.
Rather than ‘see and put’ he taught his students to think pictorially, to pass their perceptions of landscape or still life through such articulating filters as an arbitrary and strictly limited palette (Prussian Blue and Light Red with black and white, just like J.W. Turner). Perspective was flattened, tonal cadences from dark to light were clearly defined. Form was modeled by light. Compositions were unified, often by breaking surfaces into the grid forms also advocated by John Passmore and Godfrey Miller.86

Richards’ memories of the extent of Cowley’s influence on her were dominated by the fact that she found him to be a meticulous painter. He introduced Richards to the palette knife and her adoption of this technique, as an alternative to the brush, radically altered her art making practice. She adopted his limited colour palette, and this made her far more knowledgeable about colour and its properties, and how to use them to achieve her desired outcome.87

Passmore had completed his stint at the Newcastle National Art School before Richards arrived and her only exposure to his teaching was when he replaced Paul Beadle for a short period. Therefore, his influence was not as strong on her work as it was on that of the other students. However, Richards was included in the list of students he taught in Newcastle and was invited to exhibit in the Students of John Passmore Exhibition in 1992. Despite her refutation that she was not influenced by Passmore, a connection was made by one art reviewer at the time: “Rae Richards also continues to show the Passmore influence in her late, clear, cool, fresh still-lifes.”88 In a 1993 statement Richards said:

I think he taught people to really ‘see’ things not as one expects to see them, but as they really are. Once

86 Ibid.
87 Rae Richards, Interview, 26 April 2007.
one has ‘seen’ the purple shadows on a lemon, life is never the same again. Where and how the light falls and the quality of that light is what one strives to possess by painting. And in so doing, never to offend against the picture plane (sic).  

This quality is still is evident in her paintings.

In the 2007 interview with Richards she again confirmed that it was Crowley, not Passmore who was the greatest influence, however she did say that Passmore taught her to look at how light falls on a subject. Richards had found Passmore difficult, rude and sarcastic and she said that it appeared that he delighted in demoralising students.

Lillian Sutherland

Lillian Sutherland was a teacher when she commenced her formal art education at the Newcastle National Art School in 1955 under the tutorship of Paul Beadle, John Passmore and Brian Cowley. The influence of Passmore can be seen in an oil on board student work made in 1957, Gold Jar (plate 10). In this work Sutherland experimented with form and balance.

Another oil on board painting, Williams River at Patterson (plate 11) made in the same year, is less like Passmore’s style and more like the style she was to further develop over the years. The partial abstraction of the subject matter and the distinct use of colour and tone to achieve an almost impressionistic light in the composition continued throughout her career.

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90 Rae Richards. Interview, 18 April, 2007.
91 Maitland Mercury, "Passmore Influences Shine through Works."
92 Rae Richards. Interview with the author, 18 April, 2007.
Plate 10  *Gold Jar*, Lillian Sutherland, 1957, painting, oil on board, dimensions not given, private collection of Anne Adrienne, Newcastle, NSW.

Plate 11  *The Williams River at Patterson*, Lillian Sutherland, 1957, painting, oil on board, dimensions not given, private collection of Anne Adrienne, Newcastle, NSW.
Madeleine Scott Jones

Madeleine Scott Jones, who joined the group in the second Low Show Group exhibition, was the only member who did not train at the Newcastle National Art School. Her First association with the art school was when she met several members of the Low Show Group on her arrival in 1959 and then when she established the ceramics course at the Newcastle National Art School in 1961.

Lovoni Webb

Lovoni Webb enrolled at the Newcastle National Art School in 1953 after returning from Sydney. Her teachers were John Passmore, Paul Beadle and Brian Cowley. She said it was “as a student of John Passmore that I began to understand more about art, and in particular the importance of drawing as well as the theories of colour and form of artists such as Paul Cezanne.” Webb’s next two years were to have a big impact on the direction her life would take. The positive educational experience she received from John Passmore and Paul Beadle cemented her decision to make art her profession. She said: “The years spent at Newcastle Technical College 1953 – 1955 with the teachers (John Passmore in particular) and students formed a sound foundation for my efforts and enthusiasm for art.”

After completing the art course at Newcastle Art School, Webb made the decision to move to Sydney and undertake the full Art Diploma Course at East Sydney Art School. It was here that she met up again with Passmore as a teacher and like many of his students remembered significant incidents:

95 Ibid.
I was also a student in a number of classes by John Passmore at East Sydney Technical College. I remember an outdoor drawing group (we drew in the College grounds and the immediate area of Darlinghurst), struggled with perspective and the problem of drawing and capturing growing forms – trees, plants. Tashism was mentioned where the liveliness of the pen line or brush stroke could perhaps express the nature of the tree or plant, be it Moreton Bay Fig or Poplar.\textsuperscript{96}

Webb remembered that:

Later his paintings when seen in exhibitions were continual reminders of the poetry of paint (one I recall at the Art Gallery of New South Wales “Bathers and Birds”) and of the insight of John Passmore as an artist and teacher.\textsuperscript{97}

\textbf{Married with Children}

When these women enrolled to study art at the Newcastle National Art School in the mid 1950s, female students far outnumbered the men. The nature of the city itself, being strongly positioned on industrial economic activity, meant that men should do ‘real men’s’ work and have masculine interests. An anti-intellectual and pro-male domination existed in the city. Despite this majority, women did not often pursue professional art careers. The Victorian period had reinforced in females the belief that the creative work they did was meaningless in terms of the public arena. Creative work by women was still viewed in terms of the polite accomplishments of female domestic life and was not considered serious as it was only part of the private sphere. Such attitudes towards women’s work have had a long history and continued well into the middle of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
The prosperity of the post war period did not change the stereotypes of the woman’s role or the community’s attitudes to it. The majority of women left employment to marry and have children. Although some married women were forced back to work, usually in menial jobs, due to poor economic situations, most women who decided to step out of the ‘suburban stereotype’ of wife and mother in the mid-1950s to pursue a career, faced many difficulties. For those whose who chose to pursue a career as a professional artist the difficulties were many.

The six women, and the two who later participated in the Low Show Group exhibitions, came from diverse backgrounds. However, the original six had one thing in common - they were all married with children.

In 1957 when Rae Richards commenced art classes in Newcastle she, like many women at the time, considered her children and family duties a priority. However, she did not use this as an excuse for not developing her own talents. Richards continued her night classes with the assistance of a supportive husband until her children went to school, when she was able to attend the full-time course which radically changed her commitment to learning about art.⁹⁹

The achievements of women were made more difficult if they had children. Some women artists have indicated that their domestic situation may have contributed to their art practice and have often produced some of the best work of their careers when faced with adversity. Barbara Hepworth, the British sculptor, said that her children, rather than

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hindering her, enriched her art and that her art helped her to cope with the “worst marital nightmares.”

However, Newcastle society’s perception of the role of women in the 1960s was a traditional one and the women artists were treated in this way. This situation was as relevant in the art community as in other areas. This was demonstrated in the 1960 feature in The Newcastle Sun’s ‘News for Women’. This article “Six Women Artists Showing Work at Regional Exhibition” failed to give them credit for the professional standard they had achieved in this exhibition. The writer said:

Six of the eight artists exhibiting at the City Art Gallery are Newcastle housewives who have made time in between home chores to prepare work for the show. All members of the group are mothers but they agree that their families are a tremendous help to their work. As well as encouragement they receive practical help when it comes to cooperation about home chores to allow them time for their art.” “Rae Richards (Mrs. P. Richards of Merewether) is relaxing after the hectic month’s preparation for the exhibition on a short holiday in Melbourne, where her husband, a metallurgist, is attending a conference. They have three sons, Phillip (12), Geoffrey (8) and James (6).

100 F Borzello, A World of Our Own: Women as Artists (London: Thames and Hudson, 2000). Page 188. Hepworth’s experience as a mother was unique or at least rare in that she gave birth to triplets while still having the responsibility of being the breadwinner. Her husband, artist Ben Nicholson, was producing artworks that were not salable at the time. Borzello, A World of Our Own: Women as Artists. Page 189. Although the Low Show Group artists could not be compared with Barbara Hepworth as an artist, they were still women trying to forge a professional artistic career.

101 Newcastle Sun, "Six Women Artists Showing Work at Regional Exhibition," The Newcastle Sun, 10 November 1960. There was no reference in the article to the two male exhibitors, Don Morris and Charles Pettinger. The inclusion of this information may have given a more accurate account of the women’s ability. The author’s reference to Rae Richards’s husband attending a conference in Melbourne was not relevant in a review of an exhibition.
Suzi Gablick wrote in her essay “The Double Bind” that historically, society viewed the unmarried woman as a ‘disadvantaged person’ yet, if married, she was frowned upon if she chose to pursue a career, due to the conflict between work and the traditional role of wife and mother.\textsuperscript{102} This conflict created real problems for intelligent women of the time and these women artists in Newcastle, determined to be professionals, would have experienced this conflict.

Initially Gablick, from her own “privileged position”\textsuperscript{103} refused to believe that women were “victims of a mysterious fatality”. She said that she “refused to conclude that their ovaries condemn them to live forever on their knees. I believed that personal credibility was achieved by acid intelligence, enlightened will and superior effort.”\textsuperscript{104} Yet in a community such as Newcastle in 1960, the stereotypical image of the role of women would have been strong and to break out of that would have taken more than acid intelligence, enlightened will and superior effort. It would require an environment that was conducive and a support system that included people with similar interests and goals. Gablick later acknowledged that it was not wholly the choice of the woman to sacrifice her identity completely for the security of domesticity that prevented her from achieving, but a more complex set of factors of social conditions. Gablick concludes:

Certainly the field of human actions tends to operate in problematic terms. However, those persons who develop an awareness of the factors which are conditioning them at any given time have the probability of de-constructing the field and switching their conduct from the expected channels. In this reflective self-awareness lies the promise of an indispensable change in our culture, which until

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
now has been saturated with assumptions, both conscious and unconscious, of male superiority.\textsuperscript{105}

This awareness contributed to the success of these women artists who formed the Low Show Group. In an interview in 2007, Richards said when the original six women made the decision to form the group they did not write any formal manifesto, but instead had a verbal understanding of what they wished to achieve.\textsuperscript{106} This group can be defined as a collective as they had come together under their own management with the same aim, in this case - to show and sell their work.

Richards was the youngest member and said there was no hierarchy in the group; they were all equal, although she personally felt she was the catalyst. She said that she came to Newcastle with ideas.\textsuperscript{107} Richards had knowledge of all of the art competitions that were happening at that time and explained that if you exhibited in any annual show, the organizers sent an invitation the following year. Details of competitions and exhibitions were also displayed on the notice board at the art school. Initially one of the aims of the group was to submit their work to these exhibitions and competitions. One of them would collect the work while another packed them ready for the courier.\textsuperscript{108}

Richards said they did not work together or discuss their art making practice, such as innovation or style. They had individual studios, however, they would sometimes get together for lunch and discuss art in general, such as exhibitions they had seen. The Newcastle art community was small and although they saw a lot of each other, they were part of different social groups.

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Rae Richards. \textit{Interview with the author}, 2009.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Rae Richards, \textit{Interview with the author} , 11 November 2009.
The Low Show Group artists were all serious about forging professional art careers. Richards pointed out that several other female students from their class at art school had moved on to East Sydney Technical College for further studies and became high school art teachers. However, these students were single and had scholarships that enabled them to be financially independent. A few of the male students also left Newcastle to further their careers, some also taking up studies at East Sydney Technical College Art School.

The women of the Low Show Group, were financially dependent on their husbands, and still had the responsibilities of homes, husbands and children. They acknowledged that they could not move away from Newcastle and so made the decision to solve the problems facing them as emerging artists by staying in the Newcastle and creating their own art community. These six women had great respect for one another and all had a high level of commitment towards achieving their goals together.

**Achieving a Goal**

Despite the opening of the Newcastle City Art Gallery in 1957, the absence of a commercial gallery created a huge disadvantage to artists and their supporters. Several attempts to open galleries had been made, without success.

In 1947 Mrs. L Campbell established a ‘picture gallery’ for the display and sale of local artists. She first conceived the idea when she realized that there was no permanent gallery in Newcastle to show and sell local art. As she already conducted a library, in the former Baby Health Centre on the main road in Mayfield, she decided to use the space at the

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109 They were Rhona Scott and Lovoni Webb.
111 Ibid.
back of the building for the gallery. The gallery opened in May 1947 and displayed thirty or more oils, watercolours, pen and ink sketches and plaques made by local artists. Her main aim was to interest buyers, not only from Newcastle, but those from out of town and from surrounding country areas. Another aspect of the gallery that she felt would benefit the community was her plan to encourage the school children, who congregated outside the library in the afternoon waiting for buses, to go in and view the paintings. This was to serve the dual purpose of “keeping them out of mischief and interesting them in art”.\footnote{NMH, "Mayfield Gallery Shows Local Artists' Work," \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald}, 1 May 1947. Page 8. There was no more available information on this project to judge whether it had been a success, or what if any support she had received from the citizens of Newcastle.}

A similar attempt to bridge the gap was made by Mary Beeston and her husband Larry, who, in 1955, established an outlet for marketing artists’ works. A lending library they had purchased at 105 Beaumont Street, Hamilton to set up a picture framing business became ‘Turana Gallery’. Beeston recalled that it was “the only private gallery in Newcastle.”\footnote{Celtlan, "Mary Beeston Painter and Designer."Page 5. Beeston said the most exciting exhibition they had was Peter Rushforth’s first exhibition. Ibid. Page 5.} However space was limited and it eventually closed its doors in 1959.

The Low Show artists believed that what they were doing was not a hobby, but serious work and to be considered professionals they needed to take action.\footnote{Rae Richards. \textit{Interview}, 2009.} In the interview with Rae Richards she said “Newcastle was maturing at that time – a growth of interest in culture rather than a work culture” There was a thirst for original artworks in Newcastle. Richards also commented that “people were now able to look at original artworks and purchase them for their private use. Even if they did not purchase works they were experiencing something that up until this time was unavailable.”\footnote{Ibid.}
Richards felt that exhibiting was a crucial factor in being an artist. In an interview in 1984, for *The Newcastle Herald*, she said that exhibiting an artwork was important as “a work of art is not finished until it has a viewer”, and felt that most artists wanted to exhibit. With this philosophy Richards entered as many competitions and exhibitions out of the Newcastle area, with her main aim to be hung and become better known.

It was when the six women finally decided to form a group in 1961, that they took control of their artistic future.

**Now to Exhibit**

In the broader art world, feminist thinkers and theorists (and somewhat later) feminism raised the issue of the position of women artists and their impact on art history. Certainly some women artists introduced feminist issues in their art making practice, by using specific images and concepts and by the rejection of some established conventions. Others, less overtly, achieved success in a time when it was not the norm. Although the Low Show Group did not consciously embrace a feminist doctrine, they were pivotal by their actions in the establishment of a strong female presence in the art world of Newcastle.

Nationally there had been early initiatives by women coming together in the arts. In 1906 six people established a supportive structure ‘The Society of Arts and Crafts of New South Wales.’ There had been similar societies established earlier in Victoria and

117 Ibid.
118 Richards sent her work off to exhibitions she had not even heard of. (Rae Richards, *Interview with the author*, 2007) One of these was an exhibition with the strange sounding title of *Fisher's Ghost Art Festival*. This festival was first staged in 1956 and overseen by a Sub Committee of Campbelltown City Council. It became important in the Australian art calendar. Campbelltown City Council, "Campbelltown Fisher's Ghost Festival," www.campbelltown.nsw.gov.au (accessed 28 November, 2009).
Tasmania. In the New South Wales group, the members were almost exclusively female.  

119 “This was not because of discrimination but rather as a reflection of the serious interest in the decorative arts by women in New South Wales.”  

120 The philosophy was that “in this society each person would assist the practice of fellow members, and equally seek advice in developing their own; and that the intention was to start a seriously committed and continuing society.”  

121 They were committed to working collectively before the feminists of the 1970s had provided a model.  

In 1907 the comprehensive exhibition of women’s art, *The First Australian Exhibition of Women’s Work*, was held in the Melbourne Exhibition Building in Victoria. This show exhibited a number of works by both recognized and unknown women artists. Despite the title, this was not the first exhibition of this kind in Australia as there had been two previous exhibitions in Sydney.  

122 Perhaps the most publicised early exhibition was the 1946 *Exhibition of Australian Women Painters*, at the Art Gallery of NSW.  

123 “Although this exhibition was planned in association with the second conference of the Australian Women’s Charter Committee, the exhibition was ‘feminist’ only in its professionalism.”  

124 The works were selected on merit by Hal Missingham, the Director of the AGNSW, mainly from the gallery’s collection.  

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119 Ethel Stephens, (1886-1944) painter, printmaker and teacher, was one of these women.  
   www.printsandprintmaking.gov.au  
   Ethel Stephens, (1886-1944) painter, printmaker and teacher was among this group of women.  
   www.printsandprintmaking.gov.au  
121 Ibid. Page 7.  
123 Ibid. Page 2.  
125 Ibid. page 6.
The women of the Low Show Group gave unstinting support to one another. However, their diverse backgrounds allowed for individuality. These six women, born within seventeen years of each other, originated from different geographical situations, educations and experiences, which inevitably had an impact on their lives and their future art making, yet they came together united by a common mission.

**The Collective**

Elizabeth Martin, Rae Richards, and later Madeleine Scott Jones, had accompanied their husbands, who were required to make career moves, to Newcastle. They found themselves having to reestablish their homes and make new friendships in a city quite unlike that from where they came. The women also had to put careers on hold to support their husbands’ career, particularly Martin and Scott Jones who had established art careers in England, Martin was a graphic artist in London and Scott Jones was a ceramicist and teacher at the Portsmouth College of Art in England.

The Low Show Group women were all married to professionals and appeared to have financial security that allowed them the opportunity to pursue their art making practice. However, for Scott Jones and Martin this was not the situation as the money they earned was needed to help support the family. 126 Martin’s son said in an interview that there were times when it was the only income. 127 Lovoni Webb, who joined the group later, never married.

Probably the one single factor that enabled the group to achieve what they did was their mutual respect and support. At the opening of the *Norma Allen Retrospective* at the

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127 Charles Martin, *Interview with the author*. 2007
Maitland City Art Gallery in 1997, Peter Richards, the husband of Rae Richards, opened the show saying:

Norma Allen was one of a group of six female artists who worked together in Newcastle through the 60’s and 70’s, [sic]an extraordinary group of professionals, each working in her own way or medium, but at all times being very supportive of each another.128

In my interview with Richards she said most of their art making was completed at night, with the artists sometimes staying up until 2.00 am painting.129 Richards pointed out that they all took risks with their painting and attempted things that they had seen or learnt from their classes, their discussions and their many trips together to galleries in Sydney.130 On the way home from these regular excursions there were passionate discussions about what they had viewed and its merits, their criticisms and the impact it made on their understanding of art. Richards said she felt that back in those times it was a more academic, fertile ground for anyone doing worthwhile things. It was her opinion that the group continued to work at what they were doing because they believed it was worthwhile, even though they felt they all had “a contract of marriage and family.”131 Richards said her knowledge of contemporary exhibitions, artists and artworks also came from reproductions and essays about the works in books and magazines. The Newcastle National Art School was lacking an art library when Richards was a student, but the availability of art books and magazines and journals at the Newcastle City Library and Charlestown Library ensured that she had regular access to these publications.

130 Ibid. Art Gallery of NSW, Terry Clunes Gallery, David Jones, Grace Brothers and Farmers Galleries.
131 Ibid.
The Low Show Group Artists

The Low Show Group artists had already established a history of showing together in three group exhibitions before they officially united. The experiences gained from exhibiting enabled them to critically assess the lack of facilities for showing and selling artworks in Newcastle. They had all visited galleries nationally and some internationally and their regular visits to the Art Gallery of NSW as a group gave them the idea of showing and selling their artworks.

There were several reasons why these women selected the title ‘Low Show Group’. Firstly, they agreed to use the basement studio of Norma Allen’s home, at 34 Ridgeway Road, New Lambton, to exhibit and sell their works. Secondly, they wished to keep the prices ‘low’ to enable the public to buy genuine artworks at a reasonable cost. Several of these women had already exhibited in Sydney, and they were all familiar with the gallery scenes in Sydney and Melbourne.132

Their recognition as professionals was what the initial group set out to attain. There was an amateur group established, the Society of Artists, and despite several of the women’s connection with the group, these women wanted more. The socio-economic position of Low Show Group artists did allow them the financial freedom to make artworks, but they felt that they needed to prove themselves by selling their works. Becker discusses this difference when he distinguishes between what he calls a “picture painter”133 from a professional. He makes references to amateur art associations and the absence of “ideologies and aesthetics of the established world of painting.”134 He does not pursue a

132 Ibid.
134 Ibid. Page 98.
judgment of the value of either group as “picture painters may produce paintings no worse than professional artists.” He goes on to say that the serious artist may not want to use the system of distributing artworks for money but to reach an appropriate audience. The women of the Low Show group were concerned about selling their work mainly to confirm their professionalism, particularly with a serious audience. This was the catalyst for establishing the Low Shows.

Conclusion

The Low Show Group of artists were highly motivated and determined women who wanted to become professional artists in a provincial city, which still lacked the support mechanisms necessary for a functional art world. They did not see themselves as ‘isolated creative geniuses’ but as a group of artists with similar aims and ambitions. Kerr reminds us:

There are major benefits in seeing and learning about the art of our own region. It makes us realize that all art exists within society, that it is not the disembodied output of exalted beings.

However, these artists were only able to realise many of their goals because of a gradual growth in the local economy, educational institutions and cultural awareness. Their coming together was the product of what was evolving, and what needed to happen, in the fine art community in Newcastle.

In the next chapter the group exhibitions of the Low Show group are described, the response to their work is noted and their influence in encouraging the development of private galleries in Newcastle is detailed.
CHAPTER 3

LOW SHOW GROUP EXHIBITIONS

Becker includes the distribution of art works as an important aspect of the work of artists. He points out that:

Artists, having made a work, need to distribute it, to find a mechanism which will give people with the taste to appreciate it access to it and simultaneously will repay the investment of time, money, and materials in the work so that more time, money and materials, and cooperative activity will be available with which to make more artworks.¹

The Low Show Group artists were committed to careers in the fine arts. However, their conceptualisation of the profession of artist was firmly based on the idea of giving “people the taste to appreciate it, access to it.”² Furthermore they wanted their audience to have the opportunity of either purchasing it for themselves, or for it to be in public places, so that it could be enjoyed. Consequently, they sought opportunities to show their work in as many venues as possible. This chapter describes the four group exhibitions, details the critical response to them and the development of the private gallery system in Newcastle.

Early Participation

Prior to the formation of the Low Show Group and their subsequent exhibitions, which commenced in 1961, these women had all exhibited in three important Newcastle exhibitions

² Ibid. Page 93.
and others outside the Newcastle region. The Newcastle shows were the *Newcastle City Art Festival* in 1959, the *Regional Survey Exhibition* and the *Collection of Canvases* in 1960.

Newcastle City Art Gallery held its first survey exhibition in 1959. Newcastle City Council organized the *Newcastle City Art Festival* for June-July, 1959, to commemorate the Centenary of Local Government in Newcastle, which had been proclaimed a municipality on 8 June, 1859. It was a national exhibition and any artist, living in Australia could submit work for selection. The selection of entries from the regional area was carried out by Desiderius Orban, the Past-President of the Australian UNESCO Visual Art Committee and a prominent teacher and artist in his own right. The artworks of Norma Allen, Mary Beeston, Betty Cutcher, Elizabeth Martin, Rae Richards and Lillian Sutherland were selected.

In his review, art critic for the *Newcastle Morning Herald*, Sparks, said that:

> A feature of the show is that there is no clear line dividing the regional and general sections of invited works. In each there are big differences in standard, and the customary wide variety of approach and subject matter. One can say, happily or ruefully, that some of the worst were not local products.

He selected several works for praise and among these was Betty Cutcher’s sculpture *Swan*, which he said was of a high standard. He also said that the regional artists Norma Allen and

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4 The exhibition showcased the selected works of fifty five artists including John Brack, Arthur Boyd, John Coburn, Noel Counihan, Tom Gleghorn, Robert Juniper, Jon Molvig, Lloyd Rees and Roland Wakelin. It represented the works of seventeen women artists and thirty eight male artists. The inclusion of only seven male artists from the Newcastle region was not as strong as the female representation of eleven. Ibid.
5 Joan Cairns, "City Art Festival," *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 20 June 1959. Allen’s work was titled *Figure* and Beeston’s painting *After Image*. The two paintings by Martin were *Concert* and *Ferry Boat*. Richards painting was *Tide Wave* and Sutherland’s *Picnic*.
6 Peter Sparks’ biography can be found in Appendix B.
7 Peter Sparks, "Portray Best at Festival," *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 8 June 1959.
Lillian Sutherland were “developing”. This was a positive review for these women artists at this early stage of their career.

However, Sparks was critical of the general standard. He said:

One would have hoped that the exhibition, as the first festival, would have been of a higher standard. That it is no worse than many metropolitan presentations does not temper the disappointment or allow the pretence that it is better than it is. But the development of a gallery is a slow and sometimes painful process, and there exists for some in other centres a prejudice against a new institution that an insistence on high standards will help to overcome more quickly.

Towards the end of 1960, the second survey show was organized by the Newcastle City Art Gallery. The Regional Survey followed on in a similar format to the Newcastle City Arts Festival Exhibition in 1959.

In this invitation exhibition, the curators settled on works of only eight artists, which was in stark contrast to the 1959 exhibition that featured the works of fifty-five artists. The artists in this 1960 exhibition included all six members of the Low Show Group and two male artists, Don Morris, an architect who had just recently moved to Sydney, and Dr. Charles Pettinger. Sparks’ response to the second exhibition was positive. It was titled: “A Rise in Art Standards” and stated:

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8 Ibid. An oil painting Figure, priced at 15gns, was Allen’s entry in this exhibition.
9 Gil Docking, Director of the Newcastle City Art Gallery said that the “exhibition had attracted more interest than any previous exhibition of its kind. More than 3,000 people had seen the pictures since the exhibition opened on June 8th.” Gil Docking, 2007.
10 Sparks, "Portrait Best at Festival."
11 NMH, "The Regional Survey 11 Exhibition," Newcastle Morning Herald, 5 November 1960. This exhibition was again held at the Newcastle City Art Gallery, opening on 3 November through to 26 November.
12 Ibid., Forty seven artworks made up the exhibition, eleven of these were sculptures with the remainder paintings. Betty Cutzer and Don Morris were the sculptors represented in this exhibition. This was a more selective exhibition of regional artists.
Nobody can accuse the eight regional artists exhibiting at Newcastle Art Gallery of a uniform approach to their problems. The wide variety of subject matter and its treatment is a pleasing sign of a healthy growth in the district’s artistic standards. A mark of an artist, and of a good student, is a willingness to tackle a difficult subject, and this quality is the most heartening aspect of the exhibition. There are surprising successes and ‘gallant’ failures, some of the latter caused by overconfidence. There are, to be artists, the benefits of the nerve-wracking business of exhibiting. The benefits for the community are, to a great degree, according to the community’s response.  

Sparks wrote that “each exhibitor shows work with which he or she can be pleased”, and favourably recommended all of the portraits. It was in this exhibition that Betty Cutcher first began to work with the sculptural form, which she continued to use throughout her career. As Lyndon Dadswell had not been to Newcastle to see his sculptures, His and Her, in position in the foyer of the Cultural Centre, he was invited to open the exhibition.  

Joan Cairns also wrote about the show for the ‘Music, Arts and Drama’ column of the Newcastle Morning Herald, on Saturday November 5, 1960. She singled out Lillian Sutherland’s Kingfishers in the Willows, saying it was a delicate imaginative study with a Chinese quality and “one of the most charming pictures in the current Regional Survey  

14 NMH, "The Regional Survey 11 Exhibition." The five portraits were titled Mrs. John Flood; Mrs. Jeffrey Clack; Mrs. Paul Cant; Jake Ramsey and Mirror. (Mirror, a self portrait was purchased by the Beestons.) Of the six Beeston works selected, five were for sale, with prices commencing at fifteen guineas and ranging through to forty guineas. The titles she chose for these paintings were Tangled Gully; Still Life with Jar; Still Life with Black Lustre; J.K.M.; Back View, Sunday Night and Still Life. The Cutcher works Sparks chose as worthy of mention in his review were, Tall Form and Hurdlers.  
15 Ibid. Five of the six sculptures by Cutcher were crafted from wood. The Race and Hurdlers were formed from Cedar, Tall Form from Cheesewood, Pelican from Bolly Gum and Shell from Sassafras. Jillian was made from plaster and all sculptures used the reductive process. The prices commenced at twelve guineas for Shell and The Race, fifteen guineas for Pelican, twenty guineas for Hurdlers while the other two were not for sale. Elizabeth Martin had recently spent six months in South and East Africa and was influenced by the exotic outside world she saw during her visit for her source of ideas for several of her works yet it was her Portrait of Mary Anne and Charlotte that Sparks felt were the stronger.  
16 Ibid., He had directed the casting of the figures in Melbourne but had left for the United States before the works were brought to Newcastle for installation. While these were being set in place in Newcastle he was watching and directing the installation of another of his sculptures in Minnesota. The mixed reception the sculptures received is noted in Chapter 7.
Exhibition.” She also reinforced Sparks’ positive critique of Allen’s portraits. Two other paintings she mentioned were “Elizabeth Martin’s delightful study of a little girl holding a cat, and her fresh and happy, *Puppet Show.*” Cairns, along with Sparks, acknowledged the women’s strong contribution. The media coverage of this exhibition highlighted the women’s potentials, even in such early days of their careers.

In an interview with Gil Docking about the history of the Low Show Group he said:

> The establishment of the Newcastle City Art Gallery and its subsequent development would have provided these Low Show artists with a more professional understanding of the complexities of the making, showing and selling of works of art to the public. The first Hunter Valley Review exhibition was the launching pad for some of these artists. They were a group of strong-minded women who were determined to establish themselves as artists, ‘come what may’.

The success of the Low Show Group in these exhibitions strengthened their profile in Newcastle.

The exhibition, *A Collection of Canvases*, was organized by the Newcastle auxiliary for the Dr. Banardo Homes in 1960 for the twofold purpose of raising money, and letting the public view artworks. Although not held in the Newcastle City Art Gallery, it was important to the cultural life of Newcastle, as it drew its audience from a different area of society. The opening, on the night of 15 June, 1960, was attended by about two hundred guests and the art works by these artists were exposed to a wider audience. The Low Show Group artists

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18 Ibid., Cairns had written about Allen’s work in the previous week’s column.
19 Docking’s biography can be found in Appendix B
22 Ibid.
Allen, Beeston, Richards and Sutherland all contributed four works each for sale. The artists donated part of the money received through sales to the charity.

The introduction of the *Mattara Art Show* in 1961 in Newcastle Civic Park opposite the Newcastle City Art Gallery, gave the artists and the public of Newcastle another annual exhibition. Many regional towns were establishing annual festivals to showcase their areas and provide a cultural event for celebration. Fifteen thousand people came to Civic Park for the opening.23 Works were for sale and subsequently, many Newcastle people purchased original artworks for their homes.24 The Low Show Group artists became regular exhibitors in the *Mattara Outdoor Art Exhibition*.25

The *A Collection of Canvases* exhibition and the *Mattara Art Show* broadened the distribution system necessary for these artists to show and sell their work. It is not always galleries that provide this service, as Becker said “art worlds often have more than one distribution system operating at the same time.”26 However, these were one-offs, or annual shows, that did not provide what a commercial gallery could offer. Despite these attempts at broadening public appreciation, there were no professional commercial galleries in Newcastle in 1961. Becker points out “wherever artists depend on others for some necessary component, they must either accept the constraints they impose or expend the time and energy necessary

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24 Both amateur and professional artists entered works for the exhibition. The number of works shown in this exhibition far exceeded the capacity of the Newcastle City Art Gallery, and the outside venue was more accessible and more visible for the public. This also encouraged visitors to visit exhibitions at the City Gallery opposite the Civic Park.

25 Docking.

to provide it some other way." In order to continue to exhibit the Low Show Group artists mounted their own exhibitions.

**The First Low Show Exhibition 1961**

The Low Show Group had no experience in curating an exhibition yet they were prepared to do what they could to put on a successful show. The women selected the works worthy of showing and framed them. As money was very limited a lot of thought went into how to do much with little. The invitation (plate 12) and catalogue for this exhibition were simple but effective. They were hand made with a screen printed face and the information typed in lower case on a typewriter. Elizabeth Martin designed and printed the invitations.

![Plate 12 Invitation, Low Show Group, 1961, screen print, Elizabeth Martin Archives, Charles Martin, Newcastle, NSW.](image)

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There were ninety-six works in the exhibition ranging in price from 10/6 to 10gns. They included small works in the forms of paintings, drawings and prints. Martin had twenty-two works; Richards nineteen; Allen seventeen; Sutherland twelve; Beeston ten and Cutcher eight works.29

This first exhibition opened on Friday evening, 15 December, 1961, at Norma Allen’s home, for invited guests, and Saturday for the general public.30 There was no paid advertising. Letters were sent to their friends and acquaintances for the Friday night opening and the notices to the general public were placed in the social pages of the Newcastle Sun and the Newcastle Morning Herald. The exhibition was opened by Newcastle identity and art writer, Joan Cairns. She wrote “the idea of a Christmas Show follows a pattern, popular in other large centres, exhibiting smaller, reasonably priced works which can be purchased for Christmas gifts.”31 Most of the ninety-six artworks were sold on the opening night, and the exhibition continued the next day and was a complete sell-out. The exhibition proved far more successful than the women had anticipated, and, because of this, the artists decided to continue with annual shows.

The Second Low Show Exhibition 1962.

The Low Show Group’s successful experience with the first exhibition strengthened their understanding of what made a successful show. Plate 13 shows the invitation for the second exhibition, again designed and printed by Elizabeth Martin.

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29 A wide range of subject matter was represented, but it was the representation of the natural landscape which was the most dominant, followed by the depiction of animals and birds. Figure drawing and images of the urban landscape, which so interested them in art classes as students, were only represented in ten works in this first show. Other themes were portraits, still life, fantasy, and nature. An increase in the number of artworks dealing with the human form can be seen in later exhibitions.

30 Three of the artist’s husbands served drinks and assisted with the guests on the night of the opening.

The second show included the original six artists, with the addition of Madeleine Scott-Jones and Lovoni Webb. Scott-Jones continued to exhibit in the next two shows, but this was the only Low Show Group exhibition for Webb as she moved to Sydney to attend art school.

The show was opened by Mrs James Auchmuty, the wife of the then Head of the University College, on 7 December, 1962.32 Roger and Anne von Bertouch attended this exhibition (plate 14).33

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32 Auchmuty was later made Vice Chancellor of the University of Newcastle when it became autonomous in 1965.
33 It may have been here that the concept of placing a ceiling on the prices of artworks in an exhibition may have mooted Anne von Bertouch to do so in the special Collectors’ Choice Exhibition that commenced at that gallery in 1963.
The notice that appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* made clear the intentions of the Low Show Group artists to make their prices affordable:

Basement art show’s 10 guinea ceiling: Six [sic, there were eight artists in this show] Newcastle artists – all women – are joining forces to hold an exhibition of their small works next month. Titled the “Low Show” with nothing over 10 guineas, it will be held in the basement of artist Norma Allen’s home in Ridgeway Road, New Lambton Heights, on December 7.34

**The Third Low Show Exhibition 1963**

Artists in the third exhibition included Norma Allen, Mary Beeston, Betty Cutcher, Madeleine Scott-Jones, Elizabeth Martin, Rae Richards, Lillian Sutherland and James Lewis. Martin again designed and made the invitations (plate 15). A Japanese theme was employed by the group for the exhibition which opened on Friday, 13 December, 1963.

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Plate 15  *Invitation*, Elizabeth Martin, 1963, screen print, Elizabeth Martin Archives, Charles Martin, Newcastle, NSW.

The Japanese influence (Plate 16) was not the subject matter of the artworks presented, but reflected the inclusion of a collection of Bonzai trees by James Lewis, and a special Japanese born guest, Mrs Suzako Podesta, who wore a national costume for the opening. The artworks in this exhibition were again priced at ten guineas and under. This exhibition was opened by Mrs Steele Douglas, wife of Newcastle doctor, Dr Steele Douglas.

**The Fourth Low Show Exhibition 1964**

The fourth Low Show Group exhibition was again held in Norma Allen’s basement garage and was opened by Douglas Thompson on 11 December. There were nearly two hundred paintings, drawing, collages and prints in this exhibition and sale of works. The press was critical of the exhibitions reporting:

> The thinking women are doing very well. [sic] Some of the work may be lightweight is purely a matter of opinion, but the artistic bargain sale has found a niche for itself in the art world of the city.\(^\text{35}\)

On 15 November, prior to the opening of the fourth show, Allan Watkins\(^\text{36}\) of the *Newcastle Herald* wrote a history of the Low Show Group exhibitions, and included the responses of the respective artists about their views and involvement in the exhibitions. He pointed out that one of the objects of the exhibition was to allow the average person the opportunity to buy genuine artworks at a reasonable price, and in this way, it was a genuine bargain sale. In the fourth exhibition the works were offered to the public for twelve guineas. The artists felt that

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\(^{36}\) Allan Watkins, a journalist for the Newcastle Morning Herald and the author of nine novels, was most remembered for his eighteen years of film reviews with that paper. He was a supporter of the cultural community in Newcastle.
it was important that the ‘average working man or woman’ were able to buy an original art work, that has form, something lacking in even the most expensive reproduction.\(^{37}\)

The views documented by Watkins supported the Low Show Group artists’ philosophy and level of commitment to their art making and exhibitions. He said:

There is very little snob value in the acquisition of an original, says Mary Cutcher [sic]. People buy only what they like and certainly not what they think they ought to like, says Norma Allen. Art patrons are becoming more discriminating, says Rae Richards. A standard is gradually forming in the district, says Elizabeth Martin. And, from Mary Beeston, an increasing interest in the Art Gallery; in artists and in showing, is giving art a long-needed impetus in the community.\(^{38}\)

Also discussed in the article was that art had become fashionable in Newcastle and more accepted in many homes, and that a number of people were putting together private collections of artworks by Newcastle artists. Watkins wrote that Allen said this was not unusual for Novocastrians yet, ‘out-of-towners’ thought it was. She said “it may be parochial, but it certainly encourages local talent.”\(^{39}\) Watkins continued: “The organizers of the Low Show Group are by no means backyard painters or artists”\(^{40}\) He acknowledged the professional status of the artists and included an extensive report on their achievements in the many different art prizes they had participated in and their inclusion in major exhibitions and collections. He said that:

It has been said by a knowledgeable art critic that ‘the work is mostly of a light nature but containing some quite good things. To their credit the artists concerned are determined people and of mature years. They think about their work, these women. The paintings or, for that matter, the other pieces are not mere documentation. The artists are establishing, through style and

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\(^{37}\) Watkins, "High Thinking for Low Show."

\(^{38}\) Ibid.

\(^{39}\) Ibid.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
image their own interpretations and with experimentation, developing techniques and ideas.\textsuperscript{41}

Watkins’ references to the work being mainly “of light nature”\textsuperscript{42} may refer to the artists’ use of pastel colours, which in that pre feminist period, was seen negatively. Also the work was often experimental and the paintings at this time were small in scale.

Watkins said that these “enthusiastic women”\textsuperscript{43} for three years had offered their works in a Christmas show at “bargain basement prices”.\textsuperscript{44} She also indicated that they had worked very hard both with making the artworks and curating the exhibition.\textsuperscript{45}

The initial four Low Show Group exhibitions, between 1961 and 1964, gave Newcastle a taste of what a commercial exhibition could offer and encouraged others to consider the possible establishment of commercial galleries.

\textbf{The von Bertouch Galleries}

The Low Show Group’s contribution to the establishment of commercial art galleries in Newcastle was acknowledged in an article in \textit{The Newcastle Sun}, four days after the opening of their fourth and final Low Show Group Exhibition. “A year of giant strides”,\textsuperscript{46} alerted the public’s attention to the “paucity of cultural outlets, (other than the galleries mentioned) for the culturally inclined”.\textsuperscript{47} The writer applauded an awareness of art that had sprung up in Newcastle. He mentioned that the three galleries which had successful exhibitions during

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Newcastle Sun, "Galleries Fill a Gap," \textit{The Newcastle Sun}, 15 December 1964.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
1964 were The Newcastle City Art Gallery, von Bertouch Galleries, and the Low Show Group exhibition; all were included in a positive overview of the year’s exhibitions.48

The necessity for the Low Show Group artists to exhibit in Norma Allen’s basement came to an end when Anne von Bertouch approached them to exhibit in her gallery in Cooks Hill, Newcastle, which opened in 1963. The Collectors’ Choice exhibition, established by Anne von Bertouch in 1963, and continued until her death in 2003, was modelled on the Low Show Group’s exhibitions.49 It was similar to the four Low Show Group exhibitions in that it had a price ceiling, featured small works and was held annually before Christmas. The first show in 1963 offered works for fifteen guineas and under.50 The Low Show Group artists remained with the von Bertouch Galleries, and throughout their long careers, went on to show annually in the Collectors’ Choice exhibition and in solo and group shows at that gallery.51

In a speech made by Anne von Bertouch at the opening of the Norma Allen Retrospective Exhibition, at Maitland City Art Gallery in February 1995, she acknowledges their contribution:

--------and believe me it was the Low Show Group that made it possible for us to begin. And the very strong Low Show Group and the marvelous people who formed part of it that von Bertouch Gallery was able to begin at all and I thank Norma and all the others who are here who used to show in that wonderful exhibition.52

48 Ibid.
49 Richards.
52 ———, Norma Allen, Retrospective Exhibition Opening (Newcastle: 1995).
The Establishment of Commercial Galleries in Newcastle

The establishment of the von Bertouch Galleries encouraged others to open privately owned, professionally run galleries in Newcastle. Within a short period of time, the Hocking Studios in Maitland, the Seaview Gallery in Redhead, the Armstrong Gallery at Morpeth, and the Craft Galleries at the Junction, were established, considerably expanding the opportunities for artists to exhibit and sell in the local commercial art scene.

The Cottage Gallery, an offspring of Galleries Primitif (established in Sydney 1960), opened in Newcastle in February 1972. The aim of the gallery was to collect works of art by “primitive and unspoiled peoples” and introduce the works into our modern culture. This gallery was not run as other professional commercial galleries, when a dealer sells entirely for financial gain. The gallery was established to promote Australian indigenous art to the public, and create national interest, so that large establishments may embrace and buy works for display.

The Hunter Village Art Gallery also opened in 1972. This gallery was situated in the Hunter Village complex at 509-11 Hunter Street, Newcastle. The works were expensive compared to what was available in other galleries. It was set up by the director, W. A. Hanley, to assist people to establish their own collections. This was a different type of gallery as they “were not greatly concerned with any major appreciation in modern art values.” The works were very traditional with elaborate frames and were hung in a formal gallery setting, replicating a fine salon furnished with antiques.

54 Ibid. Page 14
56 Ibid. Page 19.
In 1972, the Cooks Hill Gallery opened in a converted Bull Street, Cooks Hill residence. They acknowledged the von Bertouch Galleries for the work they had done in the area in educating the public, and creating an increasing awareness of art. The first exhibitions at the gallery were craft orientated, in keeping with their policy to show works of a high calibre to their best advantage. The gallery’s aim was to support craftspeople within the Newcastle region. An article in Artemis, July/August, 1973 states: “It is our belief that an artist living in a provincial centre gains much from the stimulation of working towards an exhibition and can be enriched as an artist by the constructive criticism he [sic] receives on the exposure of his work to the public in many cases for the first time.”57

This list of galleries is not exhaustive. There may have been other galleries that opened, some for only a short period of time, which were not included in this overview. Yet the overall consensus was, that from 1961, when there were no professional commercial galleries in Newcastle, to the mid seventies, the list had grown considerably. This enriched the cultural community of Newcastle and provided a supportive art world for local artists.

Public Galleries

In 1973 the Maitland City Art Gallery opened, providing another major exhibition space, and in 1980 the Lake Macquarie Gallery was established in the old Council Chambers in Boolaroo. In 1975 the Diploma in Art Course, previously offered by the Newcastle National Art School, came under the umbrella of Newcastle College of Advanced Education and the Technical College Art School ran the certificate courses in art. This resulted in two art institutions with their own annual exhibitions which resulted in a large number of students exhibiting in Newcastle.

Conclusion

The members of the Low Show Group wanted to be considered professional artists and to present their work to the public. They saw that the only way this could happen in a city without a commercial gallery was to take the initiative, and, although this required some compromises, to stage their own selling exhibitions. They took a risk, as there was no guarantee that they would be successful. The support of the newspapers in reviewing the shows extended their audience. However, it was the opening of von Bertouch Galleries and later the establishment of other commercial galleries that allowed them to concentrate on their own individual careers. The aims of their collective, to be recognised as professionals within a system of commercial galleries, had been achieved.

While the Low Show Group often continued to exhibit together, they were also spirited individuals with varied interests. In the next chapter, the development of their individual art making practice is described. The experiences which shaped their artworks are detailed and the shift, for some of the group, between art and craft is examined.
CHAPTER 4

LOW SHOW GROUP’S ART MAKING PRACTICE

This chapter traces the development of the artmaking practice of the members of the Low Show Group and endeavours to explain how the changes in their art careers influenced their artworks and the public’s response to their work. They are listed in alphabetical order.

Norma Allen

Despite having no formal art training prior to entering the visual arts course at the Newcastle National Art School in 1954, Norma Allen said “she could not remember when she did not draw or paint, and had always been interested in art, even to the point that in high-school she dropped Latin to take up art.”

Prior to the formation of the Low Show Group, Allen had exhibited her works in numerous exhibitions, mainly outside the Newcastle area. Her experience with these shows had given her an insight into the processes of entering, submitting and exhibiting artworks and the necessity of doing this to gain exposure if she were to advance to a professional status and participate in a commercial art world. During her formative years in art school, Allen was given the opportunity to develop skills and experience in many art forms, such as painting, sculpture, printmaking and drawing. As her career progressed, she continued to represent a diverse range of subject matter, using a number of different art forms.

1 June Lewis, ”An Unusual Form for Exhibition,” Newcastle Morning Herald, 11 December 1980.
Although from the late 1950s, to the early 1960s, Allen was concentrating on portraiture, working mainly in oils, she did not completely abandon her earlier interest in the qualities of different materials and the varying techniques she had experimented with, and would later diversify. Allen spent 1964 working on the landscape and figure paintings she was to include in her first solo exhibition at the von Bertouch Galleries. The subject matter had changed from portraits. Allen said at the time that “she was tending towards abstract landscapes more than figures.”²

Allen’s first art studio was in the basement of her home in New Lambton and, as she continued to produce work, the necessity for more space became apparent. She gradually expanded her studio by taking over the large family rumpus room.³

A major influence on the direction of Allen’s style of working, subject matter, and exposure to the wider world of art, came in the form of an extended overseas sojourn. In 1968 Allen departed on an extensive journey with her husband, John Allen, who was the chief engineer on the ship, M.V. Weirbank. This trip, over a period of eighteen months, ensured a sustained freedom to work that had not existed before. While at sea, Allen’s time was spent painting and reading. She completed about twenty four paintings and a number of sketches over that period.⁴ Allen was able to visit numerous countries in the Pacific, Asia, America and Europe. Countries visited included New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, India and Pakistan, Britain, several European countries, eastern and southern ports in the United States and British

³ Newcastle Sun, "A Choice of Bargains," The Newcastle Sun, November 1965. It was here that the Low Show Group of artists exhibited and sold their works.
Guiana. Leave periods in England and Europe were spent sightseeing and visiting museums and art galleries.\(^5\)

This trip had a significant influence on her artwork and was a valuable learning experience. Her subject matter continued to become more varied. Allen was inspired by the vivid colours of New Guinea and India. She exhibited twice with the Rabaul Art Society while there. “Despite some climatic discomforts I think that traveling by cargo ship is the ideal way to see the world. I found I could relax on board and looked forward to re-joining the ship after a stay in port.”\(^6\)

While on the trip Allen was able to view the works of other artists in galleries. She said “each port we arrived at I’d make a beeline for the nearest art gallery.”\(^7\) Allen used the images she saw and the drawings she made on the trip as subject matter in later exhibitions.

One of the aspects of the trip that influenced Allen profoundly was its confirmation of her love of the sea, and the necessity of daily contact with the images of the ocean, the beach and coastlines. To allow her this access, Allen and her family moved from their suburban home in New Lambton to a terrace house in Barker Street, The Hill, in Newcastle. However, this was a smaller home and the consequence of this was lack of studio space. This was rectified by building out in the roof cavity and creating a large light space with a glorious view. “The splendid view sweeps over the harbour, over the sea and right up the coast across Stockton

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\(^5\) Ibid. In Amsterdam they met up with a Dutch artist they had met when he had exhibited at the Newcastle City Art Gallery a few years previously. Ibid.

\(^6\) Ibid. She brought back mementoes of the trip which included ceramic dishes, silks and filigree silver jewellery from India, a pyjama suit from Pakistan and American Indian moccasins from Boston. Ibid.

Bight.”

Of the new studio space she said “now I have all the space to work, and I still have
the influence of the sea.”

Allen’s labours were not confined to producing artworks for exhibitions. She was invited by
Norman Talbot, poet and lecturer at the University of Newcastle, to design a cover for his
thought would be “appropriately visual for a cover theme.”

Where the other members of the Low Show Group who commenced with painting,
diversified into sculpture, ceramics, design and textiles, it was only Allen and Sutherland who
continued to focus primarily on painting and drawing. Yet, for Allen there was a significant
change of materials and techniques which could be interpreted as craft when she commenced
painting on clay platters. Although this was ceramics, for her it was only another surface on
which to paint her subjects. She was not interested in the actual construction of the plates
and platters. Paintings and painted ceramics made up Allen’s next major body of work in
preparation for a solo exhibition in 1977.

At this time her paintings were “influenced by a long association with the sea, most of them
being about the people and things near, in and on it.” Her subject matter pertained more to
figures and their relationship to the sea, rather than direct references to the sea itself. She
combined her love of the qualities of portraiture with her keenness for the sea. The ceramics
were painted using the majolica technique of oxides over a tin and zircosil glaze. The firing

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8 Ibid., The one criticism she had of her trip was that she did not have much space in which to work on the ship.
There were plenty of opportunities to view galleries but when it came to working out ideas she was limited by this lack of space. Ibid.
9 Ibid.
make the ceramic pieces but outsourced that task to Madeleine Scott Jones who also fired the works.
of the works was carried out by Madeleine Scott Jones. A reproduction of one of the paintings from the exhibition, Beside the Sea, adorned the cover of the catalogue for the exhibition. The simplicity of the composition and the almost naïve quality of the representation of the figures, the seagull and boat reflected a light hearted approach to this genre.

Plate 17  *Ruth,* Norma Allen, 1980s, hand built majolica on earthenware, 26 x 14 cm, private collection of Ruth Samuels, Newcastle, NSW.

Allen continued her experimentation and manipulation with colour on ceramics (plate 17). Her use of the flat plane of the ceramic piece as a canvas, gave her the freedom of ‘painting’ rather than being restricted to the limitations imposed by the form in the traditional style of pottery that was being produced in Newcastle at that time, much of which was decorated in the grey, greens and browns of ash glazes. Despite having the utilitarian function of a plate or bowl, Allen’s ceramics were designed to be hung on the wall like a painting. Allen said “It’s an erratic business…the result is sometimes survival and the reward (or penalty) is

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14 Allen, "Artist Statement for Solo Exhibition."
15 Sparks, "About People and Places."
transformation!” However, the porous surface of the platter and on some pieces the change of plane is more unforgiving for the artist who usually works on a two dimensional surface of paper or canvas, and it takes many years of practice to achieve a satisfactory result which is fluid rather than forced. Some of these works were not successful.

For many of her drawings and paintings Allen utilized the qualities of the aquarelle on wet paper. She found this process very exciting. The application of ‘paint’ on both the wet paper and the ceramic surface could not be any more contrary. The dry surface of the tin glazed surface of the ceramic piece sucks the moisture immediately into the body of the glaze while the moist surface of the paper allows for movement of the colour when applied to this ground. Despite this Allen stated “the essentials, memory and imagination remain constant for all media.”

Many of Allen’s drawings were of her immediate urban surroundings in Tyrrell Street, adjacent to her home and nearby areas. For a group exhibition Newcastle Graphics at von Bertouch Galleries in 1981 her drawings, in charcoal and pen, documented the historic buildings of the first school in Newcastle and the iconic ‘tower on the hill’ both in Tyrrell Street. Glovers Lane, once the site of the first railway line was depicted in the third drawing. These drawings were quite large (one measuring 91 x 54 cm) and were a departure from the figurative and ocean subject matter that had been a focus for several years.

Allen’s retrospective exhibition in 1995, an acknowledgement of a long and successful career in the visual arts, was not a point of cessation for the artist. If anything, it was a point not to

16 Lewis, ”An Unusual Form for Exhibition.” The act of making the form was elementary, a necessity rather than an important step in the process. Although it was a long process to dry the form without warping and to bisque ready for the design, the final surface was painted “much the same as any painting except that you use different materials such as copper, cobalt and iron in very fine particles suspended in water” and the piece is again fired this time at 1100 degrees. Ibid.
17 Ibid.
rest on one’s laurels, but to forge ahead to more challenging areas.\textsuperscript{19} Although she had been on many study tours she said: “I wouldn’t say any one thing has influenced my art. It would be a mixture of things I have seen and experienced”\textsuperscript{20} She believed that if you have the talent to be an artist you should use it. “All along I knew I had to be an artist and it has been my job for more than 35 years. Art is absorbing and before you know it you are taken over by it”.\textsuperscript{21}

**Mary Beeston**

Mary Beeston wrote that the work of art:

> is a communication, not a kind of visual letter from the artist to the viewer about some object or experience, nor the illustration of fact or fiction, but the manifestation or expression of an individual original idea. The work itself communicates inasmuch as it involves the viewer, stimulates a new awareness, frightens, comforts, infuriates, excites, or delights him [sic].\textsuperscript{22}

Beeston’s connection with industrial Newcastle began at the age of two when her father moved the family to Mayfield, an inner suburb of Newcastle, when he was appointed to set up an Australian Wire Industry in association with BHP. This location influenced many of her art works particularly later in her career when she received commissions for public works.

Initially, Beeston’s desire was to study pottery, as this was not possible she enrolled in the art classes at the Newcastle National Art School. Like the other Low Show Group artists it may have been the influence of Passmore, and a determination to become a professional artist, which led to such a successful art career. Beeston initiated a career path that resulted in her


\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.

being a significant artist and, consequently, an important figure in the cultural life of Newcastle. Like the other artists from the Low Show Group she commenced her career as a painter, yet she would struggle with her desire to be both a painter and to be involved in designing tapestries.

Beeston’s first solo exhibition, at Leveson Gallery in Melbourne in 1964, was an important step in her career as up until then she had only exhibited in group shows. In preparation for this exhibition she painted six hours a day, most days, in the basement studio of her Newcastle house. 23

The inspiration for her body of work, to be included in her first solo exhibition in Newcastle at the von Bertouch Galleries in 1965, derived from both her passion as a gardener and the landscape of New Zealand, images of which were captured while there a few years previously. 24 She was also influenced by the dry spell of weather being experienced at that time, to produce paintings that depicted the effect of drought on the landscape. 25 In this exhibition, it was the manipulation of these elements, colour and tone that would later influence her designs for textiles. 26

Her interest in industrial landscapes extended beyond Newcastle and a trip to the industrial centres of Tasmania inspired landscapes such as Smelters Country and Red Ascent, in Beeston’s 1968 solo exhibition at the von Bertouch Galleries. The inclusion of still life compositions and the representation of the figure made up the remainder of the subject matter. 27 This exhibition included six drawings which were made while touring, and twenty two oil paintings executed after the trip. The industrial landscape images she had collected in Tasmania were used to create the painting Smelters Country.

The next influence on Beeston’s subject matter, combined with her passion for colour, stemmed from a six week trip to New Guinea in 1969, where she joined a patrol to villages in the highlands around Mt. Hagen. “There is an occasional patch of brilliant colour in the rich dark landscape, with sky barely visible between the mountains and some wonderful cloud round the peaks,”28 she said. This body of work was shown in her next solo exhibition at von Bertouch Galleries in May, 1971, along with other paintings representing images of the suburbs around Melbourne, and her continuing manipulation of still life compositions.29

Beeston, like Richards and to a lesser degree, Sutherland, found another passion in the expressive form of textiles and fibre. This may have appeared a risk at the time as she had achieved such success with her painting and the reality of such a huge shift, could have ended a promising career. However, there was a growing interest in spinning and weaving in the early seventies in Australia and particularly in Newcastle and the Hunter Valley.

Beeston formed a close working partnership with her husband Larry and the textile works they completed were a joint venture. While this partnership is acknowledged, it is the overall artmaking practice, not only in textiles, of Mary Beeston, that is being examined here.30

Beeston, and her husband Larry, had moved to the lake at Kilaben Bay in 1970, where they were able to convert a small cottage into their studio. Larry Beeston had been weaving for many years and was now working full time in this area. Mary Beeston had been spinning the yarns; she said her husband could not seem to develop an interest in this area.31 This was the beginning of a successful partnership, with Beeston designing the tapestries, and her husband

29 Ibid.
30 Their partnership and joint ventures would benefit from further examination and would be a valuable area of study.
31 Sunday Telegraph, "Mary Beeston," *The Sunday Telegraph*, 19 November 1972, Beeston said she found it exciting to be in contact with growers and brokers all over the state when she was selecting yarns for weaving.
weaving. Their work extended to commissions for dress materials and ponchos. In 1973 the Beestons made a study tour of Scandinavia, participating in workshops, to further develop their skills, at the Frederika Wetterhoff School in Hameenlinna, near Helsinki, Finland.

Their affiliation with the Craft Association of NSW continued and, in 1976, Anne von Bertouch recommended them on a professional basis to be included in two workshops, one in Armidale, NSW, and the other in Steiglitz, Victoria, where they could further develop their art practice.

In 1976 Beeston had a new focus for her painting for an exhibition at von Bertouch Galleries that year. Previous paintings had been more analytical, and dealt with the manipulation of form and colour, whereas these paintings evoked a feeling for the environment that was absent in the earlier works. It appears that she had combined the representation of the landscape and the human form, subjects dealt with individually in past works, which had now merged as one. A poem written by Beeston and included in the catalogue indicates that the works were less analytical and more expressionistic:

Climb to the sun
unbearable ascent too far too high
stay love with me
Leave the dark cloak
lichen embroidered by patient time
leave the soft grass
whispering windblown seed-clinging nest
leave the old ones

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rooted encumbered unknowingly still
strong my love
come to the sun.  

Mary Beeston

During 1978, Beeston and her husband travelled to Nepal, via Thailand and then on to India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey. From there they moved on to Europe for an extended period of time. The trip provided Beeston with a valuable experience, not only in participating in workshops and viewing artworks, but also providing access to the libraries, bookshops, experimental theatre, electronics, music and architecture of Europe. While in the U.K. they studied tapestry techniques at the Daniel Droin School, chemical dyeing with Roy Russell and linen spinning with Patricia Baines. The designs for the tapestries made during the Beestons’ stay in Wales in 1978 revealed Beeston’s continuing experimentation with colour, in a medium other than painting. Half the works produced for the exhibition were abstract designs, while the other half represented aspects of life that Beeston had seen during her Asian trip.

As the time spent overseas had been absorbed by designing and exhibiting tapestries and developing skills in that medium, Beeston was more than ready to come back to Australia and “swing back towards a greater involvement in painting”. The cultural aspects that she had been exposed to in Europe were manifested in her work, including experiments in new paint media and a new interest in the quality of paper. Beeston settled down to serious work, preparing for an exhibition the following year.

36 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
Beeston was successful in keeping a focus on each area of her creative process in her painting and craft, but she indicates that painting was her main love. A journey made to the interior of Australia provided the subject matter for her next body of work. For a tapestry commission for the Madison Motor Inn, in Newcastle, in 1986, Beeston’s design depicted well-known features of Newcastle such as Nobbys, City Hall, the Cathedral and the Hunter Valley Vineyards. Juxtaposed with the natural features and familiar architecture were the silhouettes of the heavy industries of Newcastle, which extended the full width of the tapestry. The representation of industrial Newcastle reoccurred in her design work, particularly for the large commissioned projects. There is a similarity in her work to that of Isabella Parry, who produced works showing the beginning of the marks of the coal industry upon the Newcastle environment, while Beeston shows the final transformation through an industrialised skyline.

One of the challenges for Beeston, in creating her tapestry designs, was that the innovative ideas she developed were often not able to be physically transformed into weavings, and so modifications were always being made in collaboration with her husband Larry. The process after this point was quite tedious, as it involved the coding of every area, line and colour for the making of the cartoon. Despite Beeston’s change of media the process of designing these tapestries was very similar to painting. The transparencies technique they used for weaving, involved a film like ground fabric of woven linen threads to set the general tone and colour. Intricately interwoven into this, were the threads that formed the pattern, giving it a more solid appearance. Patricia Adams wrote in 1987 that:

the result of this is a rich interplay of film colour and surface colour which is enhanced by the varying weights of the pattern carrying threads (fine linen imported from Finland) providing a

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full range of transparencies that links these weavings more closely with Mary’s concerns as a painter.43

In 1988, Beeston wrote an article for *The Textile Fibre Forum* (a publication of the *Australian Forum for Textile Arts. Ltd*), titled ‘Ten Days to do the Impossible’. It was a description of the making of the *Court House Quilt*, a collaborative project, with the assistance of the Newcastle group, The Novocastrian Quilters.44 She describes her role in the designing of the quilt, and her somewhat concerned reaction to relinquishing it to someone else, to interpret and make up.

Consistent with Beeston’s previous work, the theme of landscape was used in her tapestry design. Her subject was derived from a six month sojourn in Balranald, far western NSW, in 1986, where the physicality of ancient Australian history was etched into the landscape of Lake Mungo. The impact of this on Beeston’s paintings manifested itself in the manipulation of form and colour, to create works that emphasized the “haunting landscape of eroded desert outcrops.” 45 Beeston wrote in her artist statement for the exhibition *Moods and Contrasts*:

Lake Mungo is part of the dry Willandra Lakes system, and is the site of early aboriginal occupation in Australia....There one moves among wind-sculpted shapes, which change their character and colour as the sun moves across the sky. A place of infinite silence, of space too great to comprehend, of endless variety of form and colour, so fragile that every footstep and every slightest breath of wind is destructive, and yet I find some understanding of the eternal Now, and an ineffable presence companions me.46

Making artworks was only part of Beeston’s heavy work schedule. A month in Japan in August, 1989, was crammed with workshops and tours of museums and galleries. Their

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43 Ibid.
itinerary revealed that every day was committed to work or travel. As Beeston had become interested in both the making and the manipulation of paper as artworks, part of the trip was to learn about paper making. In 1989 Beeston attended the *International Paper Conference*, which included a washi making workshop on experimental paper making, at the Fuji Paper Mills, Tokushima. Trips to local papermakers in different towns allowed Beeston to observe traditional techniques. She visited different craft museums, traditional textile museums and attended a workshop in the ‘yuzen process’, using stencils and hand painting. She also attended a workshop in the traditional ‘Kata-zome yuze’ which is the stencilled resist printing of cotton and silk fabrics using indigo dyes. The exposure to these techniques impacted on both the textile designs and Beeston’s drawing and painting.\(^{47}\)

In Beeston’s collection of works in 1992, the shift to urban imagery was the result of her move back to the city, from Lake Macquarie. She said “It has suddenly become my village, my new environment. So I am seeing it with fresh eyes, with a childlike delight in all of it … I have tried to catch this simplicity in the works in the exhibition.”\(^{48}\)

Beeston, like Passmore, Richards and Allen, became fascinated with the harbour and the ocean after her move back into the city. She was influenced by “the gentle lavender of the water as the green and gold lights come on around the working part of the harbour, the beach front and the fascination of just watching the ocean.”\(^{49}\) The output of work by Beeston at this time was considerable. At the age of seventy five she was still quite capable of organizing and producing works for the many exhibitions she was invited to participate in.

Beeston’s work was not only about the manipulation of colour and form to produce aesthetic compositions, there was a far deeper element that underpinned her art making practice. In a

\(^{47}\) Mary Beeston, letter to Sonia Celtlan with biographical information for Celtlan lecture at Newcastle Region Art Gallery, 1989.


\(^{49}\) Ibid.
large work made in 1994, as part of the *The Third Act: Fibre Artists of the Hunter*, Beeston said:

> It is impossible to depict visually the ideals and spiritual concepts that govern human existence. In addition to well known [sic] symbols of idealism, the time honoured convention of relationships of colours to shape is used as a visual metaphor.50

Beeston’s fascination with the industrial landscape was revived after a trip to Lightning Ridge in western New South Wales in 1994. “Once again I was delighted with the magical light on the mullock hills, and as fascinated to see the disused trucks and equipment gradually disintegrating and becoming part of the earth.”51

From there, she continued to the top end of the Northern Territory, Arnhem Land, Katherine Gorge and Litchfield Park near Darwin, all of which provided Beeston with subject matter. This was seen in her next body of work consisting of twenty one oil paintings and pastel drawings that Beeston completed for another exhibition in 1995.52

> Mary Beeston wrote and lived in the same way as she made her art – combining passion with persistence, painstaking design with intuition, and (to paraphrase her friend and weaving collaborator Rachel Frecker) emotion with shimmering vitality and subtlety.53

Beeston’s extensive art career, which spanned forty eight years, left an invaluable legacy to the art world generally. Her almost obsessive output, which included making artworks, teaching and writing, reached far beyond Newcastle, encompassing national and international contacts. Gael Davies wrote of Beeston and her husband: “Their legacy can be seen in the

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50 Mary Beeston, “Artists Statement” to Newcastle Region Art Gallery, 1994, Gallery archives.
52 Ibid.
extensive practice of Fibre Art Australia wide. Examples of their particular form of expression of this art form are to be seen nationwide.”^^54

Beeston’s strength was in her unique understanding of design which she applied to both her painting and textiles. Again, like the other women in the Low Show Group, the stylistic influence of Passmore can be seen in her early works, yet she was able to take what was needed from his teachings and adapt it to develop her own, individual style.

The standard of Beeston’s work always remained high and, even though she worked in several forms and crossed the boundaries between art and craft, she claimed that it was painting that was her true passion. Despite her involvement with textiles, an interview with Sonia Celtlan later in her life revealed that:

Mary at 73 believes she is not yet an artist, that she is still pursuing her goal. She said, [sic] when I interviewed her after her exhibition this year at von Bertouch Galleries: ‘I am a painter not an artist.^^55

This may have indicated that she was always learning and never believed that she had achieved the high status of “artist” in the traditional sense.

**Betty Cutcher**

Betty Cutcher had always been interested in art, however, influences while a student at the Newcastle National Art School channelled her more towards sculpture, than painting.

Like the other Low Show Group artists, Cutcher had also established a studio at her home but the need for more space prompted her to search for a larger home. When Paul Beadle’s

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^^54 Gael Davies, "Mary and Larry Beeston," *Exhibition Catalogue* (date unknown).

house, on the shores of Lake Macquarie came up for sale, the Cutchers purchased it. The larger property allowed her to set up a workshop at the bottom of her 1.5 acre garden. From this vantage point she was able to watch the swans on the lake from her work bench. She was interested in the natural forms of birds, which she would use in her sculptures.56

Cutcher’s methodology usually commenced with a concept relating to her ongoing interest in ‘growth and movement,’ particularly in animal, bird and plant forms. She then proceeded to the making of preparatory pencil sketches, which were finally transposed into a three dimensional sculpture, usually carved from wood.57

Like the other women in the Low Show Group, Cutcher had a family that was co-operative and supportive and she was “able to combine the occupations of sculptress and housewife.”58 From 1961 to 1964 she studied ceramics under Madeleine Scott Jones and Ann Douglas. At that time she found that making domestic pottery was not the direction she wished to pursue, although she used clay along with a variety of other materials for her sculptures. In the Low Show Group exhibitions she worked in clay and wood.

Cutcher left Newcastle in 1965, to live in New Zealand, where she later married Paul Beadle. Beadle had been working in Adelaide when appointed Head of Art at Auckland University. After they had settled in Auckland, Cutcher and Beadle continued to communicate with Anne von Bertouch and to be involved in exhibitions at that gallery for several years. The direction that Cutcher took in her career was quite different to the other members of the Low Show Group. Her early exodus from Newcastle, the positive learning experience she gained in the pottery classes conducted by Madeleine Scott Jones, and her working relationship with her husband, Paul Beadle, all had a bearing on the course of her subsequent career. Unlike

56 NMH, “Sculptress Chosen to Exhibit at Festival,” Newcastle Morning Herald, 4 June 1959.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
Sutherland who finally left Newcastle for Sydney and kept close ties with the artistic community in Newcastle, Cutcher eventually lost contact with Newcastle.

Cutcher continued to exhibit throughout Australasia. During which time she worked mainly in metal (bronze) for her sculptures and had also rekindled her interest in pottery. Pottery became a large part of her studio output. She joined the Society of Sculptors and Associates in New Zealand in 1967. She had previously been a member of the Sydney group which she had joined in 1960.

Cutcher wrote about the development of her ideas in an exhibition catalogue in 1969:

I mistrust words for the revelation of an artist’s aim – all I am trying to do is use my own particular sensibilities, knowledge, imagination and response to materials to make things which are a direct product of my hands, instincts, mind and environment, working with materials having their own inherent qualities – and in the case of pottery needing to fulfil several functions, the first of which is to contain.59

She continued to describe her art making practice:

So, having carved and practised what I could of sculpture (mainly wood carvings) before I came to pottery, it was natural that I should be primarily interested in the sculptural form of pots and should utilise what I have learned of forming with clay in the building of pots. Insects have always fascinated me – their structure and their behaviour. They belong to the world of instinct and unthinking response which we too share, and obey more often than we would care to admit.60

60 Ibid.
Plate 18  Cutcher’s artwork on the cover of her 1969 exhibition catalogue for New Visions Gallery, Auckland.

The making of bronzes became an important area of Cutcher’s practice. In 1988 she co-founded the New Zealand Contemporary Medallion Group (NZCMG).⁶¹

Plate 19  *Father and Son*, Betty Cutcher, c1990, Bronze medallion, no dimensions given, private collection of Ian Cutcher, Sydney, NSW.

Plate 19, *Father and Son*, c1990, is a bronze medallion made to celebrate the birth of Cutcher’s grandson in Australia.⁶²

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⁶¹ Pat Baskett, "Top Brand of Medalists," *NZ Herald*, 9 April 1992. This group was involved in the making of medallions, which are different to medals, as they are small and hang by ribbons. Medallions are larger and not necessarily round. They are made in limited editions of three to twenty-five and handmade rather than commercially ‘struck’ as with medals. Some of the artists felt that they were more hand sculptures.

⁶² Ian Cutcher, "interview with the author," 13 April, 2008.
Cutcher was always interested in the technicalities of the processes used to create artworks.⁶³ She worked in many different art forms, both two dimensional but primarily three dimensional. Cutcher’s daughter said that her mother was always experimenting with different forms and techniques and spent time manipulating the materials to see what she could achieve.⁶⁴ Her subject matter continued to be drawn from nature, as seen in plate 22.⁶⁵

Cutcher produced several medallions that dealt with feminist issues. *Women’s Suffrage NZ* (plate 20) was made in 1993 to commemorate one hundred years of women’s suffrage. Another medallion (plate 21) made in 1999, showing a naive styled depiction of a clothesline, is a successful work, with a more humorous approach to the issues concerning women and domesticity. Cutcher’s daughter said that this was one of her mother’s favourite pieces.⁶⁶

Betty Cutcher died in New Zealand in 2002 at the age of seventy eight.

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Plate 20  (left) *Women Suffrage NZ*, Betty Cutcher, 1993, bronze sculpture, no dimensions given.

Plate 21  (right) *Untitled*, Betty Cutcher, 1999, bronze medallion, no dimensions given.

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⁶⁴ Ibid.
⁶⁵ Ibid.
⁶⁶ Ibid.
Plate 22 *The Frog*, Betty Cutcher, date unknown (later career), painting, oil on canvas, no dimensions given, private collection of Ian Cutcher, Sydney, NSW.

Elizabeth Martin

Elizabeth Martin was born in London, England in 1905, a member of the Holman family of Topsham in Devonshire. At Exeter in Devon she attended classes in antique drawing, life drawing and anatomy, where she drew plaster casts, flowers and still life. The main objective of the classes was to learn how to draw using techniques such as watercolour. She progressed on to life drawing classes. At this stage she said “I hadn’t any ideas of my own.”

After leaving art school Martin was interested in illustrating children’s books, but realized there was no market for such work at that time.\textsuperscript{68} She then attempted to make a living designing paper book jackets on a free-lance basis. Although she received a few commissions, it was not enough to live on. Martin then expanded her portfolio with posters and a company, The Shell-Mex, gave her advertising folders to design, as their director at that time believed in encouraging a student. Martin also found a small market at Fortnum and Masons for hand-painted wooden chocolate boxes.\textsuperscript{69}

An opportunity of a permanent job in a studio of Technical & Trade Advertisers was offered, which she accepted, despite the long hours. She said that “all lettering had to be hand-drawn in those days. We worked 9 am to 6pm weekdays, and Saturdays from 9am to 1pm.”\textsuperscript{70}

Martin married in England in 1939, and came to Australia with her husband the same year.\textsuperscript{71} The couple had no plans except that they were on their way to Melbourne, but during the trip her husband was offered employment at the Newcastle factory of John Lysaght Australia Ltd.\textsuperscript{72} On her arrival, as she did not know anyone, she sought out contacts in the art world by joining the Newcastle Art Society, which was the only art group in the city. It was here that she met Reg Russom, who offered her a part-time teaching position at the Newcastle National Art School.

Martin continued making artworks and during their holidays, she and her husband travelled around New South Wales, where many of her works were completed, in particular watercolours of the landscape. The management at Lysaghts, and in particular Messrs. Parry-
Odeden and Vincent Wardell, commissioned her to make a number of drawings and watercolours of Lysaghts.

Martin did not abandon her earlier artistic interests when she came to Australia. While working as a commercial artist in London, Martin had become interested in puppets and later worked as a designer, making scenery and costumes for the Festival Theatre in Cambridge. In 1954 she picked up the threads and began working again in puppetry. Martin’s involvement in both the making and performances of puppetry, and her passion for this, lasted many years. The puppet shows were a novelty in Newcastle and the media took special interest and gave Martin and her associates many positive reviews. She also made large paper-mache carnival figures, used in the Mattara Parade.

Martin found the technicalities of the manipulation of string puppet too difficult, and chose to work with glove puppets. She said that she started out when she and a friend produced a few shows such as ‘Cinderella’, ‘Punch and Judy’ and ‘Wind in the Willows’ for schools and children’s parties. Martin enjoyed these as she said “the children talk to the puppets and make suggestions, and the show becomes quite improvised.”73 Martin’s London experience proved valuable when she was required to physically build a puppet theatre for the Newcastle productions.

In January 1960, the Martin family departed on a six month trip to Africa. When they arrived they stayed for about three weeks in a town near Durban (Pietermaritzburg). It took fourteen days to travel from this town to Martin’s sister’s farm in the White Highlands of Kenya, where they stayed for most of the visit. On the trip to the farm they travelled through Johannesburg, Pretoria and North and South Rhodesia. This trip provided Martin with

memories which were recorded in sketches and watercolours. Martin took several puppets on the trip to entertain children in Africa. This trip would provide Martin with inspiration and subject matter for many years. Martin also illustrated a children’s book being published in Sydney and designed for theatre.

Martin began to make wood-block and lino-block prints to illustrate posters to advertise the puppet shows and other functions she was involved with, such as Musica Viva, and theatre shows. She decided to work and experiment in black and white lino-block printing. This form of printmaking complimented Martin’s illustrative style and subject matter, as the black and white prints could then be worked on with colour. It is not unusual that many women at that time chose this form of printmaking, as it could be done at home without the need for a press. Hand burnishing was possible although Martin said “it was hard work”. Andrew Ferguson, another artist and the Director of the Newcastle City Art Gallery at the time, had suggested that she purchase a set of Japanese wood-carving tools. Martin said “they proved just the shot.” In her biographical notes she describes the processes of this art practice. The expense of producing artworks is often a problem, both in the cost and availability of materials.

Martin said:

I bought remnants of cork-lino, drew my designs very freely with a felt-pen, then cutting with the gouge-shaped tools, not aiming at an exact reproduction of the drawing. I never mounted the lino on masonite. I printed my designs by hand, using printers’ ink, mineral turps both for thinning ink if necessary, (and to clean up afterwards), a small palette & and palette-knife, a rubber roller, and lots of clean newspapers. Having inked the completed design, I placed paper (bond or

74 Newcastle Sun, "Memories of Tour Captured on Art Canvas," The Newcastle Sun, 13 September 1960.
77 1.dozen for 6/-
litho paper) on the block, and rubbed with the back of a tablespoon till the ink was evenly spread over the design.\textsuperscript{79}

Martin was able to achieve similar qualities with wood-block prints, yet the result was different as the grain of the wood produced texture on the dark sections that were not possible with the lino-block, thus softening the work. Her subject matter for prints came from several sources, such as medieval stories, knights’ journeys, and heraldic animals. Another influence was Picasso, “who himself borrowed themes from Old Masters, ‘The Judgement of Paris’, ‘Susannah and the Elders’, ‘Nymphs and Satyrs’”.\textsuperscript{80}

At this point Martin’s career took a completely different direction when she made the decision to work in clay. Her future career was devoted to creating ceramic sculptures, a form she never tired of. However, for the first few years after her discovery of clay as a sculptural medium, she remained involved in both the puppetry and ceramics.

Like the other members of the Low Show Group, her interest in ceramics was kindled in classes with Madeleine Scott Jones at the Newcastle National Art School, in the early 1960s. In these classes she was introduced to the different construction methods of coil, slab and wheel thrown pots. Martin found that she was not as competent with throwing on the wheel and preferred the hand-built or ‘primitive’ methods of construction. She moved away from the pot form, and concentrated on making heads and portraits, small figurines and groups of figures, always in a realistic style. Martin continued her studies in ceramic sculpture with Silver Ware, who also taught at the art school. Martin still made many preparatory drawings and then transposed them into three dimensional sculptures.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.
The works in Martin’s solo exhibition in 1975 at the von Bertouch Galleries were both decorative and fanciful and proved popular. The sculptures were figurative in a stylized way, reminiscent of primitive tribal figures, yet based on mythological creatures. The characters represented were ‘Thyrsus’, the husband of Bacchus; ‘Undine’, the water spirit; ‘Dryad’, the wood nymph; ‘Dionysius’ (or Bacchus) the god of wine, and ‘Daphne’, who was pursued by Apollo and changed into a tree. Martin said that “other classical subjects were sources and ideas, also Japanese ‘Haniwa’ ceramics inspired the ‘Kings and Queens’ series that I produced.”

The clay Martin used was an earthenware body, Cessnock Potters’ clay, which was available locally. It was a reliable clay, which when bisque fired to 1115 degrees became a very warm red colour. After this firing Martin applied oil colour in layers and then removed it in parts to reveal the reddish hue of the clay.

Martin wrote about the concept for a ceramic sculpture, *Birth of Athene*, purchased by the Newcastle City Art Gallery in 1975:

This represents the goddess springing out of her father’s head. The legend was that it was predicted that Zeus lulled his pregnant wife, Netis, to sleep, with ambrosia and then swallowed her. Sometime later Zeus was suddenly overcome with a raging headache and advised Hephaestus to split his head open with an axe. Hephaestus did so, then out sprang Athene, fully grown, & dressed in splendid armour. Athene is credited with a number of inventions which include the flute, the plough, the Harriot, the cup and the earthenware pot. She is the patron of all women’s arts such as weaving, spinning, and cooking and was the first to teach man to count. She will take arms only in a defensive battle, and has no arms of her own, but must borrow a set belonging to Zeus. (his thunderbolts) This ceramic was exhibited at the von Bertouch Galleries during International Women’s Year, but I think that no-one perceived the reference intended. There is a fellow-piece to this ceramic

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83 Ibid.
85 Elizabeth Martin, 1975, handwritten biographical notes to Newcastle Region Art Gallery. (no page numbers)
entitled ‘Zeus devouring Netis’ (his pregnant wife) which is now in a private collection.\textsuperscript{86}

Martin continued making puppets and the carnival figures along with her other sculptures. She was a prolific worker, always willing to be involved in community activities.\textsuperscript{87}

Charles Martin, Elizabeth’s son, recalled that his mother was always working. She took over the dining room as a studio and the family had to find somewhere else to eat. She also spread her art making throughout other rooms and stored the completed works in different rooms in the house. This was particularly difficult for the family when she was working on the large carnival heads.\textsuperscript{88}

Martin continued to experiment with the surfaces of her sculptures and found a technique for applying colours to the clay that suited her work. Martin employed the use of oxides such as cobalt and manganese which, on the rich red of the Cessnock clay, created the surface appearance she desired. The subject matter had also broadened but her love of portraiture continued. She would make quick sketches of the children she taught in art classes and then make the heads. She also used close friends as models. Martin constructed several heads of Africans made from memories and the many notes she had made in her travels in 1960. Many of these heads she gave away to friends and relatives.\textsuperscript{89}

Martin’s art making process was a well- planned procedure that embraced her philosophies of creating. She kept detailed records of all of her art making, commencing with an objective, progress through the process and finally an evaluation.\textsuperscript{90} She said that clay had been her

\textsuperscript{86} Martin. 1986. “Biographical notes to Anne von Bertouch.”
\textsuperscript{87} Charles Martin, 2007. “Interview with the author”.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Elizabeth Martin, "Artist Statement for Catalogue,” Exhibition Catalogue (1982).
\textsuperscript{90} Martin. 1986, “Biographical notes to Anne von Bertouch.”
“favourite medium for some years” for several reasons, such as its availability and that the sculpture does not have to be sent away as in casting, but the whole process can be done in the studio. This meant that “no other hand has intervened”. She said that the cost of production was small compared to bronze casting. Martin had even used clay from her own garden for her sculptures. In a way the simple qualities of this form of art making were similar to the early lino-block prints, in that she could complete the works at home without the need for expensive equipment. She wrote:

The modelling techniques are basically slab and coil, as used by primitive potters. Modifications can be made at all stages of the work, adding or subtracting as the case may be. Tools are chiefly hands (two hands used while modelling), some wooden kitchen spoons and rolling-pins, builder’s off-cuts (collected or scrounged), a wire loop tool (made or bought) and anything else that you can pick up that might come in useful sometime.

Some of the sculptural pieces were made into planter pots. Although they were not great artworks, they proved popular as they had both a decorative and functional use. Plate 23, circa 1980, is an example of this type of work. The modelling of the face is stylised, yet not enough to be completely successful. The successful transformation from the sketch to the sculpture appears to have been lost in the process. There is a lack of understanding of the structure of the face in some of the three dimensional works.

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92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
Elizabeth Martin died in September 1989, at the age of eighty-four. Despite being ill for some time she had still managed to work. The 1989 *Collector’s Choice* in November featured five of her sculptures made specifically for the exhibition. 94 Martin’s prolific output exceeded her sales in exhibitions, and so her husband Rollo, and son Charles, continued to submit her works for *Collector’s Choice* until 1994. 95

**Rae Richards**

Rae Richards was born in Melbourne in 1927 and is the only surviving member of the original Low Show Group. Richards recollects that as a child she had regular outings to the National Gallery of Victoria and that the first artwork she recalls seeing as a child was

95 Charles Martin has extensive archives of his mother’s career from her early art making in England to her final sculptures. Among the archives are journals with many notes about her art making processes, photos of works and original artworks. Like the other Low Show Group artists, an extensive examination and analysis of her art making practice would be a valuable study.
Giovanni Battista Tiepolo’s *The Banquet of Cleopatra*, at that gallery. She remembers standing in front of it for a long time. Richards said was brought up in a family where members drew constantly and primarily communicated in visual terms, so assumed that this was the norm. Although initially she had no serious plan to become an artist she changed her mind and asked her father if she could leave school at Intermediate Certificate level and attend Swinbourne Art School. As she had anticipated, he refused permission. She was also unable to continue art at school as it was not a matriculation subject. At this time, she abided by her father’s wishes and continued her senior secondary schooling. After completing her secondary education, she trained as a librarian. Richards married young and within a few years her three children were born. The family moved to Port Pirie, South Australia, where her husband took up a position in industry. The stimulation of a large city such as Melbourne was missing in Port Pirie, and Adelaide, the closest city, was too far away for regular visits.

The Richards’ stay in Port Pirie ended in 1957, when her husband took up the offer of a position in Newcastle as a scientist working in the Research and Development Department of John Lysaght, Australia. The family settled in the predominantly middle class suburb of Merewether, about three kilometres from the city, where Richards immediately looked for ways to connect with her interest in art. At this time there was an art school and a partially constructed Cultural Centre. She said although there was more of a cultural community in Newcastle than in Port Pirie, she still felt frustrated and cut off from the access that she had enjoyed in metropolitan Melbourne.96

Richards’ move to Newcastle was in some ways similar to that of Dorothy Paty and Isabella Parry in that they had all accompanied husbands who were making career moves. However, in Richards’ case, she arrived in Newcastle during the expansion of the industrial city while Paty and Parry were part of the initial settlement of Newcastle. At this time, as in the early

96 Rae Richards, *Interview*, 26 April 2007. Richards said at her interview that she was unsure of exact dates.
colonial period in Australia, it was normal for women to follow their husbands in pursuing a career.

Subject matter has always been important to Richards and it was sourced from many areas. While other woman artists often drew on their immediate surroundings of home as a focus for their work, Richards excluded the domestic. She found that travelling and reading provided her with the impetus to visually depict more intellectual subject matter, derived from a diversity of sources. Life drawing classes were also an important basis for her work, and Richards continued these classes long after she had left art school.

Richards worked in oils and used Bristol board to paint on, as it had a surface texture reminiscent of canvas when it was treated correctly, but was a lot less expensive. She had very little money for materials and the sale of her work enabled her to purchase the precious necessities she needed. Her drawing material was primarily charcoal. Because these materials were hard to obtain, she said she learnt to respect them and also learnt the correct way of handling them. At this time in Newcastle, the only retail outlet for art materials was the top floor of Frederick Ash, a hardware store in the city, but unfortunately they had a very limited range.97

Throughout her career, the dominant theme of Richards’ work was the landscape. This included the urban as well as the natural landscape. In the first Low Show Group exhibition, fifteen of the twenty two works she had in the show were representations of the landscape. In her landscapes, the use of blues and golds in her palette resulted from her visits to rain forests and tropical areas. Richards said the theme of still life was considered “passé” at art school and that students were discouraged from considering it as a viable form of subject matter.

97 Ibid.
However, she would return to the still life at different phases of her career, as they “were always a return to the first principles of picture making.”98

For a period of time in the early days of her art making, Richards was influenced creatively by the poet, Harri Jones, and conversely she was his inspiration for several pieces of poetry. 99

One of these poems by Jones, *On a Painting, Sunk Lyonesse*, was based on a painting by Richards. Stowell wrote a review of the painting and its relationship to the poem:

The early palette-knife paintings grew from studies of rain forest lit by shafts of sunlight into the lofty gothic arches of Sunk Lyonesse and the castles and cathedrals of a fabled age.100

An extract from the poem: *On a painting, Sunk Lyonesse*.101

Recalcitrance of paint and words
is now redeemed, and all the long
Submergence in the labouring seas
Now we ride out the storm like birds
-Performance of consummate ease
At which we laboured hard and long!102 [sic]

Jones’ poetry had a profound influence on Richards’ paintings and later developments in her career. In the biography of Jones, references made to Richards reinforce the concept that they influenced each other’s art. Clive Hart, a colleague of Harri Jones, in the English Faculty at Newcastle University College recalled:

99 Bernard Jones and Don Dale-Jones, *T.H. Jones Artist in Exile* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2001), T. H. Jones (1921-65) was the husband of Madeleine Scott Jones. He was a Welsh poet who after publishing his first volume of poetry in 57, and emigrated to Australia in 59 to teach at Newcastle University. Page 206.
100 Stowell, "Rae Richards as Painter." Page 3.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid. Page 2.
Newcastle seemed have a large number of very good painters in the early sixties, and the best of them was Rae Richards, who for a while became Harri’s muse.\textsuperscript{103}

In the biography of Jones, Jill Stowell recalled that “Rae and Harri admired each other’s art”.\textsuperscript{104} The portrait of Harri Jones painted by Richards was used on the cover of his biography.

Richards painted the final, and only extant of three portraits of T.H.Jones:

The wild coal-black hair contrasts with the lurid background that might be hell-fire; the face is an extraordinary combination of innocent bliss and angst, the dark eyes are full of anguish, but the mouth is half blissfully smiling; neck and sideways shouldering torso suggest a powerful physical presence.\textsuperscript{105}


\textsuperscript{103} Jones and Dale-Jones, \textit{Taffy Was Transported}. Page 206.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
The portrait (plate 24) further inspired Harri Jones and his response can be found in the poem, ‘On having my portrait painted’.

My eyes were never right
To see the color [sic] and happiness of the world;
My mouth was always twisted into wrongness.
Still your patient labouring hands transform
Them into something rich and strange.
But though I’d recognize it anywhere
In the mirror I see a face
I have not seen in any other place.\textsuperscript{106} [sic]

Harri Jones wrote three other poems about the admiration he had for Richards’ art making.\textsuperscript{107}

Even though many women artists were content with working in the kitchen or on the dining table, Richards said that a good working environment has always been paramount to her creativity. When she first arrived in Newcastle her home in Livingston Street, Merewether, had very little space for making artworks. The family later moved to The Terrace, opposite King Edward Park, a larger home with more room. However, Richards’ need for a ‘white room’ and even more space prompted them to buy a house on two acres of land in Burwood Road, Whitebridge.\textsuperscript{108} This outer suburb of Newcastle was quite remote and somewhat inaccessible for visitors. The distance from the city had its advantages at first, but after a period of time, despite the luxury of a large studio, Richards became very melancholic due to the perpetual isolation. This necessitated another move, this time back to the city. The family returned to a larger home in The Terrace, Newcastle, where Richards lived until the death of

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid. Page 206.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid. Page 252.
her husband several years ago. She replaced it with a smaller home several doors down, but still with an upstairs studio overlooking the park and ocean.\footnote{Ibid.}

In 1966 a significant change of direction had evolved in Richards’ art making practice. When she first experimented with fabric collage in 1965, “she had no conception of how important a part of her creative life it was to become for virtually thirty years.”\footnote{Maitland City Art Gallery, "A Retrospective Exhibition of Fibre Work by Rae Richards," \textit{Exhibition Catalogue} (1994).} Her interest in banners had developed and changed her direction of art making away from painted landscapes with restricted palette. Like Beeston, Richards was aware of the growing interest in textiles, yet in an interview with Joan Cairns for the \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald}, in 1968, Richards said that she came upon her banners by accident. The sewing technique developed out of darning family sheets.\footnote{Joan Cairns, "Artistry with Scraps," \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald}, 8 July 1968.} While sewing:

\begin{quote}
    she discovered that with the pressure removed from the head of an ordinary sewing machine, stitching could be worked rhythmically in any direction, bonding layers of fabric, but also animating the surface with expressive arabesques.\footnote{Maitland City Art Gallery, "A Retrospective Exhibition of Fibre Work by Rae Richards."}
\end{quote}

When she commenced making the banners she realized that her sewing machine could be used for more than just darning, and could “weld fabrics together”.\footnote{Joyce Morgan, "A Creator of Beauty," \textit{The Newcastle Sun}, 11 June 1984.}

Richards was working in her studio and realised that after stitching some pieces of gold cloth on to calico background it resembled a stylised emblem of the mid-day sun. “I began to develop the ideas in much the same way as designing a tapestry and all sorts of ideas for wall
hangings started to emerge,”¹¹⁴ she said. Having been “fascinated by ornate design and rich colour of heraldry” she was able to use this influence in her designs.¹¹⁵

Richards has described the art making process of the wall hangings, or banners as she preferred to call them. She would select a length of heavy cloth for the banner’s background, from a pile of scrap material cut into shapes, and machine stitch with multi-coloured cottons onto the background. The cottons would act as a glaze to shade the cloth into which it was stitched.¹¹⁶ Richards described the process:

Gradually after hours of laborious cutting and machining, there emerges a design rich enough to be the palace of an oriental potentate. Dignified peacocks spread the jeweled tails across a background of grass and flowers, three kings ride off to war on their bedecked charges, and St Francis of Assisi feeds a cluster of birds fluttering in brilliant confusion at his feet.¹¹⁷

Despite the impressive reputation she had established for her textile work, Richards confessed that she was useless at sewing at school. “I still can’t sew properly,”¹¹⁸ she said. “I think it’s because I don’t really respect proper sewing, that I can do this work.”¹¹⁹

While her works were touring the United Kingdom in 1966, Richards made a study trip of Europe, where she was able to observe an extensive revival of interest in tapestries and banners. “At the Musee des Arts Moderne in Paris she was particularly impressed by an exhibition of wall hangings by Matisse, Picasso, Kandinsky, Braque and others. It is significant that the tradition and splendour of the great medieval tapestries still inspires

¹¹⁴ Cairns, "Artistry with Scraps."
¹¹⁵ Ibid. Richards believed her work was unique, but had heard of an artist in Coventry, England, who was making similar wall hangings for churches and a New York man whose banners decorated the Vatican pavilion at a recent world fair. Ibid.
¹¹⁶ Ibid.
¹¹⁷ Ibid.
¹¹⁸ Ibid.
¹¹⁹ Morgan, "A Creator of Beauty."
¹²⁰ Ibid.
modern artists.” The subject matter for her banners varied from references to medieval saints, to gardens and to birds and animals. One element that was dominantly consistent in all of the banners was colour. Richards said that the banners had come about because of her love of colour.

She said “I really can’t remember when I did not draw and paint. I’ve always been interested in the idea of working with fabrics, experimenting with dyeing, stencilling, screen printing, etc., but it wasn’t until I hit on this method that I found a way to obtain the richness and variety of colour and texture I wanted.

Richards had not completely abandoned painting and had continued to experiment with both media and colour to produce individual works. However, the development of a new technique within another medium suddenly rekindled her love of painting. She explained:

The medium is a personal development of a method usually called ‘temera batik’. The original picture is painted broadly in gouache, in this case, [and] then coated with ink, which is then removed in strict control until the final picture emerges as conceived.

About this change of direction, she said:

In 1965-66 I became interested in ‘banners’, wall hangings in fabric collage in a method developed by me, and I think for some time unique, at least in Australia. These were very well received and absorbed a great deal of time since, but recently I have returned very seriously to painting. The gouache and ink medium I originally used to design for the banners, but found it a very satisfactory medium in itself to express my attitudes and ideas which are optimistic and informative of life.

121 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
Richards continued to discuss the subject matter of these new works:

The journey of the magi expresses for me the best in man, his continued search for truth and beauty, as symbolised in this case by the Christ child. The symbols are of all those known to most people in this connection because they are part of our common mythology and therefore eminently communicative.125

The industrial machine Richards purchased after receiving a grant from the Craft Council in 1974, enabled her to accept a major commission for a series of banners for Newcastle Christ Church Cathedral, which would take Richards two years to complete.126

After the completion of the banners for Christ Church Cathedral in 1976127, the next few years proved less arduous work-wise for Richards than the preceding five years. She was still involved with teaching and exhibiting in annual exhibitions and competitions, but the major advantage was that she was again able to concentrate on producing a body of work for her next solo exhibition in 1980.

By June 1980, Richards appeared to have exhausted her inspiration with banners and decided to return to painting, her original form of artistic expression. Her next solo exhibition at von Bertouch Galleries was of paintings. She said in the catalogue statement that “this exhibition is fifteen years late”.128 Her first solo in 1966 was held at a time where she was excitedly embarking on the banners which eventually dominated her artistic life. Now she had turned a full circle and her passion was transferred to painting. In her catalogue essay she said:

I love painting, [; sic] I love making things, and see no reason for an artist to be limited to one medium of expression but rather to use ability to enrich every aspect of life. For me

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125 Ibid.
126 Maitland City Art Gallery, "A Retrospective Exhibition of Fibre Work by Rae Richards." Exhibition Catalogue.
127 These are examined in Chapter 7.
performance constantly falls short of concept – it is the sustained effort that is required to learn to do anything thoroughly, especially if it is what one loves, that pushes me on to the hope of the achievement of a standard of excellence not only in things I make but in the total performance of life.\textsuperscript{129}

Richards’ approach was similar in a way to Beeston’s. They both oscillated between textiles and painting, yet for both there were links between the two art forms, which created a growth in both areas. One art form was somewhat reliant on the other and vice versa. Of her paintings, Richards said the work \textit{Redhead Heath}, (see plate 56) purchased by the University of Newcastle from the 1980 exhibition, remained one of her favourites.\textsuperscript{130}

Richards’ preoccupation with banners may have passed, but the inclusion of painted furniture in this exhibition demonstrated that ‘craft’ had not been completely forsaken for ‘fine art’. A few years later she spoke about the painted furniture in an interview. She said she bought well-shaped, second-hand furniture and then painted on the designs, but now “cringes” over some of her early attempts as she used to “massacre them”.\textsuperscript{131} Richards said ‘I cut several hall-stands down and made them into other things like toy boxes. I’m ashamed to say it now.’\textsuperscript{132}

Richards’ experience working to complete her Graduate Diploma in Professional Art Studies at Alexander Mackie College, Sydney in 1981, was another influence that changed the direction of her art making practice and she embarked on a new phase of banner production. She said “the stimulus of the course, and the impetus provided by her colleagues, opened up new stylistic directions for her”.\textsuperscript{133} At this time Richards began to use a wider range of

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Richards. \textit{Interview 2007}. This work can be seen in Plate 56, Chapter 7.
\textsuperscript{131} Morgan, “A Creator of Beauty.”
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{133} Maitland City Art Gallery, ”A Retrospective Exhibition of Fibre Work by Rae Richards.”
materials and her subject matter also changed to architectural images. The series she completed that year was devoted to Newcastle landmarks.\textsuperscript{134}

Richards continued to experiment and in her work, \textit{Newcastle Quilt}, she had found another medium to work with. She was “exploring the possibilities of appliqué, applied decoration, patchwork pieces, decorative hangings, quilts and clothing that could be either worn or hung on the wall.”\textsuperscript{135} This move into producing objects with a possible utilitarian function continued for several years. The making of wearables pushed her art making practice even more into the area of craft. But is her work art or craft? This was a question Richard leaves others to argue over. When her first exhibition of banners was held there was great controversy over this issue. In 1969 she said that the textiles were an extension of her paintings. She said “I’m not concerned about classing the banners as an art or craft – I think of them as fabric collage, just another picture-making device.”\textsuperscript{136} In 1984 she was still of the same mind. “At one time craft was considered as a derogatory term but it has since become reinstated”,\textsuperscript{137} she said. Morgan’s article at the time states that: “she does not care whether she is called an artist or a craftswoman. She just gets on with her work.”\textsuperscript{138}

Richards had a completely different approach to making banners than to painting. She saw these “as different and not so intense”.\textsuperscript{139} However, they were physically difficult to make, somewhat tediousness in their construction and it took a certain amount of tenacity to get them completed. Richards “felt that these could be qualities specific to women artists”.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} Newcastle Sun, "Woman Artist Now Says It with Banners," \textit{The Newcastle Sun}, 5 March 1969.
\textsuperscript{137} Morgan, "A Creator of Beauty."
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
Richards returned to painting in 1984. She began to produce work which she said were “primarily landscapes of the mind, hers and that of Charlotte Bronte.”\textsuperscript{141} The series comprised of seventeen paintings based on Charlotte Bronte’s \textit{Jane Eyre}. She said “I’m fascinated by the dark and light images in the book.”\textsuperscript{142} Early in her career Richards commenced an arts degree course at the University of Newcastle, and, although she did not complete the course, she retained her love of literature and worked with the book, \textit{Jane Eyre}, open beside her as a constant reference while she was making this body of work.\textsuperscript{143}

In 1986 Richards completed another collection of fabric works, which were the last for several years. It appeared that she had exhausted the potential of this form of representation, both technically and conceptually. After completing this body of work, Richards resumed painting. Another change in her art practice was due to a sojourn in the Greek Islands in 1990, where her fascination with the representation of not only form, but more importantly, light, was rekindled. Richards’ own words sum up the influence:

\begin{quote}
Response to subject is a starting point: but after that, one is looking to share the experience, and over all to paint the light; whether it is falling on a fruit, a sea or an island. Ambience, atmosphere and the quality of light are what I strive to communicate – to share.\textsuperscript{144}
\end{quote}

Yet another change developed after her return to drawing and painting, when she had begun to recognize and explore the “obviously heraldic nature of our native flora”,\textsuperscript{145} and then decided to incorporate these into banners.\textsuperscript{146} She combined this new iconography with her interest in European heraldry for another exhibition of banners in 1992. Richards said she realized:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{142} Morgan, "A Creator of Beauty."
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} Rae Richards, 2 September 1990. Artist statement to Anne von Bertouch for exhibition catalogue.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
\end{quote}
that we have an ancient heraldry of our own in the totemic paintings of black Australians. Along with the banners of the expected sort, this exhibition begins to explore the re-interpretation of the legendary creatures that inhabit this land.\textsuperscript{147}


\begin{center}
\textbf{Plate 25  Persimmons, Rae Richards, 1991, painting, oil on canvas, 30.2 x 40.5 cm, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.}
\end{center}

A banner for \textit{Signifiers\textquoteright}, the first exhibition at the new Lake Macquarie Art Gallery building, in 1996, was Richards’ last deviation from her commitment to painting after she finally made the decision. Richards was invited into this exhibition because of her long association with banner making.\textsuperscript{148} The work in this exhibition, \textit{One day of Creation}, was made from heavy calico, batik and appliqué and represented the motif of the sun which embodied the beginning

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.  \\
\end{flushright}
of everything.\textsuperscript{149} It now appeared that Richards would be best remembered for her banners, although now her passion for painting far exceeded her interest in the fibre works. Richards’ artist statement for her exhibition \textit{Survey in Retrospect: paintings by Rae Richards} in 1996, sums up her humble approach to her art making practice:

This is the hardest thing to do. For good or ill; like it or not, the statement is there on the wall. Whatever [sic] one says tends to sound precious or pretentious or both. I paint to make paintings, and my life would be much less if I did not. I draw on my environment, natural and man made [sic] and in this I include the great myths, histories and fairy tales that enrich and sustain the resilient human spirit. If, like the sundial, I appear to count only the sunlit hours, it is not that I am unaware of the increasing horrors of the world, it is rather to arm myself and perhaps others against them by noting what I find to be good, an apple in the sun or three giant kings of the Orient searching for truth and virtue. Art is the simple most persistent expression of the good in human kind, while there is art there is hope.\textsuperscript{150}

Richards, like Beeston, was aware of the social function of art and its capacity to draw notice to the problems of the contemporary world, yet they both chose to look at the aesthetic qualities of painting and to produce works that were not political. Had they commenced their art careers earlier in life, they may have created works that communicated a message to their audience that was less ‘safe’.

The most persistent theme in Richards’ painting retrospective was landscape. Over a period of nearly forty years, Richards had been drawn to many aspects of the landscape, particularly the coastal surroundings of Newcastle. The representation of “cliffs and headlands, dunes and heathland proliferated, while the architectural heritage of the city depicted was suspended in time.”\textsuperscript{151} Some of the works included the figure in the landscape, as part of the development

\textsuperscript{149} Lake Macquarie Gallery, "Signifiers," \textit{Exhibition Catalogue} (1996). Page 9. This was a professionally printed catalogue with an introduction essay and a statement and photo of work for every artist exhibiting in this exhibition. This type of catalogue was rare for galleries in Newcastle.


\textsuperscript{151} Stowell, "Rae Richards as Painter." Page 3.
of subject matter while others were a return to the depiction of objects in still life, as a formal exercise, was also used in her paintings.152

In her paintings much of Richards’ work is figurative and she is consistently experimenting with the way light falls on objects and the colours of shadows, particularly with still life. She feels that still life, always undertaken as a formal test, will always be a challenge.153

Richard’s artist statement for the catalogue of her 1996 solo exhibition revealed the process of her painting practice:

I start the business of painting in a formal and possibly old fashioned way with an idea or sketch and my palette laid out, high toned, low toned, complementaries [sic] or monotone. It is always a challenge to begin, and the great moment is if and when painting makes its own demands and, using these miraculous tools, one may coax it into life. Desire always outruns performance and the next painting will always be the best.154

Despite her claims that her work is not about making statements she revealed a spiritual side when she discussed her work in her artist statement for this exhibition.

Recently I stood for a long time looking at a datura tree. In the late evening light the great hanging bunches of blossoms seemed to colour the air around them, at the edge of the physical flower there was an evanescent image in the air, poignant, beautiful in the dusky light. Angel’s trumpets indeed. I wish I could paint that --- how it looked, how it felt. I can try.155

152 Ibid.
154 ———, "Artist Statement for Exhibition: Survey in Retrospect : Paintings by Rae Richards."
155 Ibid.
Richards said painting remains her first love, “how the edges are lost. How much of the subject you can remove and still identify the subject matter”.

When analysing Richards’ art career, it is evident that over many years her art practice has been an ongoing experience of experimentation and discovery. When staff writer for the *Newcastle Herald*, Joyce Morgan, interviewed Richards in 1984 she said:

Newcastle artist Rae Richards is like her colourful fabric banners: peel off one layer and there’s another underneath. At first she insists there’s no message in her art and seems amused by the seriousness with which many artists regard themselves. But her latest remarks suggest she takes her work very seriously; it’s a search for excellence.

The functions of art are wide ranging and artists choose their path according to their own individual philosophies. Richards commented in the Morgan 1984 interview, that art should be accessible to everyone, and that she felt her banners had succeeded in being this. She felt that art was sometimes deliberately mystified and she was cynical about work that is obscure in its meaning. Richards said that “art is a celebration, it brings out the best in mankind” and that “the making of a work of art is a work of optimism in itself”. For Richards, her path was clear from the start and there was no vacillating or being swayed by fashion. Morgan identifies the differences in Richards’ approach to her painting and textiles:

Festive, uninhibited and vibrant were words many reviewers use about her work. Despite the boldness of her work, particularly her banners and furniture painting, there’s a quiet,

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156 Rae Richards, interview with the author, 2007.
157 Morgan, "A Creator of Beauty." “Richards is easily hurt by adverse criticism about her work and yet appears to have a ‘flippant’ attitude when interviewed. She said ‘it’s a defense, I suppose, in case anyone attacks.’ “The more important a subject is to her, the more flip she tends to be about it” although she acknowledged that it should not matter.” Ibid.
158 Ibid
159 Ibid.
160 Ibid.
161 Richards.
Richards still has a regular routine of work, although even in 1984, she revealed in an interview that she “had to discipline herself to go into the studio each day”\textsuperscript{163} She is not sure why, but did admit that it is a solitary profession, and as people are very important to her, perhaps she felt she was cutting herself off. Richards also said there were times when she did not feel like making art and was suspicious of artists who said they only work when inspired\textsuperscript{164}

Although a successful artist Richards still felt that she could do better and was never satisfied with her work. She said that she continued working “in the hope that the next work would be perfect.”\textsuperscript{165} Richards said she would like to “draw like da Vinci, have the light sense of Tiepolo with the colour and humour of Chagall.”\textsuperscript{166}

Richards’ continuing interest in materials and techniques became evident when she began to experiment with ceramics and its endless possibilities in early 2000. Earlier in her career she had dabbled with clay but was not interested in its sculptural characteristics. The advancement in technology that provided a brilliant, rich and colourful palette in the form of underglazes, was more applicable to her passion for colour and its manipulation on a two dimensional surface. The earlier oxides that were used in decoration did not have the range of colours or the clear purity when fired. Like Allen, Richards realised that it was another form of painting, where the qualities of the material presented a challenge not experienced before.

\textsuperscript{162} Morgan, "A Creator of Beauty."
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
Since the death of her husband in 2006, Richards has moved house and set up another studio where she has returned to reworking paintings that were waiting completion, and has also been experimenting with a new approach to representing the architecture of Newcastle, as seen in the work in plate 26.\textsuperscript{167}

\begin{center}
Plate 26  \textit{Untitled}, Rae Richards, untitled painting, 2006, oil on canvas painting, no dimensions given, collection of the artist.
\end{center}

Despite the turmoil of the past two years, which also included a trip to Cyprus, Richards continues to work consistently.

Plate 27 shows Richards at the opening of her exhibition at John Paynter Gallery, Newcastle, in 2008.

\textsuperscript{167} Richards. Interview with the author, 2007.
Plate 27  Rae Richards at the opening of her exhibition at John Paynter Gallery, Newcastle 2008. Author’s photograph.

Although Richards’ career has spanned over fifty years, she is not ready to cease her production of art works or participation in exhibitions. Today, Richards’ art making practice has taken on new dimensions, using her much loved art form of painting to both solve old problems and explore new ground.

Lillian Sutherland

Lillian Sutherland was born in Newcastle in 1924. She completed tertiary education obtaining a teaching certificate and followed a career as a teacher. Similar to the other members of the Low Show Group, she embarked on her art training, unaware that her life would change dramatically after this initial exposure to the art world.

In 1961, when the six artists came together to form the Low Show Group, Sutherland was married with two children and, like the other women, she had to juggle a home and family with her career as an artist. She was fortunate in that she had the financial and family support which enabled her to carry on with her work.
Sutherland left Newcastle in the mid-1960s, to live on the north shore of Sydney, but continued her link with von Bertouch Galleries, although she had also been taken up by Wagner Galleries in Sydney.

It was not only landscape on which Sutherland focused in her early career, although later, she was to be known primarily for her work in this genre. Trips out west, when she visited ‘The Ridge’ on two separate occasions, allowed her to talk to the miners and their families. She listened to their stories about the characters that had lived on the opal fields, one in particular named Dunstan became the subject of four paintings by Sutherland.168 “Dunstan was a carefree fellow until he found some ‘colour’ on his claim.”169 Sutherland explained:

He filled half a kerosene tin with stones and went to the only pub to celebrate. After several drinks he realized that someone might steal his find so he returned to his claim and hid the kerosene tin intending to recover it after he had celebrated with his mates. Dunstan returned to the pub and bought drinks all round and then staggered back in a dust storm to recover his treasure. It was nowhere to be found, and even when he enlisted the help of friends the search was fruitless. So Dunstan returned to the pub and finally, when his money had gone, he went out to his claim and shot himself.170

Sutherland observed that the people on the goldfields had time to stand around and talk and there was a “wonderful feeling of freedom”171 amongst them. She said they lived in humpies, caravans and tents and the temperature in summer would soar to unbelievable heights. “Their eyes are full of the sun and, though they chat freely enough, no-one ever admits having found ‘colour’ - a subject on which they maintain complete silence”.172

170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
172 Ibid.
Sutherland also painted the animal population and the parrots that frequented Lightning Ridge. She was obviously deeply influenced by her environment as she expressed a desire to continue on the theme after another trip to the opal fields. Sutherland said that she “worked through a theme until suddenly that’s it – I find I have said all there is to say”\textsuperscript{173} and on the subject of ‘The Ridge’ she still had a lot more to say.\textsuperscript{174}

Like the other artists of the Low Show Group, Sutherland travelled overseas and used the images she saw as a basis for the subject matter of her art making. From one such trip she used the images of flowers, birds, landscapes, markets and people as the subjects for her next body of work for a solo exhibition at the von Bertouch Galleries in 1978. This varied subject matter produced an array of moods from the “feminine, especially in its response to the beauty of the flowers and the grace of birds”\textsuperscript{175} to “the sinister beauty of the lilies”.\textsuperscript{176} There were also works representing the people of Malaysia. Sutherland wrote in her artist statement for this exhibition:

\begin{quote}
A number of works in this my ninth one-painter exhibition were drawn from a recent visit to Malaya. To me the fascination of this country was the people: a wonderful conglomerate of races – Chinese, Indian, Malay – crowded together in an ant heap of activity concerned with the business of daily living.\textsuperscript{177}
\end{quote}

Another change of subject matter, this time a self-portrait resulted in Sutherland’s work being hung in the \textit{Archibald Prize}, in 1981. This painting had evolved by chance, when she was sitting in bed reading the paper and she saw her reflection caught in the bedroom mirror. She decided that it was a good composition and so proceeded to paint it. Sutherland

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{175} Peter Sparks, "Flowers, Birds and Suburbia," \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald}, 8 July 1978.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{177} Lillian Sutherland, "Artist Statement," \textit{Exhibition Catalogue for solo show by Lillian Sutherland at von Bertouch Galleries} (1978).
acknowledged that it was easier to paint a portrait of one’s self than a sitter, as you have to
please them “and get distracted by their uneasiness when you peer for hours into their
face.”

Like the other members of the Low Show Group, Sutherland also had a period where she
experimented with art/craft. For her the works were an extension of her paintings, but instead
of using paint she appliquéd and used mixed media on fabric. These were shown in an
exhibition in 1981.

Sutherland’s travels around Australia continued and were the source of both inspiration and
subject matter. The contrasts from desert to lush forest were captured in a collection of works
she made in 1982. Her artist statement for her exhibition at the Wagner Gallery, gave
valuable insight into the source of her subject matter and the mood the landscape evoked:

Traveling from Sydney to Perth across the Nullarbor was an
impressive experience – one is truly aware of the immensity of
the desert that separates our two cities, a desert of salt bush and
stones where the crows nest [sic] on the telephone poles and the
occasional railway settlement is surrounded in every direction
by endless nothingness.

From Perth I travelled in the south west area, after the
sparseness of the Nullarbor the forest areas and the abundant
wildflowers were a complete contrast.

The exhibition that featured these works was not as successful as Sutherland would have
liked.

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180 Lillian Sutherland, "Artist Statement for Exhibition at Wagner Gallery Sydney," Exhibition Catalogue
(1982).
181 Letter to Anne von Bertouch, 23 April 1986. Local Studies Files, Newcastle Region Library. This show did
not do well financially and was given a disappointing revue in the Sydney Morning Herald. In a letter to Anne
von Bertouch on 10 July, Sutherland wrote:

"Was lovely to see you at the opening of my show, thank you for coming – not done very well financially & a
dreadful crit [sic] in today’s Herald, a

147
In 1983, Sutherland made a trip to Limestone Valley in the Brindabella Range, south of Wee Jasper where the Goodradigbe River flows through a tiny valley and was popular with trout fishermen. Sutherland’s son had previously visited the area and wanted her to see “his magic valley”. Her next body of work stemmed from that experience.

Sutherland’s statement in the exhibition catalogue for her 1985 exhibition at the von Bertouch Galleries said:

The majority of the paintings in this exhibition are from a working and camping holiday which I shared with three companions in the Flinders Ranges last year. The journey across the western NSW provided a great contrast with our eventual destination; first, miles of dry, red flat country dotted with salt bush under immense skies; next the ranges, fascinating mountains tilted and twisted, bare but alive with colours of rock bands and faces. Brachina Gorge, which cuts the mountain formation of Wilpena Pound was perhaps the most interesting of the places we visited. Our camp set by the creek bed was surrounded by the walls of the gorge, sandstone formations that changed with the light through an infinite variety of colour and pattern - a challenge for the painter.

Sutherland continued to travel and to use the landscape as a source of inspiration for her art making practice. In a letter to Anne von Bertouch, she describes her next trip inland:

I’ve been to a place called Oxley South West of Hay where I had the use of an old school house to camp in, complete with drop down dunny – on arrival wondered what on earth I was doing there as it seemed the most god forsaken place – flat salt bush country, however loved the time there & and have plenty of work ahead - all in the mind as yet – also had a constant battle with the dust & mice – occupational hazards! Time now to settle down & paint. [sic]

bit depressing but somehow I don’t feel cast down by it all, I am already back at work”. (Ibid)

Her next exhibition in 1986 at the Wagner Gallery showed works from her last trip. Sutherland said:

These works were painted in the Oxley area which lies some 80 kilometers [sic] to the west of Hay in southern N.S.W. The Oxley township was named after the explorer John Oxley where he terminated his voyage down the Lachlan River, little remains of the township. It is a place of contrast, dry saltbush plains which stretch unendingly in every direction relieved by the tree lined Lauchlan River and Cumbungy Creek and swamps which open out to the Great Cumbungy Swamp area towards Balrandal and always the immense sky.185

Sutherland put together a body of work inspired by her next trip, this time to Cape York Peninsular in 1988. She said that “I miss the reality I remember of consuming heat and powerful light under clear, varying skies and the way heat deadens a desiccated landscape.”186

Although Sutherland had moved away from Newcastle, she continued her association with Newcastle friends and colleagues, continuing to exhibit at von Bertouch Galleries. Lillian Sutherland remained a painter throughout her long life. While others from the Low Show Group experimented with different forms, Sutherland always rendered her ideas in a two dimensional format, primarily using the medium of oil on canvas or board. Her many exhibitions also showed her strong drawings, which sometimes were to be the basis of the paintings that followed, while others stood alone as finished artworks.

Sutherland’s creative strength was in capturing a mood, particularly in her landscapes. Her frequent excursions into the countryside allowed her a wide variety of different environments to experience and experiment with, from the lush verdant landscape of the coast to the warm

dry topography of the outback. Many of her works were large, enabling her to communicate to the viewer the sense of space so apparent in the Australian landscape.

Sutherland’s move to Sydney may have assisted with her career, yet it was while still living in Newcastle that she made her initial contact with the Wagner Galleries. Despite the other members of the group’s brief experiences in exhibiting nationally and internationally, Sutherland was the only artist of the Low Show Group to consistently exhibit in a capital city in Australia.

Lillian Sutherland died in 1989 at the age of 65.

**Madeleine Scott Jones**

Madeleine Scott Jones, born in 1919, came from a different background to the other members of the Low Show Group as she had the advantage of having been educated in two cultures; the English of her father and the French of her mother.

Her father, William McDonald Scott, was born in 1884 at Bandaw, on the shores of Lake Nyasa in Central Africa, the eldest of the ten children of a medical missionary. He chose to study divinity at Edinburgh University but switched to medicine, graduating with first class honours in 1905. His area of specialisation was pathology and he spent the next three years working with three leading pathologists in Edinburgh, Munich and Paris. While in Paris he met Madeleine’s mother, Alice Mollard whose family had moved there from Franche Comte to enable her father to take up the position of senator. Alice was a highly educated woman for the time as she had studied German and English at Besancon and the Sorbonne. Madeleine was one of eight children. In William Scott’s family, daughters and sons were given equal opportunities regarding access to in higher education. Six of his children chose medicine; his eldest daughter took a degree in English at Cambridge. “Madeleine, the odd one out, would

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187 Jones and Dale-Jones, *Taffy Was Transported*. Page 102
choose art school, but by that time her father, who Madeleine is certain would have disapproved, was dead, a victim in 1941 of the Blitz.”\(^{188}\)

Scott’s art education commenced in 1946, when she returned from a period serving with the navy in World War II. In post war England, those who had served in the forces were given assistance to re-train in an area of their choice; Scott chose to attend art school. She enrolled in the Camberwell School of Art in London.\(^{189}\)

In an interview in 2007, Scott Jones\(^{190}\) said her time in this school proved rewarding and gave her an excellent grounding in all aspects of art. This period of British art history was very exciting. Her tutors included Sir William Coldstream, Victor Passmore, Laurence Gowing, John Minton and Claude Ropers. Although Scott made her name in ceramics, her early days at art school were involved with many other art forms. Painting and drawing were mandatory in the first two years of the four year art course she completed at Camberwell. She felt that drawing, particularly figure drawing, was possibly the most valuable discipline for any artist despite their later specialization. The first two years of her course comprised of a general course called the Intermediate Course in which all students followed the same programme of life drawing, weaving, basic clay modelling in terracotta, and carving in stone. History of Architecture and Art History were also included in the curriculum. Having completed this course students were then able to select to specialise in either painting or sculpture and complete the next two years, thus fulfilling the requirements of the full art course.\(^{191}\)

Scott and four other students chose to major in studio pottery, which, at that time, was considered avant-garde and an exciting field. They were given the opportunity to transfer to

\(^{188}\) Ibid. Scott’s parents married in 1914, and her mother abandoned the political high life of Paris for a cottage in a small village near Cambridge, where William had obtained a university post. (Ibid)

\(^{189}\) Madeleine (Scott Jones) Mitchell, interview with the author, 2007.

\(^{190}\) Scott added Jones to her name after her marriage to Harri Jones and dropped the Scott Jones when she married Mitchell. There are inconsistencies in references, as some still refer to her as Madeleine Scott Jones, while others to Madeleine Mitchell.

\(^{191}\) Madeleine Mitchell, 2007. Interview with the author.
Stoke-on-Trent to study design relating to industrial pottery. She decided to stay with the studio pottery and the history and drawing that she found equally demanding. Museum Study was part of the course and she felt that her access to the wonderful examples of pottery from all over the world, that could be found and studied in the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum, were her most valuable influence and education.

The British Museum permitted students to actually handle the precious pieces in their collection. The students would contact the museum and arrange a time for viewing which was conducted in private in a room away from the main viewing areas. They were able to examine in great detail aspects of pottery, such as weight and balance, which is not possible when objects are in a glass case. Although Scott has travelled extensively throughout her life, she feels that this exposure to the most valuable ceramics in the world was the most inspirational and educational experience. Michael Cardew and Harry Davies were two contemporary ceramic artists who had a great influence on her, Davies in particular, as he imported contemporary pottery for a shop in Tottenham Road called ‘Heals’.  \(^\text{192}\)

Scott also spent considerable time in Paris and, when she had completed her course, she was employed by the Camberwell School of Art to teach studio pottery. It was at this time that she married the Welsh poet, Harri Jones. This was followed by the birth of her first child, Sian. She continued her teaching and, when Sian was two years old, Scott Jones, accompanied by Sian, travelled to her sister’s home in Brazil where she stayed for twelve months. On her return to England, the family settled in Portsmouth, where she was approached by Portsmouth College of Art to teach pottery design. \(^\text{193}\) She taught at Portsmouth for seven years until she and her husband made the decision to migrate to Australia. By this time she had three daughters.

\(^{192}\) Ibid.
\(^{193}\) Another teacher, a male was employed to teach the practical side.
Scott Jones has never considered herself as a ‘woman artist’. Brought up in a family that had little gender bias she was given the same opportunities as the male members of the family. Success came from hard work and positive application, and being female did not enter into the equation.\(^{194}\) Although she had children she was determined to work at her profession.

Despite her background Scott Jones integrated comfortably into the Newcastle cultural community on her arrival from England in 1959. She established the first ceramics course in Newcastle at the Newcastle National Art School in 1961.\(^{195}\) On a personal level Scott Jones did not have the same financial support the other women in the group had, due to the unsettled nature and early death of her husband in 1964, yet she managed to bring up her three daughters, make a living by teaching and making pottery, travel and still be an important figure in the Newcastle art community.

Scott Jones made both functional and sculptural ceramics. The majority of the work she submitted for her first exhibition in Newcastle, in 1961, the \textit{Regional Survey} at Newcastle City Art Gallery was functional pottery, but she was able to include several wheel constructed sculptural pieces and a table that had a glazed ceramic surface. She said:

\begin{quote}
they were probably expecting to see high temperature pottery – casseroles, teapots and so on. But I thought I’d go back to wheel sculpture, so I made rather big pieces of wheel sculpture, stylized again – flying fish, a cat and crosses between fishes and birds and very big assembled plant pots, they were all fired in the local pipe works. Some of them had black pigment on them, but mostly the surface was just like what you see on drain pipes.\(^{196}\)
\end{quote}

Scott Jones’ interest in sculptural works was indicative of her desire to go beyond conventional high-fired functional domestic ware which she felt had all been done before.

\(^{195}\) The story of her contribution to teaching is located in Chapter 6.
(and very well) by other cultures such as the Chinese, Greeks, South Americans and Spanish. She said of the sculptural pieces “I kept the surface as simple as possible because I wanted people to look at the form”. 197

Scott Jones continued her heavy schedule of teaching with four days and three nights a week taken up with classes while also producing her own work. 198 In 1966 Scott Jones returned to England and France to visit friends and family and continued on to Mexico where she studied ancient ceramic work. 199

Scott Jones’ pottery had an ‘earthy’ look, which was popular in the 1970s. She used a stoneware clay body, which was fired in a reduction atmosphere in the kiln. This brought out the iron in the body of the clay, and allowed the ash glaze to melt at this higher temperature, which was not as successful with an earthenware body and firing. The stoneware clay and high temperature firing ensured that the piece was strong and able to withstand the rigors of domestic use. Scott Jones collected ash for her glazes which cut down on the costs associated with pottery. This is a very laborious process, as the ash must be washed and sieved to acquire the consistency needed for a fine glaze. The suitability of the glaze was only obvious after firing. She used oxides, which were ground and mixed with water, for the decoration. This was sometimes used over a wax resist decoration.

Scott Jones married Sydney Sterling Mitchell in 1970. He was the widower of the late Cecily Mitchell, a Newcastle artist.

In 1977, when Scott Jones was interviewed for Artemis, she described a technique she was using called majolica (maiolica), where metallic oxides are painted on a white glaze, a traditional technique used on Italian, Spanish and Portuguese pottery. She said an English

197 Ibid.
199 Ibid.
potter, Alain Caiger-Smith, who works only in majolica, had brought an exhibition to Australia, that had created a lot of interest, and that now she was “thinking up new forms” on which to use this technique. In the interview she points out the difficulties of painting this type of decoration on clay forms, as the design must relate to the form for it to be successful and this takes a lot of time in experimentation.

Plate 28 Storage Jar, Madeleine Scott Jones, 1980, wheel thrown stoneware, 18 x 13.5 cm, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

Scott Jones’ experimentation with majolica also influenced her decoration on functional pottery. This stoneware storage jar made in 1980 (plate 28), shows a shift from the more earthy ash glaze and iron decoration (see plate 61). It was purchased by the Newcastle Region Art Gallery.

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201 Ibid. Page 9.
After her marriage to Sydney Mitchell, Scott Jones moved to a property at Speers Point where she had her first ‘real’ pottery studio.

Scott Jones moved from her Speers Point home after her second husband died in 1975. She said that the property was too large for her to maintain, forcing her to make the decision to move back to her home in the city. The move included the necessity to disassemble her pottery studio and it was then that she gave up making pots, although she continued her teaching until around 1979.\(^{202}\)

Despite having ceased making pots and teaching, Scott Jones continued making artworks in her terrace home, with its spectacular view over King Edward Park to the ocean.

Until her death in June 2010 she still met regularly with a group of ex-students, attended openings and lectures at the Newcastle Region Art Gallery and continued to support the art community of Newcastle.

Lovoni Webb

Lovoni Viria Webb was born in Jesmond, Newcastle on December 6, 1925. Typical of many families at this time, there was not much encouragement for Webb to continue on with a senior school education. In Newcastle it was the norm for girls to leave school after the Intermediate Certificate, to attend business-college and train for a secretarial position, or to be employed in a hospital to be trained as a nurse. In this case Webb chose business-college.\(^{203}\)

\(^{202}\) In the interview Scott Jones said she was not sure of the date.

In 1943 Webb commenced employment at John Lysaght Australia Ltd in a clerical capacity. It was here that she first came into contact with Elizabeth Martin, who was working on a collection of artworks for the Lysaght management. This was her first link with the Low Show Group artists.

In 1946 Webb moved to Sydney where she found employment with Crown Crystal. Her artistic interests expanded and during this time in Sydney she attended part time painting classes at East Sydney Technical College. This was her first formal education in art.204

Webb returned to Newcastle in 1948. While in Newcastle she worked in a clerical position for the Shortland County Council. Still not settled Webb in 1952 made the decision to travel to England for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Webb left Australia for London, where a letter of introduction from Ruby Grisdale, who was at the time the Honorary Secretary of the Victoria League in Newcastle, assisted her in gaining employment in the clerical field. From London Webb set forth on a European tour. Through her exposure to the culture of London her love of art was rekindled and it was here that her desire to pursue an art career matured.205 She said “my trip to England and Europe, visiting galleries and studying the exhibitions, was a great inspiration.”206 On her return to Newcastle she enrolled at the Newcastle National Art School and was a student at the same time as the Low Show Group women. Although not an original member of the Low Show Group, but as a student of John Passmore and Paul Beadle, Webb shared a similar art education. She exhibited in the Low Show Group exhibition of 1962.

Webb said that it was at the art school in Newcastle that she attempted her first oil painting and the “basic analysis of simple objects – e.g. apples – into planes with colour – warm and

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204 Ibid.
205 Ibid.
cool to suggest form.”207 The human form was also examined in Passmore’s classes. Webb said: “I also endeavoured to capture the complexities of the human figure, again with observations of planes, as well as an introduction to anatomy – (“Muscles and Pulleys”)).208

The black ink wash on cartridge Green Park, 1958 (plate 29) was made while Webb was in London on one of her many trips.

Plate 29 Green Park, Lovoni Webb, 1958, drawing, black ink and wash on cartridge, no dimensions given, private collection of Robert Webb, Newcastle, NSW.

Webb continued her studies in Sydney in 1956 at East Sydney Technical Art School. She was awarded a mature age scholarship from that institution which gave her the financial support she needed to further her education.209 The successful completion of the diploma enabled Webb to apply for another scholarship to study for a teaching certificate at Sydney Teachers

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207 Ibid.
208 Ibid.
209 Ibid.
College, qualifying her to teach in NSW high schools.\textsuperscript{210} Even though she had acquired these qualifications, Webb was not sure about teaching in schools, and applied for many different positions that required an art background including Education Officer and Curator at the Art Gallery of NSW. At this time in Australia such positions were the domain of male applicants,\textsuperscript{211} so Webb settled on a teaching career and at the same time worked on her own art making which was very important to her.

A working trip to Hill End in 1963 gave Webb the opportunity to concentrate on the landscape of the area.\textsuperscript{212} Plate 30, \textit{Hill End}, was a quick study made on that trip.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Plate_30_Hill_End_webb_1963}
\caption{Plates 30 \textit{Hill End}, Lovoni Webb, 1963, drawing, no dimensions or media given, private collection of Robert Webb, Newcastle, NSW.}
\end{figure}

In 1972 Webb returned to England and made a tour of Europe, before going on to Los Angeles and San Francisco. This was a study tour that concentrated on galleries in each of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{210} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{211} Robert Webb, 12 June 2008. Interview with the author.
\item \textsuperscript{212} Lovoni Webb, \textit{Exhibition Catalogue for \textquote{Influences of John Passmore Exhibition}} 1992.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
those places. Another study tour of the galleries of England and Europe in 1979 may have assisted with her decision to take a change of direction, as she resigned from teaching in 1980. After retiring Webb decided to devote her time to establishing her career as a full-time artist. She continued to be a member of the Gallery Society of the Art Gallery of NSW and living in Paddington brought her into contact with a lively art community. She attended many exhibitions in Sydney, sometimes going back three or four times to the one show. Webb also had an impressive collection of artworks by other artists in her home.\(^{213}\)

Anne von Bertouch encouraged Webb to make smaller works that could be sold in the *Collector’s Choice Exhibition*. Up until then Webb was producing large works. A smaller painting, an ink and watercolour on Arches, *Banksia* (plate 31), was made by Webb for the 1982 *Collector’s Choice*.\(^{214}\)

\[\text{Plate 31  } \text{Banksia & Yellow Roses, Lovoni Webb, 1982, drawing, ink and watercolour on Arches paper, no dimensions given, private collection of Robert Webb, Newcastle, NSW.}\]


\(^{214}\) Ibid. It was one of six works priced at $140. Anne von Bertouch had encouraged Webb to produce smaller works that were more ‘saleable’, as previous works were large and not suitable for *Collectors’ Choice* as there was a size and price limit. Ibid.
In 1983 Webb enrolled in a postgraduate course at City Art Institute, Sydney, and pursued her career as a full time artist, becoming a member of the College of Fine Arts Alumni Association and the National Trust. In the catalogue for Webb’s 1987 solo exhibition at von Bertouch Galleries in Newcastle, she chose to include a quote by William Blake.

To see a world in a grain of sand
and a heaven in a wild flower,
hold infinity in the palm of your hand
and eternity in an hour.\(^\text{215}\)

This could indicate that she saw nature as a source of inspiration and that making art can capture a moment in time.

In 1994 Webb returned to Dalwood Homestead in the grounds of Wyndham Estate Winery in the Hunter Valley which had family connections.\(^\text{216}\) Her great, great grandfather, George Wyndham, one of the most important pioneers of the region, designed and had the family home built in 1829. It is the earliest known example of the Greek revival style of architecture in the Hunter Valley.\(^\text{217}\) Webb shows a corner of the homestead in the watercolour, *Dalwood Homestead*, 1994 (plate 32).

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\(^\text{216}\) Robert Webb. 2008
Like Cutcher, Webb moved away from Newcastle and eventually lost contact with the Low Show Group except for the occasional Collector’s Choice exhibitions. The factor that initially connected Webb to the Low Show Group was their common contact as students of John Passmore. It was Webb’s determination to be a successful artist and her professional approach to her art making that also ensured her connection to this group. Her decision to give up full-time teaching to devote herself to her art practice indicated that her first priority was with the making, although, like many artists, the necessity to earn a living and establish financial security delayed this choice.

Webb died in Newcastle in June 2008 at the age of 83.
Conclusion

Joan Kerr wrote that:

... people from the same region have multiple common threads ... although each final pattern is different – offers pathways of understanding which are denied to us when studying the products of alien cultures.218

The ‘multiple common threads’ that initially linked the Low Show Group artists were strong, particularly as Newcastle had a very small art community at that time. However, as time went on the art community began to grow as did the careers of the Low Show Group artists. Their stories all followed different paths and had different endings. While the majority stayed in Newcastle, several of the Low Show artists moved away, one severing ties completely. The move to craft, at a time when it was becoming popular in Australia, was made by several of the artists, yet their foundation in fine arts set them apart from many of the other women involved in the crafts. Throughout their careers they continued to strive for the professionalism they initially sought when they first came together as a group.

The following chapter details their individual exhibitions, together with comments and reviews of their work.

CHAPTER 5
INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

In this chapter the individual solo exhibitions of each of the Low Show artists are considered. Although the reports of their work were in the popular press, the number of positive comments about their major exhibition assisted them in attracting their audience. This served as the conduit between the artists and their audience, which Becker considers necessary for a cooperative art world.¹ A full list of their solo and group exhibitions are included in their Curriculum Vitae in Appendix A.

Norma Allen

Plate 33  *Mirror: Self Portrait*, Norma Allen, 1959, painting, oil on paper on board, 62 x 52 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.

Norma Allen began exhibiting in local and national exhibitions while still an art student. Her decision early in her career to concentrate on portraiture, primarily in oils, was evident in the important group *Regional Survey Exhibition*, in 1960 at the Newcastle City Art Gallery. Allen exhibited in a range of exhibitions at different venues outside Newcastle, which included in Sydney, Farmer’s Blaxland Gallery, Underwood Gallery, the Society of Artists, the Australian Watercolour Institute exhibitions and the North Adelaide Gallery.

After her success in the *Regional Survey Exhibition*, Allen decided to send her self-portrait, *Mirror*, to the Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, as an entry in the *Archibald Prize Exhibition* (plate 33). The painting was selected for hanging in this competition, a major achievement because of the large number of entries submitted from all over Australia.

Allen’s first solo exhibition opened at von Bertouch Galleries in July, 1965. This exhibition, *Norma Allen, a painter’s diary - six months - places, seasons and occasions*, despite some criticism, was generally commended. Joy Foster, art reviewer for *The Newcastle Sun* wrote...

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2 Letter to Allen from D. A. Frame, Accompanying a cheque for first prize in open section of art competition, 26 October 1959.
4 Her body of work included four portraits, and one self-portrait. The paintings were titled *Brothers; Figure in a Garden; Mirror* (self-portrait) and *Seated Figure*. These portraits were commissioned by notable Newcastle identities of the time, Mrs. John Flood, Mrs. Jeffrey Clack, Mrs. Paul Cant and Jake Ramsey, and, although the paintings were exhibited, they were not for sale.
5 NMH, "The Regional Survey 11 Exhibition," *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 5 November 1960. A work in the exhibition, *Parnell Place* was commissioned by Miss Marlene Norst, a lecturer in German at Newcastle University College. Norst lived in Parnell Place, and wanted a painting that would capture the atmosphere of that corner of Newcastle. There were plans for the demolition of buildings in the area and she wanted to retain the images of this place before the new building program commenced and changed the look of the area. Ibid
7 Allen entered her work in many of the national art competitions that were offered.
8 This was an important exhibition for Allen as it allowed her to demonstrate her diversity of technical ability while representing a broad range of subject matter. It comprised of 23 paintings in oils, one watercolour and seven drawings in ink and wash, on the themes of landscape and people. The prices ranged from 65 guineas for the two large paintings in oil *Stony Creek, 6th March* and *Myuna, Lake Macquarie*. The smallest and least expensive work was a drawing *Myuna*, which measured 8.5 x 7.5 inches and was priced at 9 guineas. Catalogue for exhibition *Norma Allen, a painter’s diary - six months - places, seasons and occasions*, von Bertouch Galleries, 1965.
9 Peter Sparks, "Quality of Song," *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 30 July 1965.
of Allen’s first solo show commenting that these works presented an “inventive” approach to the themes of landscape and the figure and that Allen had approached these “well exploited themes” with a strong individual style. The series on the seasons was explored in a way to “meet new challenges” through her ability:

to use color persuasively in landscape and figurative paintings. She selects, quite justifiably, what is pleasing to her in landscape and uses figures well as static components of composition and subsidiaries to color. At times she cuts free from the anchor of external realities to quote the season in color so that a transparent prism of green and blue is “Winter” and soft panels of vernal green and yellow convey “Spring”.

Allen’s work was admired for its subtle colours and distinctive use of light. The large painting, *Myuna*, (3 x 4 ft.), was a simplified landscape that used strong contrasts of colour. Foster said that this helped it over the “monotony” that affected the *Stony Creek* painting and that a soft luminosity was achieved in *Lake Moon*, through the “limpid colour and elusive forms”. Foster went on to say that “most of the landscapes are rosy dreams with soft edges and misty distances. A watercolour, “Red Landscape” is a sharp contrast with its clearly delineated landforms.”

The representation of people in the works in this exhibition was mostly in the small paintings, the largest of which, *Summer Girls*, was only 20 x 24 inches in size. Allen also showed a preference for representing groups of people near the seaside, one of her favourite themes. Foster wrote that two of these artworks in particular, *Children with Balloons* and *Hide and Seek* exhibited “a strong sense of design in grouping figures.” Others show “rows of

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
figures, resembling the paper cut-outs children make of people hand in hand, a characteristic grouping which the painter used very effectively.”16 *Cathedral* and its study, and a drawing *Audience*, indicated her search for new subject matter while working from already established lines.17

Sparks, in his review, said the “lyrical quality”18 was the best feature of Allen’s painting and drawings. He added that “colour of subtlety and grace”19 portrayed the seasons and that “landscape, encounters with children, a lizard in the sun, beach visits and cathedral are experiences enjoyed, feelings expressed”.20 Like Foster, Sparks singled out the large work *Myuna, Lake Macquarie*, for comment. He wrote “it is a big, satisfying landscape that contains the distances and a mood of the lake.” However, he was more critical of the figurative works. “The figure groups are the least satisfying in the exhibition. The drawing approach makes them static – something the figure does not want to be”.21 Foster however felt that “these small figures have a spontaneous appeal in their subject matter but avoid the trap of sentimentality”.22 Both Sparks and Foster agreed that the restricted tone in several of the paintings did not work and Sparks felt that the use of colour “limited expression.”23,24

Sparks noted that “all told the show is another example of the development of art in the city. This development is not a five minute growth, or a five year, and much is to come.”25

Allen’s first interstate solo show was held concurrently with a solo by Arthur Boyd at the North Adelaide Galleries, South Australia, in 1966. Elizabeth Young, in her review for the

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16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Foster, "First Solo Show."
23 Ibid.
24 Sparks, "Quality of Song."
25 Ibid.
Adelaide Advertiser, wrote “A romantic, tentative talent masks the work of Norma Allen”.  

Although Young found the work ‘slight’, she said that among these works there were several landscapes and these, along with paintings which depicted the images of children, captured the audience’s approval. A variety of mediums were utilised to represent her subject matter. In her review, Young comments on how Allen used oil and watercolour thinly in a “deliberately unified scheme or key of color (sic).” Young wrote:

In the tender ‘Pool’, ‘Four Girls’, ‘The Bouquet’, ‘Kites Flying’, ‘Lake Moon’, ‘Red Landscape’ and the warm ‘Summer’ abstract, the individual, evocative, if somewhat slight quality of her work reaches its most complete expression.

Ian George, in his review of Boyd’s work, in the Adelaide, concluded his writing with a guarded comment about Allen’s art works:

Good Contrast – By contrast one should see the showing by Norma Allen at North Adelaide Galleries. She is not quite a Boyd but deals with the equally intimate world of small children without too much sentiment and shows a satirical flair in ‘Friends of the Bride’ there is however a tendency in her works, to overstate the obvious. Nevertheless, ‘Sleeping Guests’ gives promise of sensitivity and power.

In Elizabeth Young’s review of the works, her opinion on the quality of the subject matter in Allen’s paintings was similar to that of George’s, particularly in relation to Allen’s handling of the representation of the children. “Allen is most successful in her motets of children and

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26 Elizabeth Young, "Solo Display from N.S.W.," Adelaide Advertiser, 27 April 1966.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid. A solo exhibition of the work of Arthur Boyd was held concurrently with Allen’s in another gallery space at the same venue.
young girls.”

While these comments point out the slight nature of her work and her tendency for overstatement, particularly alongside the work of Arthur Boyd, her avoidance of sentimentality and strong sensibility were seen as strengths.

By 1967, Newcastle City Art Gallery had become not just a former outpost of art, but a favourable exhibition venue for established artists. Allen continued to focus on portraiture and the progress she had made in this area was acknowledged in 1967.

In 1972, the University of Newcastle purchased an art work by Allen, titled, *Newcastle Harbour Triptych*, (plate 34). The triptych is still part of the University Collection and was selected for hanging in the exhibition, *The University Collection Evolution*, in December 2007.

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30 Young, "Solo Display from N.S.W.."
31 Ibid.
32 Newcastle City Art Gallery, "The Newcastle Prize 1967," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1967). The inaugural exhibition was in 1957, when the prize was conferred on Michael Kmit. Acknowledgement on a local level occurred with Allen’s work being accepted into ‘The Newcastle Prize’, 1967, judged Hal Missingham. Some of the artists included in the exhibition were Judy Cassab, Herbert Flugman, Desiderius Orban, William Peascod, Clifton Pugh, Jan Senbergs, Guy Warren and Reinis Zusters.
33 ———, "Third Hunter Valley Review," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1967). For the Third Hunter Valley Review 1967, the acknowledged Australian artist and former Novocastrian, Tom Gleghorn was judge. The catalogue introduction was written by David Thomas. It was in this exhibition that the members of the Low Show Group, with the exception of Betty Cutchet were together again in an exhibition. Norma Allen had two portraits in oil, Mary Beeston had two paintings; one oil, and the other acrylic, Elizabeth Martin had two lino-cuts and Rae Richards had one oil painting.
34 Portia Geach Trust, "Portia Geach Memorial Award," www.trust.com.au (accessed 28 June, 2007). Her portrait of an academic at the University of Newcastle, Dr. Norman Talbot, was accepted for hanging in the *Portia Geach Memorial Award Exhibition*.
35 Newcastle City Art Gallery, “Hunter Valley Artists,” (1972): This was an invitation exhibition of Hunter Valley artists specially arranged for the Mattara Festival. The University paid $200 for this work. Three small works (each 20 x 24 inches) made up the triptych. Allen submitted only one work of the fifty six which made up that exhibition.
Plate 34  *Newcastle Harbour Triptych*, Norma Allen, 1972, crayon drawing, 3 panels each 64 x 70 cm, University of Newcastle Collection.

Allen showed both paintings and painted majolica ceramic platters in her next solo exhibition at von Bertouch Galleries in 1977. It was the human studies in this exhibition that Sparks wrote of in his review. He said:

> The works are mainly concerned with people, the most difficult and rewarding of subjects. A liking for the crowded canvas sometimes leads the artist into difficulties but this can be taken as acceptance of challenge.  

He said “the majolicas [sic] are of necessity simple things and this is their strength” preferring *The Gentle Lovers*, *Night Life* and *Butterfly*. Of the overall exhibition he said “the whole picture is one of an artist progressing, a maddening process for the victim involved and one that pays late dividends at times.” It was from this exhibition that the University of Newcastle purchased *The Story* (plate 35), for their collection.

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37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 In the work *The Story* the melting of the images into a sea of blue and the naïve quality of the portraits, resembles the works of Marc Chagall. The multiple focal points are linked by the use of the light tone and the organic shapes, none of which are overly dominant.
A pencil, pen and black oil drawing, *Sketch of Jill Cutcher (Girl with Bird)* (plate 36), was purchased in 1977 by a patron and later donated to Maitland Gallery.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ This work purchased by Pat McGilvray, was given as a gift to Maitland Regional Gallery in 2005. It was not part of her 1977 solo exhibition, but may have been purchased from the *Collectors’ Choice*. 
In September 1979, Allen was included in the Ceramic Survey ‘79 show, at von Bertouch Galleries. She was showing with the most talented ceramic artists from the Newcastle region, many of whom had been students of Madeleine Scott Jones. Ceramic platters were her ‘canvases’ for these portraits, again rendered in oxides over a tin glaze.

In 1980, Allen’s paintings and majolica were again highlighted in a solo exhibition at von Bertouch Galleries. Maureen Hayes, in her review of the exhibition for ‘Newcastle Spotlight’ in the Newcastle Morning Herald, said:

Memory and imagination haunt her paintings etchings and ceramics. Norma Allen, well-known Newcastle artist provides an exhibition of excitement...Maiolica dishes, plates and bowls vibrate with a richness of colour and line.

Again the subject matter was diverse, and Sparks said “it all expresses a feminine viewpoint,” but it was more than that; it was about memories and experiences with both the landscape and people.

In 1982, Allen’s solo exhibition at the Armstrong Gallery in Morpeth showed a large body of work. The art review from the Newcastle Morning Herald praised “the oil, ‘Girl with

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42 Ibid.
43 Anne von Bertouch, "Norma Allen," Exhibition Catalogue (1980): There were seventeen paintings on paper and hardboard which ranged in size from 12.5 x 10 cm to 49 x 74 cm. The sixty six pieces of majolica incorporated three tile tables, sets of bowls and plates, framed tiles plates, an assortment of bowls, plates and dishes and two majolica medallions, a huge output for any professional artist.
44 Maureen Hayes was an artist and teacher.
45 Maureen Hayes, "Intriguing Line-up of Talent," Newcastle Morning Herald, 5 December 1980, The spelling of ‘maiolica’ has been retained in the extracts. ‘Maiolica’ and ‘majolica’ are both correct
47 1982 was the year of the Inaugural Mattara Spring Festival Invitation Art Award Exhibition at von Bertouch Galleries. Again Allen was selected for inclusion in this important exhibition and again a painting of her immediate surroundings, ‘Garden’, was given a positive review by the art critic of The Newcastle Herald, Charles Pettinger, who also commented “that it was a very important exhibition pointing to the way ahead. It was a credit to those who envisioned, inaugurated and produced it.” Charles Pettinger, "Magic in Diversity of Mattara," Newcastle Morning Herald, 27 August 1982.
48 The inclusion of both painting and ceramics was reminiscent of her solo show in 1980, as was the large number of works. She used oils for her larger paintings and aquarelles for the smaller works and the majolica
Poppies’[which] could not fail to be a preference accompanied by ‘Christmas Tree’, an oil and ‘Tania’, an aquarelle”.49 This review was titled *Picasso’s ghost around the corner* as the art reviewer wrote that during the viewing of the exhibition, “he glimpsed the ghost of Picasso and Roualt peeping around the corner.”50 Similarities were also alluded to between the ceramic pieces by Allen and the works of the ancient Etruscans and Greeks. Sparks concluded: “in short the whole collection is fascinating and unique.”51

Allen’s next solo exhibition was in November 1985, at the von Bertouch Galleries. In Stowell’s review, she also alludes to the similarity between Allen’s majolica plates and those of Picasso. She also wrote “their origins lie much further back in the imperial majolica platters of the 16th century and in the paintings of the period.”52 Of the paintings she felt that some of these evoked Botticelli’s “wistful face and tendrils of hair he gave to Venus and the Madonna.”53 Stowell said a definite style had developed in Allen’s work and the subject matter remained consistent, although in this exhibition she replaced the drawings on paper using aquarelles, with paintings in oil on hardboard.54

In 1986, Allen was again invited to exhibit her works in a house show at the von Bertouch Galleries, along with artists Nora Heysen, Margaret Olley and David Boyd.55 In 1992 Allen was asked to participate in *Influences of John Passmore Exhibition* at Maitland City Gallery, with other Newcastle artists who had been students of Passmore. 1997 was the last year that Allen exhibited in a solo show at the von Bertouch Galleries and again her artworks were paintings on canvas, board, paper and clay. It was over forty years since Allen completed her

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50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
training at the Newcastle National Art School, and the subject matter was also consistent with past collections, and included at least nine portraits using a variety of media.\(^{56}\)

From the commencement of her art career, Allen exhibited every year, whether in a solo show, group show or in the annual *Collectors’ Choice* exhibition.

**Mary Beeston**

Prior to the establishment of the Low Show Group, Beeston had already established a name for herself locally. In 1961 Beeston first exhibited with the Contemporary Art Society of Australia in Sydney and submitted several works for the *Wynne and Sulman Prize*. The work which was selected for hanging in the *Wynne* competition was *Cook’s Crossing*, and in the *Sulman* competition, *Blind Captain Cat Climbs In to His Bunk*.\(^{57}\)

A winning entry in the *Royal Easter Show Art Competition*, in 1963, brought Beeston in contact with the director of the Leveson Gallery, Melbourne. He saw a photograph of her work in a Sydney paper and offered her an exhibition the following year. This was to be the first of many at that gallery.\(^{58}\) The judge of this competition, William Dobell, said her work “was a strongly composed painting with an unusual presence”.\(^{59}\)

\(^{56}\) Anne von Bertouch, “Norma Allen : Paintings and Maiolica,” *Exhibition Catalogue* (1997). Not all of the works were contemporary, many were from her own collection and dated back to a head of Donatello rendered in oil and dated 1956, a watercolour, *Rabaul*, 1969, a charcoal drawing of *Tyrrell Street Tower* 1981, her *Self Portrait*, 1959, which had been hung in the *Archibald Prize Exhibition* of 1960 and was now in the Maitland City Art Gallery Collection and her portrait of Norman Talbot, which had featured in the *Portia Geach Award Exhibition* of 1967, and was now in the University of Newcastle Collection.

\(^{57}\) Art Gallery of NSW, "Archibald,Wynne and Sulman Prize Awards," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1961): Other artists whose works were included in these competitions included Robert Hughes, Salii Herman, Robert Dickerson, John Percival and Thomas Gleghorn.


\(^{59}\) Ibid.
Beeston’s 1964 solo exhibition at Leveson Gallery showed a body of work inspired by native drums and weapons from the New Guinea Highlands, together with the abstraction of the human form, garden flowers and trees. The Melbourne review of the show discussed her two different approaches to art making practice:

The works of Mary Beeston’s Leveson St. Gallery exhibition are of two kinds – in one she has used figurative forms to build up paintings of austere strength, in the other she is experimenting with abstraction. In both groups there is concern for colour and surface qualities.

In ‘Art Notes’ in the *Melbourne Age*, the art critic Bernard Smith’s review of the exhibition would certainly have pleased Beeston in its appraisal of her work. He said:

Mary Beeston’s exhibition (Leveson Street) reveals an artist with a feeling for large and ample forms of luminous colour and a reassuring mood of quietness and peace. Whether she works in a realistic mode, as in her finely conceived Backyard, Sunday Night (18), or evokes the hot toned exotic color [sic] of the tropics, as in Kundu (1), the quality of stasis, of rest, remains.

He went on to point out:

The quietude never becomes flat and dead because, running through all the paintings, is an intimate feeling for growth and continuity of life. At times it runs a little dangerously towards sentiment; but paintings like Blue in the Garden (10) and Still Life with Goblet (7), with their sonorous red and blue modulations and transitions, are visually most satisfying.

This exhibition was also an important point in Beeston’s career as several works were acquired by different collections. A painting was bought by Bendigo Teachers’ College and two others were purchased by visitors from London. Gil Docking (then Director of Newcastle

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60 Collected by her son Richard when he had traveled to New Guinea on business.
64 Ibid.
City Art Gallery) travelled to Melbourne and selected the work, *Still Life with Goblet*, for the gallery collection\(^\text{65}\) (plate 37).

![Still Life with Goblet, Mary Beeston, 1964, painting, oil on composition board, 91.1 x 121.9 cm, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.](image)

**Plate 37** *Still Life with Goblet*, Mary Beeston, 1964, painting, oil on composition board, 91.1 x 121.9 cm, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

Sparks reviewed Beeston’s, 1965 solo exhibition, at the von Bertouch Galleries, and said: “the exhibition is a milestone in the development of art in the city and a triumph for a Newcastle trained artist.”\(^\text{66}\) Foster also reviewed it and commented that Beeston was at ease in her ability to successfully move from one subject to another. She continued: “This is an exhibition of contrasts, at the same time unified by her well-controlled style”.\(^\text{67, 68}\) There was praise for her use of “rhythmic design and subtlety of tone which she uses with fine control

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\(^{65}\) NMH, "Painted Subjects from New Guinea."


\(^{67}\) Joy Foster, "Artist at Ease," *Newcastle Sun*, 22 April 1965.

\(^{68}\) Ibid.
over a range of subjects,”69 and the “use of contrast between rich color [sic] and shadow”.70 This was a successful show, where her thirty paintings demonstrated her ability to capture different subject matter in her “own unique way”.71

Beeston’s exhibition at the Leveson Gallery in 1966 was her third solo show in three years. When Alan McCulloch reviewed the exhibition for the *Melbourne Age* he said that it “deserves much more review space than I can give it.”72 He continued:

> She paints in thin transparent veils of warm color [sic] to range successfully through a surprising variety of subjects from a still life study to Papuan drums (1) to the symbolism of the dreaming figure in ‘The Gift’ (12).

Despite his “lack of space” he continued to give a full and positive description of the works:

> The well-controlled semi-abstract style seems equal to all demands. The multiple shapes and colors [sic] of ‘Coconut Baskets’(4) and ‘Stone Axe’(3) are all beautifully integrated and like the symbolistic ‘Lakatoi’ denote consistent respect for textures.73

The culmination of a successful year resulted in another acquisition by the Newcastle City Art Gallery, the painting, *Blue Gum*74 (plate 38), and for Maitland Regional Gallery, *Gleaming in the Shade* (plate 39).

An article about Beeston and the exhibition was also featured in the *Melbourne Herald*.75

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69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 *Blue Gum* represents an artwork that revealed Beeston’s interest in colour, which was then still experimental.
74 Beeston wrote about the work:

> “The juvenile leaves of the Australian Blue Gum (Eucalyptus Globulus), of which the square stem and broad glaucous leaves are typical, though these characteristics alter in the mature foliage. A close look at many everyday things familiar objects, often reveals exquisite form and colour”. (Mary Beeston, 13 February 1967. Letter to Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Archives.)
Plate 38  *Blue Gum*, Mary Beeston, 1966, painting, oil on composition board, 76.2 x 65.2 cm, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

Plate 39  *Gleam in Shade*, Mary Beeston, 1966, painting, oil on masonite, 109 x 121 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.

Another solo show at the von Bertouch Galleries, in 1968, displayed a diversity of subject matter, but the manipulation of colour was the element consistent throughout the exhibition. Christine Ross, who reviewed the exhibition on ABC radio, said:

> Colour is the keynote, strong, intense and vibrant moving from rich reds, pinks and oranges to icy but equally rich blues, greens and purples. The colours assume a jewel-like quality each competing with the other for supremacy in magnificence and depth.

Sparks in his review wrote “the show as a whole clearly establishes the artist’s ascendancy on the Newcastle scene.”

Beeston’s next solo exhibition was at the von Bertouch Galleries in 1971. Ross said in her review that Beeston did not have the “strong emotions, feelings or protests or the futility of a tormented world as depicted by many artists today. Instead it is the work of an artist at peace with herself and the world”. Beeston said:

> The essential requirement, however, is that it be honest expression on the part of the artist. If he [sic] is able to find the inspiration and express the idea within the framework of his [sic] self-imposed disciplines, the visual manifestations will find a response from those who are sensitive to the particular form used.

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76 Christine Ross is an artist and was a lecturer at the University of Newcastle.
79 Christine Ross, “Artist Shares Experiences,” Newcastle Morning Herald, 18 May 1971, Christine Ross is an eminent Newcastle artist, lecturer, writer and was periodically an art critic for Newcastle Morning Herald.
80 Beeston was not unaware of the different functions of art and representation. In an essay she wrote for the Artemis journal, (published by the Newcastle Region Art Gallery) in May 1971, Beeston acknowledged the different levels of visual communication in art and how the audience responds to these and the fact that “sound knowledge, experience and intuition predispose the viewer to the fullest response on any level” (Mary Beeston, "Art as Communication," Artemis, Newcastle Regional Gallery Journal May/June (1971). Page 11.)
A further acknowledgement of the strength of her work was the invitation to exhibit in a solo show at the Bonython Gallery in Adelaide in 1971.\textsuperscript{81}

It was at this time in her career that Beeston began to design tapestries for her husband Larry to weave. In 1974 they received a grant from the Crafts Board of the Australian Council for the Arts to assist them with their projects. Also in 1974, their first collaborative exhibition was shown at the von Bertouch Galleries, with weavings by Larry Beeston and design by Mary Beeston.\textsuperscript{82}

A work they completed in 1975 *Autumn*, a wool on linen tapestry, purchased for the University of Newcastle collection (plate 40), shows the collaborative weaving and design.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{plate40.jpg}
\caption{Plate 40 *Autumn*, Mary Beeston, 1975, tapestry, wool on linen, 105 x 133 cm, University of Newcastle Library, University of Newcastle Collection.}
\end{figure}

Despite her involvement with textiles and the success Beeston was achieving in this area, painting and drawing were the primary forms of expression in her next solo show at the von Bertouch Galleries in 1976. In her review Ross wrote about the landscapes represented in this

\textsuperscript{81} Anne von Bertouch, "Mary and Larry Beeston," \textit{Exhibition Catalogue} (1974). Unfortunately there is no more information about this exhibition.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
body of work, and the changes occurring in Beeston’s interpretation of the subject matter. The peaceful qualities were still present but the mood was more evocative. Ross wrote:

The craggy rock formations, either projecting from the landscape or burrowing into it, emerge from the almost vaporous surrounding vegetation in stark contrast. Creating a mood where a surreal atmosphere is present, it is logical to find the metamorphic figure landscape aspects growing as a strong direction in the paintings. This is seen to advantage in ‘The ‘Lovers’, where the monolithic rock formations become personified.83

The oil painting on composition board, Cave I (plate 41), was purchased by the University of Newcastle for its collection.84

Plate 41 Cave I, Mary Beeston, 1976, painting, oil on composition board, 74 x 59 cm, University of Newcastle Collection.

84 In this exhibition the series of three, oil on canvas paintings, titled ‘Cave I, II and III,’ possessed the characteristics described by Ross.
At the end of an extended overseas tour in 1978, the Beestons stayed for five months in North Wales in the home of Morfudd Roberts (one of Britain’s leading weavers), where the Beestons produced eighteen weavings which were shown at the Solstice Gallery in Edinburgh, and later in Amsterdam in 1979.\textsuperscript{85}

The writer for the \textit{Weavers Journal}, J McPherson, wrote: “to say that this was the most beautiful and most satisfying exhibition of woven art I have ever seen would not be an overstatement.”\textsuperscript{86} She felt what contributed to the success of the works was the effect of the “light and air, which was conveyed through the transparency of some of the backgrounds, with the pattern, colour and design, being highlighted in the foreground”.\textsuperscript{87} Beeston’s ability to achieve this sense of form through colour was akin to her manipulation of the elements in her paintings.

Her success as a designer was seen in a group exhibition at the University of New South Wales, in April 1980, and in a solo show in the same month at the von Bertouch Galleries. Yet it was painting that took precedence in this exhibition, although she was also acknowledged for her designs. Sparks wrote “the exhibition reveals a development of talents as well as a literal broadening of horizons. It is impressive”.\textsuperscript{88}

In this exhibition it was the Asian influence, rather than the European influence of Beeston’s trip in 1978/79 that provided the stimulus for the paintings and designs. Beeston wrote of her experiences: “there was an almost overpowering visual impact of the succession of vastly

\textsuperscript{85} Patricia Adams, "Like a Prism - Mary Beeston," \textit{Artemis, Newcastle Regional Gallery Journal} 10, no. 2 April/May/June (1979). Page 12.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Peter Sparks, "Hills and Myths of Asia," \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald}, 25 April 1980.
different landscapes, combined with a sense of history, ancient and timeless and yet coincident with today’s existence”. 89

The focus of a solo exhibition was a new technique, the Finnish weaving process called transparencies, 90 shown by the Beestons at the Old Bakery Gallery in Lane Cove, Sydney, in April 1982. 91 Coinciding with the Sydney exhibition was another solo show of Mary Beeston’s works at Armstrong Gallery in Morpeth, New South Wales. 92 Her designs were again featured in a joint exhibition with husband Larry, in June 1983, at the Weswall Gallery in Tamworth, New South Wales.

Twenty seven paintings and drawings were included in Beeston’s solo show at the von Bertouch Galleries in 1983. Charles Pettinger, in his review for the Newcastle Herald, wrote that her handling of the representation of the landscape still embodied the “strength of her drawing, form and colour”. 93 Running concurrent to Beeston’s Paintings and Drawings exhibition was another at the same venue, Transparencies and Tapestries 94 which showed twenty one tapestries and transparencies designed by Mary and woven by Larry. 95 Pettinger reviewed both exhibitions and said that both were “memorable”. 96 Of the transparencies and tapestries he said: “Mary and Larry Beeston combine in an expertise of faultless design, co-

90 The development of a Finnish weaving technique, called transparencies, used by the Beestons, impacted on Mary’s designs. This technique became the ongoing influence on their collaborative works.
92 Armstrong Gallery, "Mary Beeston : Small Works on Paper," Exhibition Catalogue (1982). It was here that her ongoing investigation into the many qualities of paper, stimulated by her European trip in 1979, was actually incorporated in her art making. The artist’s handmade paper was used for a series of twenty one watercolours and collages. The raw materials for the paper was found in the garden, and combined with recycled paper and fibres. The experimentation with surfaces did not end with the paper, and the inclusion of fibres, yarns and found natural objects to form collages was developed.
94 An example of the technique transparencies can be seen in the work in Chapter 7.
95 Pettinger, "Beestons' Works Prove Memorable Event."
96 Ibid.
ordinated colour and the perfect culmination in a tour de force”. 97 He explained that the “entire catalogue could be listed as preferences” 98

An exhibition of tapestries at the Lake Macquarie Community Gallery in 1985 was a joint show featuring designs by Beeston and weaving executed by her husband. The designs for these works included the view of the city from the sea and forest scenes. 99 In the review of the exhibition for The Newcastle Herald, the debate about art and craft was again addressed. The writer, Elizabeth Potter, wrote: “if ever I had any doubt that craft was art, it was dispelled by the exhibition of woven transparencies.” 100 Whatever the audience wished to call it, the editor of the Fibre Forum, Janet De Boer, who opened the exhibition, said “it was an embarrassment that every one of the Beeston’s works hadn’t been snapped up by the city.” 101

The Beeston’s next solo exhibition, Moods and Contrasts, at the von Bertouch Galleries in February 1989, covered a wide range of art forms and subject matter. It showcased not only their collaborative works, but also new paintings by Beeston. 102 The exhibition was opened by Laurie Short, whose introduction applauded the careers of these two artists. It is interesting to note that Short raised the subject of “why translate the painting or drawing into a woven article?” 103 This was a question that associates of Mary Beeston must have asked over the years since she had made the decision to work in this way. Short’s reply was:

The pigments of the artist allow an almost limitless range of colours and a great variety of textures. In the hands of a skilled weaver, there lies a different range of effects. There is special liveliness of colour produced by the mixing of the threads of various colours and a vitality of texture that add their own charm to the work of a weaver. The weaver’s web is not simply

97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
103 Laurie Short, Opening address for exhibition, 24th February 1989. Transcript, Anne von Bertouch Files, Local Studies Section of Newcastle Region Library. Pages 1.
a copy of a picture, it is a unique product arising from its own discipline and its own charm to the work of the weaver.\textsuperscript{104}

The tapestry designs by Beeston represented several different approaches. The transparencies depicting native flowers were familiar, but a complete contrast was presented in the bold geometric designs of several other tapestries. Another group was based on the contours of seashells.\textsuperscript{105} The exhibition also included Beeston’s paintings and again highlighted the fact that Beeston was still working in paint. Stowell, in her review of the exhibition said, “Mary’s first love is still painting.”\textsuperscript{106}

Short also took the opportunity when opening the exhibition, to “float an idea”\textsuperscript{107} with the audience. He proposed that it was time for the city of Newcastle to establish a place to house a collection of local craft, “so that a high standard of design and skill may be encouraged.”\textsuperscript{108} He said “we need to gather together somewhere, exemplary pieces of the best work produced by our local craftsmen.”\textsuperscript{109} He also said in such a collection the Beestons’ work “would be highly prized as would the standard they set.”\textsuperscript{110} Unfortunately for Newcastle, this never happened.

Along with the paintings, Beeston utilized her hand-made paper as the basis for a collection of collages, drawings, and small packages for her next exhibition. The found objects used in the works reinforced the preciousness of nature.\textsuperscript{111} In a review for ABC Radio, art commentator, Anne Pell stated that, \textit{Vanished Time}, was for her the most impressive work in

\begin{flushleft}\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Stowell, “The Different Worlds of Mary and Larry Beeston.”
\item \textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{107} Short. Opening address for exhibition, 24 February 1989. Pages 1-2.
\item \textsuperscript{108} Ibid. Page 2.
\item \textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Stowell, “The Different Worlds of Mary and Larry Beeston.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{flushleft}
the exhibition, as the only evidence of human presence in the vast landscape was a roll of rusty wire, which made her feel quite insignificant.\textsuperscript{112}

A work that evolved from Beeston’s studies was \textit{Japan Sea Piece 1} (plate 42), a paper collage, 21 x 21 x 5.2 cm, now in the Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection. It demonstrated the combination of several of the processes she adopted.\textsuperscript{113}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Plate 42 Sea Piece 1, Mary Beeston, 1989, paper collage, 21 x 21.52 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.}
\end{center}

A move away from the modernist style of her earlier work was obvious in the new paintings, shown in Beeston’s fourteenth solo exhibition, at the Von Bertouch Galleries in August 1992.\textsuperscript{114} This work reinforced her statement earlier in the year about a change of style. Her subject matter had also changed. She had localized this to embrace not the natural landscape,

\begin{footnotesize}\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{112} ABC Radio, “Larry and Mary Beeston,” in \textit{Arts Programme} (1989).
\item \textsuperscript{113} This was an innovative use of techniques that produced a surface where the layers melt into each other to create surface that requires the audience to look closely to ‘discover’ the signs and symbols represented in the composition.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Michael Hedger, "Paperworks an Innovative Use of Simple Medium," \textit{The Newcastle Herald}, 17 August 1992, Michael Hedger was a curator at Newcastle Region Art Gallery and an art historian.
\end{itemize}\end{footnotesize}
but the familiar buildings of Newcastle in a type of representation Michael Hedger, reviewer for the *Newcastle Morning Herald*, said was “reserved for the rooftops of Paris”.\(^{115}\)

While Beeston’s 1992 solo exhibition at the von Bertouch Galleries was running in Newcastle, she also had work in Tokushima, Japan in *The Fibre Artists of the Hunter Traveling Exhibition* and art works travelling New South Wales and Queensland with the University of Wollongong’s, *Book and Print Show*.\(^{116}\)

Two urban themed pastels on canson paper were purchased by the Maitland City Art Gallery in 1993. They were *They Moved Last Week*, (plate 43), and *Loco Machine Shop Honeysuckle*, (plate 44).

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**Plate 43 They Moved Last Week, Mary Beeston, 1993, drawing, pastel on Canson paper, 54 x 72 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.**

\(^{115}\) Ibid.

In 1993 Beeston was invited to participate in several exhibitions, *Discerning Textiles* at the Goulburn Regional Gallery in August, and a survey exhibition at the Maitland City Art Gallery. *Transparencies*, exhibition opened in November and featured the work of both Larry and Mary. Beeston’s participation in group exhibitions continued not only in Newcastle but in other venues in New South Wales\(^\text{117}\) and internationally in Scotland, Holland and Japan.\(^\text{118}\)

In 1995, Beeston held her fifteenth solo exhibition at von Bertouch Galleries. At this time she was also still very active in group shows in Newcastle and the Hunter Region.\(^\text{119}\)

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\(^{118}\)Ibid.

\(^{119}\)In 1995 she exhibited in Newcastle AH&I Show; Maitland Prize Exhibition; Newcastle Printmakers & Fibre Artists of the Hunter at the Lovett Gallery Newcastle and the Prime Painting Prize at the Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
Betty Cutcher

Betty Cutcher exhibited with the Low Show Group and in local exhibitions as well as showing in Sydney, Adelaide and Auckland before she left Newcastle in 1965.

One of the most important exhibitions in her early career was the *Newcastle City Art Festival*, in 1959. Cutcher was the only sculptor from Newcastle to be invited into the exhibition and received many positive responses to her work. She showed two sculptures, *Swan* (plate 45) was carved from cedar and *Cat* (plate 46) was a work made from walnut wood.\(^{120}\)

![Plate 45](image.jpg)

**Plate 45** Betty Cutcher and William Dobell with ‘Swan’, 1959, photograph, Newcastle Morning Herald. No date on newspaper cutting. Photograph courtesy of Newcastle Herald.

The art reviewer for *The Newcastle Herald* wrote that these two sculptures were highly praised by the festival selector, Mr. Desiderius Orban.\(^{121}\)

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\(^{121}\) NMH, "Sculptress Chosen to Exhibit at Festival," *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 4 June 1959.
Betty Cutcher was one of three Newcastle artists selected by Hal Missington (Director of the Art Gallery of NSW) for the special prize for regional entrants. In 1960 another sculpture, *The Race* was purchased from an exhibition at the Newcastle City Art Gallery, by the senior pupils of Jesmond High School, as a farewell gift to their school.

Cutcher left Newcastle in 1965 and, unlike Sutherland, did not keep in contact with the other members of the Low Show Group. In March 1969, Cutcher and Beadle held an exhibition at the New Vision Gallery, in Auckland. This was an important show for Cutcher as it introduced her to the Auckland audience.

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122 ________, "City Art Festival," *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 4 June 1959. Her sculpture *Swan* was sold to a private buyer for twenty guineas.


124 In this show she had thirteen bronzes and forty two pieces of pottery. The bronzes were representations of the insect kingdom and ranged in price from one hundred to three hundred dollars. These had all been produced in 1968/9. The ceramics were priced between five dollars for a small bottle to forty dollars for a hand built pot. Other ceramic objects included storage jars, wine jugs, candle holders, lamp bases, vases and two sculptures.
Cutcher, exhibited with FIDEM, an international order of artists, first in 1989 in Helsinki and again in the British Museum in 1992. The curator of coins and medals at the museum, Mark Jones, wrote that “an exciting innovation was the presence of the New Zealanders whose varied and energetic work is a tribute to the creative excitement created by Betty Beadle (Cutcher) and her ‘NZCMG’." Two bronzes made in 1988 show the style of work she was producing at the time (plate 47).

Plate 47  *Bronze Medallions, Betty Cutcher, 1980s, no dimensions given, private collection of Ian Cutcher, Sydney.*

In 1993 Cutcher was invited into the *Low Show Retrospective* at Maitland City Art gallery. In the review of the exhibition Stowell wrote of Cutcher’s early work:

> Of the two sculptors, Betty Cutcher shows the contemporary strength of study of the rounded forms of the Moore school. Her carvings like *The Race* and *Tall Form* show the same sensuality, nuances of the media. Her interest in medallion design is well known so it is pleasing to see two examples of her skill in this specialized area. Her aquatints use the same compact design elements.  

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Elizabeth Martin

Elizabeth Martin’s first exhibition in Australia was with the Sydney Contemporary Art Society during World War II, with an oil painting *Leins Mill*.127 Her first art exhibition in Newcastle, in July 1954, was in the Frederic Ash Ltd building in Newcastle with watercolourist, Brenda Narbey.128 This exhibition showed thirteen works by Martin.129

Plate 48 is a self portrait painted circa 1960.

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Plate 48 *Self Portrait*, Elizabeth Martin, c1960, von Bertouch Galleries Collection, Newcastle (no other information available).

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127 Elizabeth Martin, Handwritten notes 1986. Unpublished - in the archives of Charles Martin. This was a painting of the women working in the mills at Lysaghts, making aeroplane parts for the war effort. (Ibid)
129 Elizabeth Martin and Narbey, "Exhibition of Paintings,” Exhibition Catalogue for exhibition at Frederic Ash Ltd, Newcastle. (1954). The works were primarily of NSW landscapes from as far north as Byron Bay, west to Gloucester and south to Budgewoi. Also included was a self-portrait. Prices ranged from seven to ten guineas. There was also a selection of unframed sketches that could be viewed on application. Frederick Ash was a hardware store, but they had an interest in art and were the only outlet for art materials in Newcastle at that time.
Plate 49  *Menagerie*, Elizabeth Martin, early 1960s, woodblock print on paper, 37 x 32 cm, gift of William Bowmore, 1995, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.

A woodblock print on paper produced and exhibited in the early 1960 period, *Menagerie* was given as a gift to Maitland City Art Gallery by William Bowmore in 1995. This print shows the decorative style Martin used throughout her early career and which can be seen in her later ceramic heads.

By 1961 (at the time of the first Low Show Group exhibition), like most of the group, Martin had exhibited in Newcastle, Sydney and Melbourne. In 1964 she also submitted and had works hung in the *Blake and Sulman Prizes* at the Art Gallery of NSW\(^\text{130}\) and a portrait hung in the *Archibald Prize*.

Martin was the only Low Show Group artist to exhibit in the *Second Hunter Valley Review* at Newcastle City Art Gallery in 1965. The selection of the submitted works was made by Elwyn Lynn. A solo exhibition at the von Bertouch Galleries, in March 1975, showcased

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\(^{130}\) One of her paintings was sold at the exhibition and transported to a Jesuit Seminary in Brussels.
Martin’s terracotta sculptures. The exhibition received a favourable review from Ross. She said the works were decorative and that “Elizabeth Martin has coming through strongly in all her works, an enjoyment of life that is refreshing and pretends little else.” Ross also said:

“The small squat figures are in some instances absurd with their large exaggerated eyes, coiled hair and arms like appendages tightly curled, though there is considerable strength of design in the symmetry and placement of color [sic] and decoration in ‘Oriental Gentleman,’ ‘Oriental Rake’ and ‘Oriental Wiseman.’

In September of the same year (1975), a group exhibition of Newcastle women artists, was held to celebrate International Women’s Year at the von Bertouch Galleries. Martin made three female sculptures for this exhibition. Her pigmented terracotta sculpture, *The Birth of Athene* (plate 50), was purchased by the Newcastle Region Gallery for their collection.

![Image of The Birth of Athene](Plate 50)

*Plate 50  The Birth of Athene, Elizabeth Martin, 1975, pigmented terracotta, no size given, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.*

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132 Ross, "Exhibition for Women's Year."

133 At a cost of $250.
The purchase of another of Martin’s sculptures, for the first *Newton-John Award* at the University of Newcastle (1975), was certainly an acknowledgement of how highly her work was appreciated by those at the university. This, along with the representation of works in the Newcastle Region Art Gallery and the Maitland City Art Gallery, collectively documented Martin as a significant Newcastle ceramic artist.

In her solo exhibition at the von Bertouch Galleries in 1978, Martin’s body of work embraced the themes she had featured in past exhibitions, along with a new influence, that of the writings and illustrations of Edward Lear.\textsuperscript{134} Sparks’ review in the *Newcastle Morning Herald*, ‘New direction, old myths’, described Martin’s exhibition as ‘feminine’ which perhaps was not a criticism, but a reference to the small nature of the sculptures and the subject matter. He wrote:

> Of the portraits, Medieval, the head of a woman, is a fine work and by far the best in the show. Also noteworthy is Ballet Dancer. With the Lear subjects, and Jenny Wren, the artist shows a special flair.\textsuperscript{135}

Joan Cairns’ review of the exhibition showed more enthusiasm for the ‘feminine’ works. She said “Elizabeth Martin is showing a few of her beautiful sculptured heads, including one of ballet dancer Nureyev.”\textsuperscript{136} Throughout 1978 Martin was also preparing for an exhibition at the Solanda Gallery in Canberra to be held later in that year.\textsuperscript{137} A solo exhibition at the Armstrong Gallery in Morpeth in 1979 again featured characters from Lear’s *Nonsense Rhymes*.\textsuperscript{138, 139} Martin had another solo show at the Armstrong Gallery in May 1981.

\textsuperscript{134} Anne von Bertouch, "Elizabeth Martin," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1978). His limericks in the *Book of Nonsense*, along with the drawings, were used by Martin to provide the basis for seven works in this exhibition.

\textsuperscript{135} Peter Sparks, "New Directions, Old Myths," *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 18 April 1978.


\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{138} NMH, "Terracotta Sculpture," *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 4 May 1979. A bible story also inspired Martin to produce a group of three figures depicting the children in the fiery furnace.
A solo exhibition at von Bertouch Galleries followed in 1982. There were forty six works in this exhibition.\textsuperscript{140} Charles Pettinger, reviewer for the \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald} said:

The excellence of Elizabeth Martin’s offerings requires no further comment except the following: Every ‘head’ pleases this viewer but especially ‘Gold Hair’ and ‘Athene’ as does ‘Batheri One’ among the figures. The plaques are interesting. ‘Bacchus’ really looks to be waiting for the next drink! The drawings for the faces equal the result.\textsuperscript{141}

Along with the five solo shows between 1978 and 1982, she also exhibited in group shows and annually in \textit{Collectors’ Choice}.

Another solo exhibition of Martin’s terracotta sculptures was held in November 1984, again at the Armstrong Gallery, and she was invited back in 1985 as part of a group show of women artists. Stowell, in her review of the exhibition for the \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald}, said:

Behind the whimsical charm lies a masterly competence in traditional clay modelling. A series of portrait heads demonstrates complete assurance in handling realistic form, as well as an understated pleasure in pose and poise. The figures have that rare quality of entirely natural body weight. The clay is permitted to keep its immediacy in a way that bronze cannot.\textsuperscript{142}

Elizabeth Martin’s last solo show was at von Bertouch Galleries in July 1986.\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{139} Armstrong Gallery, "Elizabeth Martin," \textit{Exhibition Catalogue} (1979). Another theme introduced in this exhibition was based on the drawings of Toulouse-Lautrec.

\textsuperscript{140} Elizabeth Martin, "Artist Statement for Catalogue," \textit{Exhibition Catalogue} (1982). Among these, Martin exhibited six drawings of females selected from dozens she had made. She wrote: “I prefer to make rapid notes while the subject is talking or moving in a natural manner. As studies for sculpture, fixed poses are no use to me.”


\textsuperscript{142} Stowell, “A Different Display by Women.”

\textsuperscript{143} Again the majority of her sculptures were of females, with the titles of the works referring to mythological goddesses, the bible, African influences and images of mother and child.
It was in *Bicentennial Finale*, curated by Anne von Bertouch and held at her gallery in December 1988, that Newcastle audiences were again able to see ten early lino-prints and a watercolour by Martin. Most of the prints had a heraldic theme, while the watercolour *Tug, Newcastle, AM 1954* was a harbour image.¹⁴⁴ These were Martin’s last exhibitions before her death. In 1994, Anne von Bertouch, in collaboration with Elizabeth’s husband, Rollo Martin, honoured Martin by showing a retrospective of her works.¹⁴⁵

Another retrospective exhibition of Martin’s art making held in 2001, at the von Bertouch Galleries, in collaboration with her son Charles Martin, was the final show of her work in Newcastle.¹⁴⁶

In 2003, Anne von Bertouch bequeathed part of her personal collection to the Newcastle Region Art Gallery. Amongst the works were two terracotta sculptures with oxide decoration by Martin titled *Girl with pots* (Plate 51) and *Girl and boy* (Plate 52).

Plate 51 *Girl with Pots*, Elizabeth Martin, 1974, terracotta sculpture with oxide decoration, 37.6 x 24.6 x 18.4 cm. Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

Rae Richards

Rae Richards, like Beeston and Allen, moved very quickly from student status to that of exhibiting artist. By 1959, Richards had become well established as a painter, exhibiting in selected exhibitions and prizes, including Muswellbrook Art Prize; H C Richards Art Prize; Crouch Art Prize; Wynne, Sulman, Blake Art Prizes, and the NBN Art Prize. Richards was also represented in the Newcastle Art Festival Exhibition in 1959,\textsuperscript{147} and the Regional Survey Exhibition in 1960. In 1961 she showed in the Contemporary Art Society Exhibition in Sydney. This experience would have allowed her to view what was happening in Sydney at the time.

\textsuperscript{147} With an oil on board painting \textit{Tidal Water} which was priced at 8 guineas.
Plate 53  *Sunk Lyonesse*, Rae Richards, 1960, painting, oil on composition board, 85.5 x 112.5 cm, University of Newcastle Collection.

*Sunk Lyonesse* (plate 53), 1960, is an oil on composition board painting, based on a poem by Harri Jones. It was purchased for the University of Newcastle Art Collection  

Richards was invited to exhibit in the inaugural *Collectors’ Choice* exhibition, in 1963, and continued to exhibit annually in this exhibition until it ceased on the death of Anne von Bertouch in 2003.  

In 1965, Anne von Bertouch saw Richards’ experimental fabric pictures and immediately asked Richards to exhibit them in her gallery in a solo show in 1966. In this exhibition  

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148 Richards continued to exhibit in selected exhibitions in Newcastle, such as the *NBN Exhibition, Newcastle Show Exhibition*, and in the regional art galleries in the Hunter Regions of Maitland and Muswellbrook.  
149 In 1963, a group exhibition at David Jones Gallery, Sydney, organized by the Australian Art Society, also featured Richards’ work.  
Richards included paintings and textiles, yet it was the collection of banners that was the strongest feature of her art making and they were a sell-out. Tony Tripp from the Newcastle Sun said:

Built-up in patches of colored, sometimes patterned fabrics, traced over with a seemingly endless snail-trail of fine thread, these flamboyantly decorative hangings reveal a fullness of expression which the artist has only fitfully suggested in her paintings.

Of the paintings, Tripp said that “except for Bird in the Bush, the handful of pictures on view had neither the style nor skill so effortlessly displayed in the newer medium.” Despite his criticism of the paintings in the light of the banners, and his rather lukewarm descriptions of the painted furniture, his praise for the banners was heartening: He said:

The von Bertouch Galleries burst into vibrant color as Rae Richards’ sumptuous banners are unfurled on chaste walls. ‘Peacock in his Pride’ the loveliest and most completely satisfying in the series has something of the spirit of reckless splendor found in ballet décors of the Diaghilev era.

One pertinent point that Tripp made was that in all of the banners “a wonderful feeling of spontaneity survives what must be a tedious and painstaking process of creation.”

The art/craft scene was changing in the 1960-1970 period, with a “worldwide emergence and acceptance of the new forms of fabric art, including machine embroidery,” but Richards’
techniques were quite unique and may have derived from her painting background, rather than embroidery or weaving origins.

Two of Richards’ works were accepted for the *Ascher Award Exhibition of Works in Fabric*, in 1966, to tour galleries in the United Kingdom. This gave her the recognition she was hoping for, particularly as this was one of the first international awards for textile-related art. Also that year she had a solo show at the Little Gallery in Sydney.

In her solo exhibition at von Bertouch Galleries in 1967, following a trip to Europe, there was a distinct absence of the traditional form of painting. Twenty one banners were exhibited, three of which were large, full door banners. The review for this exhibition by Charlie Lewis in the *Newcastle Morning Herald*, revealed that Richards’ intention to communicate to the viewer a celebration of colour, not only through the deliberate manipulation of discordant hues, but also the more subtle juxtaposition of colour where the subject matter warranted, was successful.

The uninhibited gaiety with which the banners are decorated testify to a rich sense of design and a great love of colour. Shapes cut from coloured material with seemingly abandon are arranged with verve and appliquéd on to lengths of richly-coloured material.

Where more restrained colours were used, Lewis wrote that those few were less gay but more subtle, particularly one work *War of the Roses* that used tertiary grounds against a “terra verte” background. Lewis described it as “beautiful.”

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159 Maitland City Art Gallery, "A Retrospective Exhibition of Fibre Work by Rae Richards."
160 Anne von Bertouch, "Rae Richards," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1967). Also included in the exhibition were five pieces of painted furniture reminiscent of the Bloomsbury Groups’ painterly expressions on their household pieces.
162 Ibid.
163 Ibid.
164 Ibid.
Banners by Rae Richards, her third solo show opened on July 10, 1968 at the Macquarie Galleries in Sydney.\textsuperscript{165} This exhibition followed a show of Lloyd Reese's works.\textsuperscript{166} For over three years Richards had been refining her techniques and producing banners. Her passion for that medium had developed, as well as the standard of the work. In May, 1969, Richards exhibited her banners in a solo show at the John Gild Gallery in Perth.\textsuperscript{167}

However, Richards did not give up painting completely for making textiles. An oil on compound board painting, The Magi, made in 1969, was purchased by the Newcastle City Art Gallery in 1973 (plate 54).

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Plate 54 The Magi, Rae Richards, 1969, painting, oil on compound board, 102 x 150 cm, purchased in 1973, University of Newcastle Collection.}
\end{figure}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item The works in this exhibition ranged in price from $50 to $175 and in size from 43 x 80.5 inches to 32 x 41 inches.
\item The art critic also acknowledged, as had the critic from Richards’ previous exhibition that, despite the painstaking and exacting method of her art, Richards was able to achieve a spontaneity which somehow managed to survive the laborious processes involved in fabricating the banners.
\item The representation of the subject matter in this work, “St Francis and the legendary banishment of snakes from Ireland” was worked on a piece of grey and “ascetic” hand-made Irish linen from Galway. (Ibid)
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The dark background of *The Magi* anchors the bright colours, to prevent them leaping off the surface, and the contrast of the warm and cool colours creates a sense of movement in the partially abstracted figures. A later gouache and ink work, *Adoration* 1971, (plate 55) again shows Richards’ practice of using a dark background. This work was also purchased by the Newcastle City Art Gallery.168

![Plate 55 Adoration, Rae Richards, 1971, gouache and ink drawing, 68.8 x 50 cm. Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection](image)

In 1972, another solo show at the Macquarie Galleries in Sydney gave Richards the opportunity to extend her interest in the subject matter of traditional banners.169 Despite Richards’ return to painting, she agreed to another solo exhibition at the von Bertouch Galleries in 1973, again devoted to banners.170

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168 The work *Adoration* 1971 still had the characteristics of *The Magi* 1968, but Richards had used the gouache and ink technique she developed to get the result she could not achieve with oil on board.

169 NMH, "Ancient Art of Banners," *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 27 January 1972. She said that in medieval times they had developed along the same lines as traditional patchwork and that the Crusaders had carried banners, made by their wives, as they rode off to the Holy Land. She explained that other banners depicting incidents from the crusades were hung in churches and used to decorate the walls of baronial halls. (Ibid).

170 Anne von Bertouch, "Exhibition by Rae Richards," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1973). The number and size of these works represented a huge undertaking, not just a brief return. The exhibition featured sixteen banners.
Richards began to prepare for an exhibition in London at the Qantas Gallery the following September (1974). In the interim, one of her phoenix banners was selected for the 1973 *Craft Australia Exhibition in Canada*. The work was exhibited first at the Art Gallery of NSW before proceeding to Canada.\textsuperscript{171}

Richards’ next solo show *Home and Abroad* presented by the National Trust in Simpson’s Cottage in 1975, gave her the opportunity to return to painting, even though she was working on the commission of banners for Christ Church Cathedral.

In her next solo exhibition at the von Bertouch Galleries in 1980, Richards showed paintings of the landscape, one of her earlier subjects.\textsuperscript{172} An oil on canvas painting, *Redhead Heath* (plate 56), was purchased by the University of Newcastle for their collection.

![Plate 56 Redhead Heath, Rae Richards, 1980, painting, oil on canvas, 84 x 67 cm, University of Newcastle Collection.](image)

measuring from 118 x 173 cm to 90 x 54cm, and fifteen heraldic monster wall hangings measuring 115 x 73 cm each.

\textsuperscript{171} Maitland City Art Gallery, "A Retrospective Exhibition of Fibre Work by Rae Richards."

\textsuperscript{172} The twenty six oils represented well known landmarks around Newcastle, Murdering Gully and Redhead Heath.
Therese Mackie wrote that in the works in this exhibition “Richards expresses a delight in the external world and returns to semi abstract landscapes where she tries to capture the light as it affects it”.\textsuperscript{173} She also said that the mood in Richards’ work “seems to be somewhere between fantasy and poetical”.\textsuperscript{174}

Richards completed a Graduate Diploma in Professional Art Studies at the Alexander Mackie College in Sydney in 1981.\textsuperscript{175} She was commissioned to make a textile piece for the Newcastle City Hall in the same year.\textsuperscript{176}

An invitation to exhibit at the Cooks Hill Gallery in 1984 gave Richards another Newcastle venue and an opportunity to present a new body of work. This time it was paintings.

Richards’ work in her next exhibition, held at the Morpeth Gallery in 1986, was a return to banners.\textsuperscript{177} Stowell in her review of the exhibition discusses Richards’ “radiant response to colour”\textsuperscript{178} in the paintings, but felt that the fabric pieces were the strength of the show.

The most impressive work in the show is a large, dark hanging which combines the formalism of the traditional grid of the patchwork quilt with a landscape of free and receding space. Such exciting juxtapositions of colour and texture do more to conserve the habitat of the imagination than transmission to the fabulous present.\textsuperscript{179}


\textsuperscript{174} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{175} Maitland City Art Gallery, "A Retrospective Exhibition of Fibre Work by Rae Richards." Photographs of this work later appeared in \textit{Kunapipi} published in Denmark in 1990. This publication was an international journal devoted to colonial literature and the arts.\textsuperscript{176} It was ‘Art Deco’ in style. This complemented the architecture of the City Hall which was built in 1929.

\textsuperscript{177} Jill Stowell, "Perfect Afterlife for Preloved Clothes," \textit{The Newcastle Herald}, 3 June 1986. Richards presented the audience with an eclectic collection of artworks and objects proliferating in colour and texture. Her departure from the making of works through manipulation of fabrics had only continued for a short period of time before they reappeared in a slightly different form. Her collection of ‘pre-loved clothes’ some of which had been ‘donated’ by friends, were transformed into clothing and banners that had become more fanciful, where the introduction of Australian ‘creatures were intermingled with storybook dragons. She also included some gouache paintings of the “misty landscapes of Camelot” (Ibid) and its surroundings. (Ibid)

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.
In this exhibition Richards introduced an Australian content into the banners and clothing. Stowell said that these new banners incorporated “large areas of traditional patchwork” which was different to the earlier works, and that the inclusion of lizards and crocodiles, waratahs and banksias “become as strongly heraldic as the familiar dragons and jungle birds.” Stowell wrote: “A frilled-necked lizard in a lace collar with my daughter’s lurex dress for scales rears among banksias fashioned from my old orange dress with pink spots.” Stowell was amongst others who had donated ‘pre-loved’ clothing to Richards to be incorporated in her artworks. A work from this exhibition *Waratahs* 1990 (plate 57), was purchased by the Maitland City Art Gallery.

![Image of Waratahs](image)

**Plate 57 Waratahs, Rae Richards, 1990, mixed fabric seminole, 113 x 86 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.**

The quotation “Many Glittering seas and many shadowy islands separated Odysseus from his home,” by Homer, was used in the catalogue introduction of Richards’ next exhibition of paintings at von Bertouch Galleries, in late 1990. A return to painting was her decision after a ‘sojourn’ in the Greek Islands in early 1990. The solo exhibition gave Richards the

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180 Ibid.
181 Ibid.
opportunity to visually represent her numerous experiences while visiting the islands, through a suite of paintings in gouache on paper, and oils on canvas board.182

Richards continued to show her gouache and oil landscapes in group exhibitions for the next few years with sustained success.183

Despite Richards’ return to painting it appeared that the public was not yet willing to allow her to discard the making of banners completely. Another solo exhibition at the von Bertouch Galleries in 1992 resurrected this form of expression with a new approach, which had surfaced fleetingly in the 1986 exhibition, the combination of heraldry with Australian native animals.

Richards’ long career in fibre was reflected in a retrospective exhibition at Maitland City Art Gallery in February 1994.184

Another retrospective, this time for Richards’ painting, was held at Maitland City Art Gallery in 1996. The works in *Survey in Retrospect: Paintings by Rae Richards*,185 spanned the period from 1959 to 1995 and demonstrated what the director of the gallery, Margaret Sivyer, described as “the changes in style and the strong line of development with some exploratory diversions in the process.”186

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182 Anne von Bertouch, "Different Directions : Four Painters and a Sculptor," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1990). The subject matter included the representation of the “village quake of ’56”.(Ibid)


184 Maitland City Art Gallery, "A Retrospective Exhibition of Fibre Work by Rae Richards.” The ‘A Retrospective Exhibition of Fibre Work’ catalogue included her impressive list of exhibitions, commissions and awards. Forty one works made up the exhibition which covered the period from 1966 until 1992. Many were on loan from private and public collections and the collection of the artist.


186 Margaret Sivyer, "Survey in Retrospect," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1996). The exhibition was made up of eighty works with oils on board, masonite and canvas, and gouache on paper.
Stowell said that in the later works, Richards had returned to the use of a palette knife in her art practice, which was the perfect choice for “articulating scumbled blocks of oil paint.”  

This was a technique she had used in her early paintings when she was depicting rainforests where the light illuminated the trees “into the lofty gothic arches of sunk Lyonesse and the castles and cathedrals of a fabled age”.  

Richards’ prolific output did not diminish. Another solo exhibition *Paintings - City of the Golden Palm*, was held at von Bertouch Galleries in 1997. 

In August 2001 a solo show at the von Bertouch Galleries gave Richards the opportunity to exhibit along with her paintings a new medium for her, ceramics. This latest form of visual expression won acceptance with both the public and the gallery directors and in 2002 she was invited into *Diversity, Survey of Ceramicists of the Hunter Region*, at Maitland City Art Gallery. Over the next few years Richards received commissions for installation ceramic works in the form of fountains and murals. 

Richards exhibited at the John Paynter Gallery in Newcastle in August 2008, with two other Newcastle artists and former lecturers in Fine Art at the University of Newcastle, Christine Ross and Gordon Rintoul. 

In August 2008, the Lake Macquarie City Gallery held a retrospective survey of Richards’ work. This exhibition showed paintings, textiles and ceramics and, although she had previously exhibited in this gallery, this was her first retrospective in that venue.

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187 Ibid.
188 It showed twenty-three, oil on canvas paintings, with the theme of Newcastle.
190 Richards, Interview with the author, 2007.
191 In this exhibition she showed paintings, and ceramics made for another exhibition at von Bertouch Galleries, which unfortunately, due to the death of Anne von Bertouch, did not eventuate.
Lillian Sutherland

Sutherland’s entrance into the professional art world followed a similar pattern to the other members of the Low Show Group. She submitted her paintings in local and state exhibitions and art prizes, slowly developing her own distinctive style.

Like Beeston, the exhibition that transformed Sutherland’s career was the Royal Easter Show Exhibition in 1969. For both artists this event was not considered a major exhibition, but it became a launching point for their careers. It was in this exhibition that the Director of the Strawberry Hill Gallery in Elizabeth Street, Sydney, saw Sutherland’s work and offered her a solo exhibition in September of that year. Through her association with the gallery, Sutherland was also represented in the Australian Art Exhibition, which travelled to Kuala Lumpur in the same year.

In another solo exhibition in the following September, 1970, at the Strawberry Hill Gallery, the theme represented in the paintings by Sutherland was dominantly landscape and the natural objects occurring in this backdrop.

Sutherland moved to Balgowlah, Sydney in the mid-1960s, where she set up a studio. She kept in touch with the other members of the Low Show Group and continued her association with Anne von Bertouch.

A solo exhibition at the Toorak Gallery in South Yarra, Victoria, in January 1971 showed the female portrait that suggested the title of this show, Veronique. In 1971 and 1972,

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194 Ibid. Twenty-one paintings made up this body of work.
195 She continued to show in group exhibitions, solo shows and the annual Collector’s Choice in Newcastle.
196 A portrait ‘Veronique’ from the exhibition, was featured on the invitation.
Sutherland returned to the Strawberry Hill Gallery for two more solo exhibitions of recent paintings and drawings.\(^{197}\)

A revisit to the landscape, both urban and rural, was the subject matter of the exhibition. Images from the small country towns of Hill End and Sofala in NSW, with references to miners and diggings, were among the works.

Sutherland’s first exhibition at the von Bertouch Galleries in 1973, *Opals and Death in the Sun*, retold the story of Sutherland’s latest excursion out west. The exhibition was made up of twenty four works, some quite large and visually representing the Australian outback and its inhabitants.\(^{198}\) Joan Cairns, art reviewer for *The Newcastle Morning Herald*, noted that:

> Lightning Ridge, with its pinkish-white landscape and friendly sun-drenched people, has so fascinated artist Lillian Sutherland [that] she has used it as the central theme for her one-man show at the von Bertouch Galleries.\(^{199}\)

Sutherland had solo exhibitions at the Mosman Gallery in 1975, and the Strawberry Hill Gallery in 1976. Another solo Melbourne exhibition in 1978, at the Munster Arms Gallery in Little Bourke Street, furthered Sutherland’s national profile.

Despite the range of subject matter in her next solo show at the von Bertouch Galleries in 1978, Cairns, when reviewing the show, was not deterred, although she did say that “the paint was a bit skinny at times.”\(^{200}\) She also said that Sutherland was “not a slave to realism but is an artist who needs the visible as an inspiration and a model.”\(^{201}\)

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\(^{197}\) Strawberry Hill Gallery, "An Exhibition of Recent Paintings by Lillain Sutherland," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1972).


\(^{200}\) Ibid.

\(^{201}\) Ibid.
In another solo exhibition at the von Bertouch Galleries in 1981, Sutherland changed from the usual oil paintings and included appliqué and mixed media on fabric. The subject matter again covered many genre but it was the “hot emptiness of the Australian landscapes” and the flowers, in particular *Flannel Flowers, Salamander Bay*, that were the strength of the exhibition. Sparks, in his review, praised her representation of the blooms but said “some of the figure drawings can be criticised”, but failed to explain why.

Germaine Greer, while on a trip to Australia in 1983, purchased a large oil on canvas painting titled *Limestone Creek, Wee Jasper* (plate 58) from Sutherland’s next solo show at the Wagner Gallery in Sydney, 1983.

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Plate 58 *Limestone Creek, Wee Jasper*, Lillian Sutherland, 1982, painting, oil on canvas, 182 x 182 cm, private collection of Professor Germaine Greer, Essex, England.

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203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
205 Germaine Greer, 1 March 2006 2006. *Personal email to the author*. The work was air freighted to London to Greer’s home. It is now in her home in Essex. The work is still in Greer’s collection and was photographed by the author in May 2006. (Plate 58)
In 1983 the works from the Wee Jasper excursion, minus those sold in the Sydney exhibition, were exhibited at the von Bertouch Galleries in another solo exhibition. The reviews for this exhibition were featured in several newspapers. The Newcastle Herald and Leisure Guide journalist, Janine Wilson, wrote that there were two categories into which Sutherland’s work could fall; one where paintings were expressionistic in style while the others were simpler and executed in a ‘Chinese style’. The subject matter for these often featured birds.

Pettinger, in his review, said that Sutherland had again shown her “mastery” in all of the works, be they watercolour, oil or ink drawings and that the landscapes in oil were “a satisfying statement of tenderness and strength, impeccable design and an empathy for what is depicted.” He added that her ability to handle colours, the use of the drama of contrast and agreement were “totally adequate”. Pettinger felt that The River; The Children; Wee Bills; Mountain Robin’s; Blossoms in a Jar; Honey Eater; Old Man’s Beard; Late Afternoon Limestone; Willows by the River, and Morning Frost were the most successful of the oil paintings. He also commented on the skilfully executed watercolours, Frost Morning and Limestone Land 2 and that “the watercolours have more than a hint of the famed old Japanese masters. Willow Tree is just fine, a small gem.” Pettinger felt that both the watercolours and the ink drawings were “beyond criticism”. It is interesting that one writer viewed the works as Chinese in style while the other saw a Japanese influence.

The Flinders Ranges Series was the title of the next exhibition of oils and watercolours for Sutherland’s solo show at the Wagner Galleries in December 1984.

209 Ibid.
210 Ibid.
211 Ibid.
212 Ibid.
Through her association with Shirley Wagner of the Wagner Art Gallery in Sydney, Sutherland was included in an exhibition in Hong Kong in 1985. This exhibition, *Australian Contemporary Paintings and Graphics in Focus*, held at the Art Centre, Hong Kong included the works of well-known Australian artists including Sidney Nolan, Charles Blackman, Arthur Boyd, Brett Whiteley, Lloyd Rees and James Gleeson. In his review of the exhibition Nigel Cameron said: “Australian landscape seems still to fascinate artists there in a way that landscape of other painting nations has largely ceased to do. Only the Chinese are still rootedly landscape painters, and for quite other reasons.”

The review by Cameron, journalist for the *South China Morning Post*, was quite scathing when he referred to the Australian artists’ continuing preoccupation with depicting a typical Australian landscape, “with its hot colours and desert forms and air of a lost continent (which it hardly is, these last 50 years or so).” Cameron proceeded to describe the works of Nolan and Boyd as ‘reminiscence’ rather than paintings and stated that the kitsch painting by Gleeson “should not be allowed to mingle with more serious work”. However, Sutherland escapes his criticism. He said:

One of the best painters in the exhibition is one whose work I did not previously know – Lillian Sutherland. She gets away from the clichés and paints landscapes underivatively.[sic] She draws beautifully – look at numbers 38 and 39, ink and wash, watercolour respectively, for confirmation of this, and in number 33 we find a landscape painter who approaches her landscape with her own, uniquely her own, eye.

The Flinders Ranges were next represented in Sutherland’s paintings and drawings. She had depicted this area in her works for her 1984 exhibition at the Wagner Gallery and continued with the subject in her next solo show at the von Bertouch Galleries in 1985. Stowell’s

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214 Ibid.
215 Ibid.
216 Ibid.
review of the exhibition said that the Sutherland had covered “a lot of exotic new ground.” Stowell felt that the exhibition was “bound to be a success” in view of Sutherland’s past successes. Stowell said:

here shown as misty and elegiac, even chilly which gives one or two paintings in burning colour an added impact. A luminous evening on the Myall Lakes provides the striking contrast. Her technique in oils and watercolours is marvellously fluent, spare and suggestive. The watercolours in particular are in a classical mode. A dark range looms up, a rusty slope catches the light. It’s quick, accomplished, dramatic and appears so easy.

In this exhibition, along with the landscapes, Sutherland included brush drawings of birds she had observed in her travels. Stowell singled these out for her review:

The brush drawings of the birds, too, are not only observant and attractive but extremely skilful. A crow expresses surprise. A couple of magpies carol.

In June 1988 Sutherland returned to the von Bertouch Galleries with a body of work titled *Quinkan Country, Cape York Peninsula.* The reviewer for *The Newcastle Morning Herald* wrote that Sutherland’s oil paintings “have a layered richness of texture and decorative design.” The review alludes to the possible influence in style of Robert Juniper and Fred Williams, and that “her paintings possess a spiritual affinity with the landscape as she conjures both the beauty and remoteness of Cape York Peninsula.” From this exhibition

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218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
220 Ibid.
221 Ibid.
223 Ibid.
the Newcastle Region Art Gallery purchased the watercolour, *Big Rock at Brady Creek* (plate 59), for their collection.

Plate 59  *Big Rock at Brady Creek*, Lillian Sutherland, 1988, watercolour, 76.6 x 57.7 cm. Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

Sutherland died the following year, in 1989. In 1990, the Wagner Art Gallery acknowledged Sutherland’s long association with the gallery with a retrospective exhibition which spanned the period from 1967 to 1989. The cover of the invitation below, (showing text) featured *The Gorge* (plate 60) a watercolour that was completed in 1988.

Madeleine Scott Jones

After her arrival in Newcastle in 1959, Madeleine Scott Jones was included in several group exhibitions in the area.

*Stoneware bottle*, made in 1966 (plate 61), shows the wax resistant decoration over black pigment on a wood ash glaze, that was Scott Jones’ distinctive style at that time.\(^{224}\) This work was purchased by the Newcastle City Art Gallery.

\(^{224}\) This piece was purchased by the Newcastle City Art Gallery.
Plate 61  *Stoneware Bottle*, Madeleine Scott Jones, 1966, wheel thrown stoneware, wax resist decoration over black pigment with wood ash glaze, 14 x 27 cm, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

Scott Jones was one of only four Newcastle and Hunter Valley artists invited into the *Regional Survey III Exhibition* in 1967, at the Newcastle City Art Gallery. In this exhibition she had two stoneware wheel sculptural works in the form of a bird and an animal, a collection of wheel thrown bowls, vases and a ceramic coffee table. Also included was a group of stoneware pots made while working in England. In 1970 Scott Jones had a solo exhibition at the National Sculpture Gallery in Canberra and exhibited in the *Australian Pottery Exhibition* in Sydney.

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225 The other artists selected were Morris Kennedy from Cooranbong, Viola Bromley from Muswellbrook and Wolfgang Degenhardt from Charlestown. The sculptures were 10gns and 8gns respectively and the pots ranged from 4gns to 12/6.
226 Newcastle Region Art Gallery, "Regional Survey 111 Exhibition," *Catalogue* (1967). The works made in England were only for exhibition, not for sale and showcased her ability in a wide range of both functional and sculptural works.
The number of talented potters had grown considerably in Newcastle and in 1971 the Newcastle City Art Gallery decided to invite many of these into the *Hunter Valley Pottery Exhibition*. For this exhibition Scott Jones chose to confine her works to wheel thrown domestic stoneware with under-glaze brush decoration on an ash glaze. In one work she did use wax resist over black slip. The Newcastle City Art Gallery purchased two works from the exhibition for their collection (plates 62, 63).

Plate 62 (left) *Stoneware Jug*, Madeleine Scott Jones, 1971, wheel thrown stoneware, underglaze with brush decoration and wood ash glaze, 29.5 x 14.6 cm, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

Plate 63 (right) *Stoneware Jug*, Madeleine Scott Jones, 1971, wheel thrown stoneware with underglaze brush decoration and wood ash glaze, 27 x 18.3 cm., Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

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227 There had been two previous ceramic exhibitions at the gallery in 1969 and 1970, which were devoted to the work of well-known Australian potters.
Plate 64 Stoneware Bowl, Madeleine Scott Jones, 1975, wheel thrown stoneware with brush oxide decoration, 14.5 x 27 cm. Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

Pottery bowl, 1975, was purchased by Newcastle Region Art Gallery from the International Women’s [sic] Year Exhibition at von Bertouch Galleries in 1975 (plate 64).

In July 1977 Scott Jones exhibited her work in her first solo show in Newcastle, at the von Bertouch Galleries. Forty seven pieces of stoneware made up the exhibition, which included jugs, lidded pots, teapots, bowls, wine bottles and coffee mugs.228

Stowell, in her review of the exhibition, likened Scott Jones to famous English potters, Bernard Leach, Michael Cardew and Harry Davies, who shared a similar background to Scott Jones and who also believed strongly in the “validity of domestic pottery”.229 This exhibition showed the work that had become familiar to the art lovers of Newcastle since the early 1960s. The pots displayed the “classical, elegant shapes displaying the potter’s crisp throwing and finely crafted handles.”230 Scott Jones’ use of iron brushwork on the pieces originated from her experiences in ceramics in England. Stowell said:

230 Ibid.
Particularly effective is a rich iron glaze; on several tall pieces it appears in thick italic strokes, while the more rounded pots are often decorated in a variety of circular forms. Motifs and techniques refined over the years lend a sense of classical continuity.\textsuperscript{231}

Scott Jones continued to exhibit annually in the \textit{Collectors’ Choice} at the von Bertouch Galleries and her work could be purchased from several galleries in the Newcastle region.

\textbf{Lovoni Webb}

Webb’s participation in exhibitions commenced in 1962, when a painting was selected for hanging in the \textit{Sulman Prize}, at the Art Gallery of NSW. Her works continued to be selected for this exhibition in 1963, 1964 and 1966.

It was also in 1962 that Webb was invited by the Low Show Group of artists to exhibit in their second annual exhibition. Despite her move to Sydney, Webb had kept in touch with her fellow students. The following year she was included in the inaugural \textit{Collectors’ Choice} exhibition at the von Bertouch Galleries.

In 1965 and 1977, Webb had portraits selected for hanging in the \textit{Archibald Prize}. Her portrait paintings were also selected for the \textit{Portia Geach Portrait Prize} in 1967, 1975 and 1982. A solo exhibition in Sydney in 1973, at the Macquarie Galleries, acknowledged her professional standing as an artist.\textsuperscript{232} In 1987, Webb had a solo exhibition, \textit{Moments and Memories}, at the von Bertouch Galleries in Newcastle.

\textsuperscript{231} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{232} Webb’s contact with Newcastle and the Hunter Region continued with her submitting works to the \textit{Maitland Art Prize}, 1962, 64, 65 and \textit{Muswellbrook Art Prizes} in 1962, 64, 65, 1972, 73, 74, 75, 1981, 82, 85 and annually in \textit{Collectors’ Choice} at von Bertouch Galleries.
Like Cutcher, Webb’s exhibition history is not complete.\textsuperscript{233}

\textbf{Conclusion}

The Low Show Group artists were involved in many solo and major group exhibitions and it was through these that they achieved recognition and confirmed their status as professionals. Not all the exhibitions were in Newcastle, in fact, as evidenced, many of them showed in important galleries in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, and overseas. It was those in Newcastle that were reviewed in the local newspapers, which encouraged positive responses from the people of Newcastle, linking the audience with the artists.

Kerr wrote that “we cannot judge the value of local art if we are always measuring it against some proclaimed exotic perfection.”\textsuperscript{234} The work of the Low Show Group artists were often placed side by side with artists recognised in the mainstream and frequently held their own. But the value of the Newcastle exhibitions was that they contributed to the developing local art world that was so important in the future of fine art in the region.

In the next chapter the Low Show Groups’ contribution to art education is examined and its value to the fine art community is assessed.

\textsuperscript{233} Robert Webb, 12 June 2008. \textit{Interview with the author}.
CHAPTER 6

CONTRIBUTION TO ART EDUCATION

Many of the Low Show Group of artists carried their commitment to the fine arts into teaching in art and craft. In this chapter their careers are outlined, their students identified and their influence in art education examined.

When Becker outlines the collective input in an art community, he says that a wide range of support needs to be present for artists to continue and produce artworks. He discusses reputations and how they are formed, but states that it is also important how the artist uses his/her reputation.¹ The Low Show groups’ own positive art education experiences instilled in them a desire to do more than just make artworks. Consequently the contribution they made to the fine arts community through teaching was significant. Not all artists impart their knowledge to a wider audience; however, except for Betty Cutcher and Lillian Sutherland², the members of the Low Show Group were willing to share their skills through teaching as part of their love of art and commitment to their community.³

There may be many reasons for teaching. For example, financial concerns, a love of educating or to confirm artistic seriousness. Becker claimed that many women, particularly

² These women may have taught but there is no evidence at this time to support this.
³ Webb commenced employment with the NSW Department of Education as an art teacher in 1961 and retired in 1980. She taught in the state schools; Arthur Phillip, Parramatta, Strathfield Girls High and Sydney Girls High. (Robert Webb, interview with the author, 12 June, 2008.)
those who may have the financial support of husbands, choose to teach to demonstrate their artistic seriousness.⁴ For the Low Show Group artists it was for a combination of reasons.

**Artists and Teachers**

To be offered a teaching position is an acknowledgement of professionalism. In 1961, when Norma Allen was offered a part time teaching position at the Newcastle National Art School, she had achieved some confirmation of her artistic qualifications. Allen’s involvement in tutoring was extended when, in October 1972, she agreed to teach a class in portrait painting the following year for the local Workers’ Educational Association.⁵

Mary Beeston had an extensive career in teaching, particularly in Newcastle, where many students benefited from her broad knowledge of a diverse range of art forms, media and techniques. These students had taken her classes in painting, applied pure design and applied pure colour, and in colour applied to spinning, dyeing, tapestry, embroidery, quilt-making and creative knitting. Beeston commenced teaching in 1970. Her overseas and national experiences, in both teaching and learning (from conferences, seminars and workshops) further enhanced the quality of the tuition she was able to provide.⁶

By 1980, Beeston’s transition from artist to artist/teacher was growing. She had taught previously, but until this time it had been confined to the Newcastle and Hunter Valley areas. In 1981, she was invited to speak at the *First Australian Fibre Conference* in Melbourne and

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⁵ WEA, Letter, 18th October 1972. Private correspondence from WEA to Norma Allen. Zoe Allen archives. (granddaughter) Allen had previously judged their second annual art show at the Adult Education Centre in Union Street, Newcastle.
⁶ Mary Beeston, Curriculum Vitae. Available in Appendix A.
the New Zealand Woolcraft Festival and, in 1982, at the Australian Forum for the Textile Arts Conference.\(^7\)

In January 1989, Beeston’s high standard of professionalism, as both artist and teacher was recognised when she gave a workshop Colour in Yarn Design at the 8\(^{th}\) Biennial National Conference for the Australia Forum for Textile Arts at the University of Wollongong, NSW. Again the focus was colour. She said: “I see, I hear, I feel colour, it is my plaything, my demanding companion, a tantalizing mystery, an absorbing lifetime study”.\(^8\) Her passion for experimentation and inquiry in art meant that she was continually discovering new aspects in her art practice that she willingly communicated to her students.

Beeston was also an art writer and a regular contributor to the Australian Fibre Forum Magazine. She wrote reviews for local Newcastle newspapers, and contributed articles to Artemis the Newcastle Region Gallery journal. She wrote a book for the Collins Support Yourself Series on Spinning and Weaving that was published in 1986.

When Beeston was art writer for the Newcastle Morning Herald, a review of the work of the Sydney artist, Judy Cassab, which showed the high calibre of writing, attracted the attention of Elwyn Lynn, artist and art critic.\(^9\) He said that Beeston was “representing an independent and intelligently germane approach to Cassab’s work”.\(^10\)

For Elizabeth Martin not all of her teaching, when she first arrived in Newcastle, was at the Newcastle National Art School. She also taught young women, who were studying

\(^10\) A list of Beeston’s publications can be found in Appendix A.
dressmaking at the Newcastle Technical College, a mandatory class in design. Martin also took a Saturday morning children’s art class and a class for adult manual arts students also at the Technical College. She said that “trying to teach art is a very valuable experience, and I think I learned more than my students.”

Richards was always willing to share her knowledge and skills in art with others. In 1962, Richards established an experimental painting group at the William Lyne Geriatric Hospital under the auspices of Dr Richard Gibson, which culminated in an exhibition. It was not only the patients who made and exhibited their works, doctors, staff and relatives were also included. Due to the success Richards had with this first teaching experience, in 1964 she agreed to teach art for twelve months at Hunter Girls High School, a selective girls’ school in Newcastle.

In 1968 Richards returned to teaching when she established the first ever adult art class with the W.E.A. Newcastle, conducting regular day and evening sessions, summer schools and weekend seminars at Morpeth Conference Centre. These classes continued for many years and “developed an almost cult following.”

In 1982, when Richards completed a Graduate Diploma in Professional Art Studies at Alexander Mackie College in Sydney, she said that the skills gained from her studies also helped her as a teacher. Her classes at the WEA became so popular that a notice was placed in the ‘Arts’ section of The Newcastle Herald on 27 February 1984, informing interested students that enrolments were being taken for Richards painting classes. The numbers were

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13 Ibid.
limited as Richards wished to “spend considerable time with pupils on a one-to-one basis.”15 She had always been interested in teaching, particularly beginners, and said that she enjoys it when students “begin to look at their work in new and different ways”.16

Madeleine Scott Jones had established a sound career in teaching ceramics and design in England. Before her marriage, she taught at Camberwell School of Art, in London. Prior to her arrival in Newcastle in 1959, she had also taught pottery design for seven years at Portsmouth College of Arts in England.

In her first year in Newcastle, Madeleine Scott Jones taught art at what was then Newcastle Church of England Girls Grammar School (now Newcastle Grammar School).17

Scott Jones’ first professional encounter with the women artists of the Low Show Group was in 1961. They knew of her ceramics career in England and were interested in exploring the area of studio pottery that Scott Jones was experienced in teaching. After a great deal of persuasion, she agreed to teach at what was then the Newcastle campus of the National Art School. The school had a waiting list of students for this course, as pottery was considered new and exciting and was then considered to be a sophisticated art form that appealed to both men and women.18

The 1960s were a time of development in the craft of pottery and particularly the artist-potter. Throughout Australia, particularly in New South Wales and Victoria, there was an interest in pottery both historically and in contemporary practice. Artists who had been working in other areas became attracted to this popular craft. Many travelled overseas to study, while others

17 Madeleine Mitchell, (Scott Jones) 2007. Interview with the author.
18 Ibid.
attempted to develop a studio pottery industry that was uniquely Australian. Some very successful pottery came out of Australia in the following years.

Newcastle’s first pottery course commenced in 1962, with Scott Jones the only teacher, at the Wood Street building of the Newcastle National Art School, where students could enrol in the three year, part-time course. The classes were held both during the day and at night, to accommodate students who were employed at other times. The facilities for the newly established ceramic department of the art school were very primitive. There was very little in the way of equipment and only one very small kiln, which limited the size of the objects to be constructed. The job was also physically demanding as Scott Jones was required to reclaim the clay herself, as in these early days it was not practice to employ a technician.

As the classes grew, Del Colmer was made her teaching assistant and later Ron Hunter was engaged as a technical assistant. In 1965, Scott Jones had sixty students in four classes and the new intake for the year added another twenty six including John Molvig who would later become significant for his contribution to Australian painting. By 1977, the number of students enrolled in ceramics had grown to eighty five. Overall the student body was comprised of students who anticipated using their new found knowledge and skills to establish professional careers, along with housewives who needed a creative outlet and some male students who were preparing for retirement.

In conjunction with the part time courses in ceramics were classes for Trainee Art Teachers. Previously students embarking on a profession in teaching art were required to go to Sydney for their educational training. However, with the increased facilities at the Technical College,

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19 Gillian McCracken, "50 Years of Australian Ceramics (Newcastle Region Gallery 28th November to 8 February)," *Exhibition Catalogue* (2003).
21 Madeleine Mitchell. (Scott Jones) 2007, *Interview with the author*.
22 Madeleine Scott-Jones, 2007. TAFE Class lists.
particularly in the ceramics department, the trainee art teachers were spared the added expense and inconvenience of moving to Sydney to study the subject of their choice. These students were required to complete a three term unit in ceramics and were assessed at the end of the course. In 1965, Scott Jones had a class of eight trainee teachers, but the number of students was to grow to fifteen by 1968.24

Two of her conversion students from a 1970 class went on to become Heads of Visual Arts Departments in state schools, Ian Payne at Belmont High School and Brian Allen at Merewether High School. Two from another 1970 class, John Berthold and Gary Jones had successful careers as lecturers in Fine Arts at the University of Newcastle.

Usually women outnumbered men in the undergraduate courses but the high percentage of male candidature in the art courses could be explained in several ways. Perhaps in the past the lack of educational facilities for training art teachers in Newcastle had forced these males into another specialisation in teaching. It may also have been due to family, or public pressure, that males did not become art teachers. For whatever reason, many males began to choose this subject.25 26

By 1975, many other ex-students of Scott Jones’ were making a living through production pottery, working from home studios they had established under her guidance. This was an exciting time, as many talented women in Newcastle were able to make a living through their craft. They came from different educational and social backgrounds, and some were already

24 A shortage of art teachers in Newcastle in the mid-1960s was addressed by retraining infants and primary school teachers as well as secondary teachers from other subjects such as Industrial Arts to fill the positions. A conversion course was set up by Scott Jones.24 This conversion course proved successful and attracted a healthy number of male teachers. In the class of 1969, of the eleven students, ten were male and in 1970 there were four classes, in one all eleven were male, while in another there were fifteen males and three women.
25 Madeleine Mitchell, (Scott Jones) 2007. Interview with the author.
26 Ibid.
professionals who were making a lifestyle change. Some had experience in art while others came into the course without any prior artistic knowledge.27

Since that time many of Scott Jones’ students have set up studios to work at a professional level in both making and teaching. Among these are Dawn Allen, Joyce Cliff, Ann Munro, Ellen Hoskins, Rosemary Boards, Carolyn Dowson and Sue Bartholomew.

Rosemary Coote became well known for her pottery and her interest in ceramics led her to travel extensively to study. Elizabeth Martin, who studied ceramics under Scott Jones, chose ceramics over painting and printmaking as her medium of artistic expression. Several of Scott Jones’ students, Barbara Pangelley and Roslyn Earp, Peter and Lezlie Tilley, have all taught at the TAFE art school while others have become secondary school teachers. Scott Jones’ stepdaughter Roslyn Earp, who graduated from the course, become a very able potter and joined Scott Jones in a teaching position as the pottery course became even more popular.28

As the materials needed for producing pottery had previously been difficult to obtain Cecily Woods, a member of the 1965 pottery class, along with her husband, set up a retail outlet to provide clay to the growing number of potters. They stocked the versatile Cessnock Red Earthenware which was the basis for most of the general pottery at the time. Cecily Woods also worked with a group of women to establish the Newcastle Pottery Group. This group established a centre where people for a small sum of money could have access to electric pottery wheels and gas and electric kilns. The group was able to purchase an old butcher’s shop in Bull Street, Cooks Hill, which, over a period of time, was refurbished and set up with the necessary equipment. The link between the students of Scott Jones and the pottery group was strong and some of its success must be attributed to Scott Jones passion for teaching and ultimately through instilling that passion in her students.

27 The author was a student at this time.
28 Madeleine Mitchell. (Scott Jones) 2007, Interview with the author.
Scott Jones “quickly established herself as a pre-eminent teacher of ceramics and, over the next twenty years, had a profound influence on the development of the art-form in New South Wales”.²⁹ Scott Jones influence on her students was significant. Many students continued private classes with her, long after they had completed the ceramics course at the Technical College and had become working potters and teachers in their own right.³⁰

Many artists who practice and teach experience conflict between the desire to make and the need to teach. Because of the low income derived from selling artworks, it is often necessary to supplement any income with more reliable earnings through teaching. Scott Jones was always conscious of this issue and, in an interview with Paul Kavanagh, she was asked this question: “Do you find that your own work and teaching conflict with each other, or does the one augment the other?”³¹ Her response was:

The thing I like doing best of all, I think, is teaching. I get enormous satisfaction from seeing the final answer – well, not the final answer because you can never know the final answer. But it gives me much more satisfaction to see the success of a student than any other success I may get from my own work. Of course to teach you have to create as well, at your own level, otherwise you die as a teacher, and teaching becomes rather monotonous and dull. So I never keep at the same thing for very long.³²

She believed that pottery was a way to reach out to those who were unable to purchase fine art.³³ She advised that:

Generally, pottery should be functional everyday stuff which people can use at the table. Beautiful things, moderately priced, can be introduced into a household where painting and sculpture is too

³⁰ Ibid.
³² Ibid. Page 15.
³³ Scott Jones is not sure of the date she retired from teaching at the Newcastle National Art School. She said it was in the late 1980 period.
expensive for many people. So I tend to teach how to make this functional everyday pottery; casseroles, teapots and coffee pots which themselves can be very beautiful. I think I can say that I find teaching very exciting and creative.34

Conclusion

When analysing the contribution these women have made to the fine art community in Newcastle through teaching, it is evident that their careers were not only about achieving recognition as an individual artist. They demonstrated a willingness to participate and work towards developing a broader art community by sharing their skills and knowledge with others. The recognition of their professionalism was also confirmed through their teaching appointments. The model of a supportive art community that Becker proposes is made up of a number of contributing factors. Chapter seven examines the Low Show Group’s other involvements that benefitted the cultural community of Newcastle.

34 Kavanagh, "An Interview with Madeleine Mitchell." Page 15.
CHAPTER 7

CONTRIBUTION TO CULTURAL LIFE

In this chapter the contribution of the Low Show Group artists to the cultural life of Newcastle is examined through considering their significant commissions, public and private, their participation in the establishment of the Cultural Centre, and their contribution to community arts and local charities. Their endeavours were recognised through prizes and awards, and through individual artist retrospectives. Finally, their participation in the coming of Modernism to Newcastle is evaluated, from the community’s negativity which greeted Lyndon Dadswell’s sculptures at the opening of the Cultural Centre, to a gradual acceptance.

As the previous chapters detailed, the Low Show Group artists had an extraordinary record of exhibitions. Between them, and over a period of forty years, there is documentation of ninety four solo exhibitions, and over two hundred major group shows. This list is not exhaustive. They also exhibited annually in Collectors’ Choice and the Blake, Archibald, Wynne, Sulman, and Portia Geach Prizes.

The number of their exhibitions, the high quality of several of their works, and their input as educators, made them important in their community at this time. However, there were other areas where their involvement further strengthened the fine art world of Newcastle.

The Low Show Groups’ general contribution to the cultural life of Newcastle was also significant. It helped change the people of Newcastle’s conservative point of view and their limited appreciation of how fine art enhanced their world, to one where they were informed, and more able to be active participants in the growth of a strong art world.

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1 Details of lesser activities are included in Appendix A.
Major Acquisitions

A measure of the high standard of work by members of the Low Show Group is their incorporation into the collections of public and other institutions. These include the University of Newcastle Collection; Newcastle Region Gallery; regional galleries in Lake Macquarie, Maitland, Muswellbrook, and Singleton; Christ Church Cathedral; Newcastle Courthouse; Newcastle schools; Newcastle Building Society; Greater Newcastle Building Society and Council Collections in Newcastle, Cessnock, Muswellbrook, and Maitland.

Sutherland’s work is in the Australian National Gallery and Beeston’s work is in the Ube City Collection Japan; Powerhouse Museum; Victorian State Collection; Manly Art Gallery; La Trobe University College, Victoria; The Australian Federal Police Complex, ACT; regional galleries in Ararat, Albury, Broken Hill, Goulburn, Katoomba, Wyong and Stanthorpe Gallery, Queensland.

Richards has work in private collections such as the AMP Society, Sydney and Hobart and the Reserve Bank Sydney.

Retrospectives

Most of the Low Show Group artists were given retrospectives in recognition of their contribution to the fine arts in Newcastle, and in some cases more than one.

Allen’s work was shown in a retrospective in 1995; Beeston in 2003; Martin in 1994 and again in 2001; Richards’ fibre retrospective was in 1994 and her painting retrospective in 1996. Another, showing works from both fibre and painting, was held in 2008. Sutherland’s retrospective was in 1990.
Commissions and Public Art Projects

The Low Show Group’s contribution to not only the fine art community, but the broader community of Newcastle, can be recognised through the significant works they produced to enhance public spaces.

Allen’s commissions were for portraits of significant Newcastle identities, to be hung in public and private locations. In 1960 she was commissioned by Hamilton Bowling Club to paint the portrait of the president, Mr. C.A.H. McNeill, for their club building. This work is now part of the Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection (plate 65).

Plate 65  Mr. C A H McNeil, Norma Allen, 1963, painting, oil on canvas, 99 x 80.9 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
In 1961, she was commissioned to paint a memorial portrait of the late R.F. Hodge, former headmaster of Maitland High School. By 1963 she had completed her twelfth commission.

In 1977, Allen was commissioned to paint a portrait of Professor Tony Vinson, a former head of the NSW Prison System and a lecturer at the University of Newcastle (plates 66 and 67).

Plate 66  *Professor Tony Vinson, Norma Allen, 1977, ink on paper drawing, 55 x 44 cm, University of Newcastle Collection (left)*

Plate 67  *Tony Vinson Portrait, Norma Allen, 1978, painting, oil on canvas, 165 x 89 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection (right)*

2 Joan Cairns, "Portrait as Memorial of Headmaster," *Newcastle Morning Herald* 1961. Although Hodge had died before she started the work, Allen was able to obtain a sense of the character of the subject by using photographs and discussions with the people who had been close to him.

3 The ink drawing (plate 16) of Vinson in the University of Newcastle Collection appears to be a preparatory drawing for the oil on canvas portrait that Allen completed of Vinson in 1978. This work is different to Allen’s more formal portraits. In this portrait the composition places Vinson in the foreground with a backdrop of a prison. The figure only takes up one third of the picture plane and Allen’s use of a limited palette renders it almost monochromatic with little contrast of tone, yet it presents Vinson as a strong image. This work is now in the Maitland Regional Gallery Collection. The body commissioning this portrait is not known.
In 1982, Beeston designed a large wool and linen tapestry *The Procession* (3.7m by 1.5m), which was commissioned by the University of Newcastle and depicted an academic procession. It was hung in the Great Hall of the university\(^4\) (plate 68).

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**Plate 68 Academic Procession, Mary Beeston, 1982, wool on linen tapestry, 1520 x 35560 cm. Commissioned for the foyer of the Great Hall, University of Newcastle, University of Newcastle Collection**

The Cessnock City Council commissioned Beeston to design a large tapestry, *Rescue*, for the relocated Hunter Valley Mine Rescue Station in 1984. The image woven into the tapestry was based on a design Beeston made when she visited a mine rescue simulator at the station.\(^5\)

A large fibre work completed by the Beestons in 1986, titled *Newcastle*, was commissioned by the Madison Motor Inn in Newcastle.\(^6\) The same year, another commission was accepted by the Beestons which would be one of the most challenging to date. It was again for the University of Newcastle, Great Hall.

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\(^4\) An extensive article on this work is available in K L, "Mary and Larry Beeston," *Craft Australia*, no. Spring 1982/3 (1982).


\(^6\) Beeston spent 150 hours on the design.
The Hunter Tapestry (plate 79), 1988, is a large wool tapestry made up of twelve panels each measuring 233x1610 cm by 233x150 cm, and was commissioned by the Friends of the University of Newcastle. Stowell wrote: “every detail of the design has significance. Nothing was left to chance. Mary Beeston has supervised every stage of the massive operation”.

The relocation of a site specific artwork is one of the most disappointing experiences in the career of an artist, who has been commissioned to complete a work for a particular space.

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7 Jill Stowell, “The Hunter Tapestry Hung,” *Artemis, Newcastle Regional Gallery Journal*, no. October/December (1988). (no page numbers) The Hunter Tapestry is perhaps the Beestons’ most powerful work due to both its size and theme. It is a celebration of the evolution of Newcastle and the Hunter Valley. It presents a series of events from its primitive beginnings, the coming of man, and the arrival of white settlers, soldiers and convicts. The impact of these events on the environment is evident in the partially abstracted symbols depicted in the tapestry. The message is strong and all encompassing. (Stowell, 1988).

It was two years in the making and was finally installed in August 1988, being officially presented by the Governor of NSW at the time, Sir James Rowland. It measured eighteen metres wide by two and a half metres in height. At the time of installation it was valued at $45,000. The work was designed to enhance the architectural space rather than dominate. The rectangular panels were designed by Beeston to relate to its surroundings which were predominantly geometric in the form of bricks, wooden panels and the red piping which houses the air conditioning. (Stowell, 1988)

8 Ibid. An extensive review of this work can be found in the *Artemis Journal* (Newcastle Region Gallery).
Historically, this happens for a range of reasons; it may be because the work offends the public; needs repair, or is considered aesthetically unsuitable. In this instance the relocation of Beeston’s twelve panelled, *Hunter Tapestry*, within the Great Hall of the University of Newcastle, was because of sound problems.\(^9\) The university employed an internationally renowned acoustic engineer, Peter Noland, who discovered the tapestry was exacerbating the problem. The tapestry remained in the same space but was repositioned 2-3 metres higher. Specialist lighting was installed to shine across the hall to enhance the colour in the tapestry.

One of the main concerns for Beeston was that she had not been consulted. She sought legal action, but the University of Newcastle said, because the tapestry had affected the sound quality in the Great Hall, that it was necessary to relocate it.\(^10\) She was given support by the cultural community but to no avail.\(^11\) Miller claims “that she would not have allowed the work to be moved in a way that so destroyed its value”\(^12\), as it had been relocated to a height where people did not notice and the steel frame was visible. Not only had the university failed to consult Beeston, but they also failed to consult with the Friends of the University, and in particular Laurie Short, who was involved in the purchase and donation of the tapestry. He described it as “an act of gross vandalism”.\(^13\)

In May 1990, David Bradshaw, then Director of the Newcastle Region Art Gallery, asked Beeston to design a tapestry to be sent to Ube, Newcastle’s sister city in Japan.\(^14\) This was an acknowledgement of the regard for Beeston’s work and confirmed the high quality of her

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\(^9\) Raoul Mortley, who attended his son’s graduation ceremony that year, was unable to hear the proceedings as there was no acoustics from the PA. This was due to a new system which had been installed.

\(^10\) Kylie Miller, ”Row Erupts over Relocation of Tapestry at Uni,” *The Newcastle Herald*, 13 June 1996.

\(^11\) Ibid.

\(^12\) Ibid.

\(^13\) Ibid.

\(^14\) David Bradshaw, 1990. The work would be woven by Larry Beeston and needed to be completed by October 1990 for the presentation in November.
creative work. Beeston designed two important works for Christ Church Cathedral. *Lenten Altar Frontal* \(^{15}\) and *The Ten Virgins - Matthew 25*, (plate 70). \(^{16}\)

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**Plate 70** *The Ten Virgins*, Mary Beeston, date or size not given, tapestry, fine linen warp – crewel wool weft, Newcastle Christ Church Cathedral.

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\(^{15}\) This is a weaving made with a fine linen warp and crewel wool weft. It is “a symbolic representation of the crown of thorns, the nails of the Cross and the Chalice.” It is only on display during Lent.

\(^{16}\) This work hangs on the inside wall immediately to the right of the southern doors. It is also made with fine linen warp and crewel wool weft.
Martin’s first commission was to design and make the setting used for the Newcastle Roxy Theatre production of a J. M. Synge play. The designing and making of sets for local productions continued over a number of years. They included the plays *Waltz of the Toreadors*, *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Twelfth Night*. Martin was required to make and paint the scenery, design and make the costumes and many other props and ornaments.\(^{17}\)

The outstanding contribution to the cultural life of Newcastle by Richards, was her public artworks in the form of banners, which she designed and made specifically for city sites. Yet her first commission was not in Newcastle. In 1970 it was the AMP Insurance Company, who employed her to design and sew four large banners to decorate the foyer of its new building in Hobart.\(^{18}\) This was one of Richards’ most daunting tasks to date, as the work was to be relevant to insurance.\(^{19}\) Morgan relates that “inspiration came after she saw a performance of *Noah’s Fludde* and she decided to incorporate in the banner the biblical imagery of Noah and his ark. Richards said “well, Noah was building up his own insurance.”\(^{20}\)

A Craft Council grant in 1974 enabled Richards to purchase an industrial sewing machine, which then allowed her to accept a major commission for double sided banners to adorn the newly constructed Great Hall at the University of Newcastle.\(^{21}\) Richards not only fulfilled this commission, but made a gift of two additional fabric collage banners, *Arcadia* (plate 71), and *Academia* (plate 72).\(^{22}\)

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\(^{17}\) Elizabeth Martin, Handwritten notes 1986. Charles Martin archives.


\(^{19}\) Margaret Sivyer, "A Retrospective Exhibition of Fibre Work by Rae Richards," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1994). This commission was negotiated through The Australian Wool Board.


\(^{22}\) J J Auchmuty, 21 May 1974. Personal letter from Auchmuty to Rae Richards. The banners facing into the hall represented both opposing and complementary ideas of Academia and Arcadia, “the ancient Greek ideal of balance between wisdom, knowledge and joyful play.” (Maitland City Art Gallery, "A Retrospective Exhibition of Fibre Work by Rae Richards." *Exhibition Catalogue*)
Plate 71  *Arcadia*, Rae Richards, 1974, fabric collage, 153 x 270 cm, for the Great Hall, University of Newcastle, University of Newcastle Collection.

Plate 72  *Academia*, Rae Richards, 1974, fabric collage, 153 x 260.5 cm, for the Great Hall, University of Newcastle, University of Newcastle Collection.
The fabric collage banners that face into the foyer are *Sunburst*—*the light of knowledge* (plate 73), and *The Tree of Life*, also traditionally known as *The Tree of Knowledge* (plate 74).

**Plate 73** *Sunburst*, Rae Richards, 1974, fabric collage, 153 x 154.2 cm, University of Newcastle Collection

**Plate 74** *Tree of life – The Tree of Knowledge*, Rae Richards, fabric collage, 153 x 260.5 cm, University of Newcastle Collection
The main collection of Richards’ banners grace the elegant neo gothic architecture of Newcastle Christ Church Cathedral, which is located on top of the hill and dominating the surrounding city. The beauty of the banners is instantly visible when entering from the southern or western doors, as they line both sides of the main aisle, directing the viewer’s eye towards the altar. (Plate 75)

The banner commission for Christ Church Cathedral was one of the most ambitious and taxing projects undertaken by Richards. She researched Christian symbols and the lives of the saints which took twelve months and another year was required to complete the work. The finished banners were hung and consecrated in November 1976. The Banners were made from Australian wool and appliquéd in a riot of coloured pieces of every imaginable pattern and texture. The aim was to create an “ambiance of warmth of colour and softness of cloth.” Richards said:

Although all the figures belong and are relevant to Christian belief, the subject is secondary to decorative intent. As is proper for banners, the changes are heraldically correct, though sometimes freely interpreted, particularly in the arms and attributes of the saints...The Archangels and Saints, where used, are depicted on one face while their arms and attributes are shown on the other. For the most part the allegories chosen demonstrate the constant battle of good against evil.

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23 For locals and visitors this church acts as a magnet as it is prominent from any point in the city and easy to access. At night it dominates the city with its skillfully illuminated form.
24 Maitland City Art Gallery, "A Retrospective Exhibition of Fibre Work by Rae Richards."
25 Newcastle City Council, “Newcastle Fibre Art on Display,” Exhibition Catalogue (198?). (Date not clear) A coloured brochure with photographs and a full explanation of the banners may be purchased from the Christ Church Cathedral Shop.
26 Ibid.

The sixteen banners, (plate 75), represent religious figures and symbols and are made from collaged fabric. The number indicates their position in the cathedral.
In 1987, James S. Murray, a journalist for The Australian, wrote about the inclusion of artworks in churches in an article titled ‘Where art has a sacred place’. He highlighted the appropriateness (or a lack there of) of artworks and objects that adorn many churches. He saw the inclusion of rhetoric in the banners in the Newcastle Cathedral as unusual, and, in his critique, juxtaposed this with his theories on the churches of Rome and other major examples of religious architecture and adornment in Australia. Murray was not adverse to

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contemporary, avant-garde innovation but felt that it must work with the architecture of the church.\textsuperscript{28} He remarked:

Wall hangings are now an ecclesiastic adornment, and sometimes a nightmare...Banners covered with texts are another contemporary vogue, often hung willy-nilly on church pillars, out of proportion with the building and interrupting the sight lines to the altar or pulpit – though I admit to the splendid effectiveness of the pseudo-heraldic banners aggrandizing the Anglican Cathedral in Newcastle, obviously designed for the intended space by people who knew what they are doing.\textsuperscript{29}

Richards was commissioned to paint a portrait, now in the university collection, of the first Vice Chancellor of the University of Newcastle, Professor Auchmuty, (plate 76).\textsuperscript{30}

\textbf{Plate 76} \textit{Professor Auchmuty}, Rae Richards, (date unknown), painting, oil on canvas, 50 x 74.5 cm,

\begin{center}
University of Newcastle Collection, obtained in 1994.
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Richards’ painting captured the subject’s ‘colourful’ eccentric characteristics. The cool blue/green background of the portrait depicts the logo of the university.
In 1974, Scott Jones designed and constructed a ceramic mural (plate 77) for the Greater Newcastle Permanent Building Society building in Tudor Street Hamilton. Unfortunately it was destroyed when the building society renovated their premises about nine years later. Scott Jones was not notified of the building society’s intention to destroy the mural and only heard about it when they sent her photographs of the work, some-time later.

Plate 77  *Ceramic Mural*, Madeleine Scott Jones, 1974, hand-made glazed and coloured bricks, app 114 x 215 cm (each panel) Greater Newcastle Permanent Building Society, (removed 1983).

31 Paul Kavanagh, "An Interview with Madeleine Mitchell," *Artemis, Newcastle Regional Gallery Journal* 5. No 2, no. March/April (1974). (Nee Scott Jones) Page 9. This commission was a departure from her usual artwork, but her extensive knowledge of the nature of ceramics and the technical problems that needed to be considered before embarking on a project of this size, made her a suitable candidate for the venture. Scott Jones performed hundreds of tests and worked with an architect to finalise the actual installation of the many hundreds of brick tiles. Overall it was a slow process due to the fragility of the tiles in their raw state.
Prizes and Awards

The Low Show Group artists won many art prizes and awards. Through these, they received positive acknowledgement for the standard of work they were producing and were becoming recognised in the fine art community.

Allen won first prize in the open section of the 1959, *Arts Council of Australia* exhibition (Cessnock Branch), with a landscape titled *Lakeside* and received a cash prize of fifty-two pounds, ten shillings. In 1961 a watercolour *Mother and Daughter* was selected as the winning entry in the *O.G. Roberts & Co Award* and received a ‘Highly Commended’ in the watercolour section of the *Mosman Art Prize* and a ‘Highly Commended’ in the *Maitland Art Prize* with her entry of a gouache painting. The Stanthorpe Gallery in Queensland held an annual competition that drew many leading artists, with its offer of generous prize money. In the 1978 show, Allen’s painting *Littorial* won the *Acquisition Section* for the Stanthorpe Art Gallery Collection.

Mary Beeston’s first awards were in 1957 when she won the *Newcastle Prize* and the *Maitland Art Prize* (these competitions were annual events). In 1963, she won the Albury

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32 Norma Allen, 1964. Catalogue information through personal correspondence to Newcastle City Art Gallery, Newcastle Region Gallery archives. Allen was also represented in the ‘L.J. Harvey Memorial Drawing Prize’ at Queensland Art Gallery in November 1961. Her fellow exhibitors in this exhibition included Guy Grey-Smith, Frank Hinder and Margaret Olley, while the judge was Russell Drysdale.

33 Stanthorpe Council, "Stanthorpe Arts Festival," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1978): The Stanthorpe Apple and Grape Festival offered prize money of $6,700 in 1978 for art, pottery and weaving entered into their art contest. This competition/exhibition had several categories with an acquisitive prize of $3,000 for a painting in the open section.

34 Sue Whitton, 22 March 1978. A letter to Allen containing a cheque and thank you from Stanthorpe Gallery. Zoe Allen archives. $250 was paid for works in this section of the competition.
(NSW) City Choice Prize\textsuperscript{35} and the Fairfax Prize for Human Image at the Royal Easter Show in Sydney, with a painting titled \textit{Woman in the Sun}.\textsuperscript{36}

Her portrait of Anne von Bertouch, in 1966, won Beeston the Newcastle Section of the Helena Rubenstein Portrait Competition, from forty-five entrants, and her work was entered in the national competition.\textsuperscript{37} Although this was one of Beeston’s few portraits, Sparks, in his review, praised her work as he felt “the winning entry is beyond dispute”.\textsuperscript{38}

The Newcastle May Day Art Competition was also won by Beeston in 1966, with a still life painting and again in 1969.\textsuperscript{39} In 1967 she won the Blue Mountains Acquisitive Prize; 1969 Newcastle May Day Art Prize; 1972 Newcastle Show Prize; 1980 Muswellbrook Prize, and the 1985 Port Stephens Art Exhibition Acquisitive Prize. Beeston’s oil painting, Honeysuckle Phoenix 1, 1994 (plate 78), won the Maitland Art Prize in 1994 and is now part of the gallery’s collection.\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{thebibliography}{40}
\bibitem{35} Joan Cairns, "30 Paintings for Show," \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald}, 17 April 1965.
\bibitem{37} Newcastle Sun, "Winning Portrait," \textit{The Newcastle Sun Herald}, 23 May 1966, The award was founded in Perth in 1960 to encourage portrait painting. It was opened to regional artists when it was found that painters outside the cities did not exhibit because of the expense involved. The prize was one hundred dollars.
\bibitem{38} Peter Sparks, "Portraits and Pitfalls," \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald}, 24 May 1966. He wrote that “Mary Beeston’s portrait of Anne von Bertouch successfully handles the problems of large-scale portrait”. (Sparks 1966)Sparks, himself a recognized artist and teacher, also stated that the “bulk of entries fail to meet the demands of portraiture” and that “many exhibitors in the show who cope with other forms of painting are betrayed in this instance by lack of training”. (Sparks, 1966)
\bibitem{39} NMH, "Valley Art Prize to Mrs Beeston," \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald}, 5 May 1969. The winning painting Smelter Country, painted in 1969, successfully demonstrated the criteria the judge was looking for: “a work that reflected an interest in either working class activity or its environment” Despite this, the judge, H McClintock, from Sydney was not too rigid in his assessment of the subject as he found it necessary also to recognize the “vitality of modern movements and contemporary modes of thought”.\textsuperscript{39} (NMH, 5 May, 1969)
\bibitem{40} It depicted the growth of Newcastle in a positive way. It shows the restoration of the beautiful, though derelict old railway sheds near the harbour in the city. This was the beginning of a huge project to restore this area of the city to house galleries and theatres.
\end{thebibliography}
Elizabeth Martin also submitted works in many group exhibitions and competitions and won the *Newcastle Show Prize* in 1964. The *Bradford Mills Prize for Painting* at the Maitland Art Show was awarded to Martin in 1966 with a work titled *Painting – Study*, now in Maitland Regional Art Gallery (plate 79).
Plate 79  *Painting – study*, Elizabeth Martin, 1966, painting, oil on masonite, 70 x 92 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.

Rae Richards won the acquisitive, 1959 *Maitland Art Prize*. In 1961 she was awarded first prize in the *Newcastle May Day Art Competition* and won the *Maitland Art Prize - Hunter Valley Section* with a painting titled *Place for the Grail* (plate 80).

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41 *Place for the Grail*, 1959, oil on masonite, 75 x 54.5 cm, now in the Maitland City Gallery Collection.

42 NMH, "Prize-Winner," *Newcastle Morning Herald*, April 1961. The competition was judged by William Dobell, who described the painting as “the most professional” in the exhibition. (NMH, April, 1961). Many of the entries from this competition went on show at the Roxy Theatre in Hamilton during the season of the Australian play ‘Reedy River’.
In 1967, Richards was again successful in the Maitland Art Prize, winning the Bradfield Cotton Mill Prize section, with an oil painting titled *Armada*.\(^{43}\) In 1982, the annual Mattara Festival featured the inaugural Mattara Art Prize of $1000. Richards’ fabric work, *Newcastle Quilt*, was the winning entry.\(^{44}\)

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\(^{43}\) Newcastle City Art Gallery, "Third Hunter Valley Review," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1967). Selected by the eminent artist, Tom Gleghorn, who was also the independent assessor for the *Third Hunter Valley Review*.

Lillian Sutherland won first prize in the *Maitland Art Prize (Bradford Cotton Mills Ltd. Section)*, in 1962, with a watercolour, *The Game* (plate 81). The prize was acquisitive and the work is now in the Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.

Plate 81 *The Game*, Lillian Sutherland, 1962, watercolour, 42 x 32 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.

In 1963, Sutherland won the *Traditional* section of the *Muswellbrook Art Prize*, with an oil on hardboard painting, titled *The Australian* (plate 82).

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45 This work was a complete contrast to the watercolour that had won at Maitland the previous year, in both scale and medium. The linear qualities of *The Game* are still present in *The Australian*, yet the colour is less intense and does not use the warm/cool relationship to create discord as with the figures and their surroundings in *The Game*. Also, the diagonal direction that is utilised to create a sense of movement in *The Game* is replaced by the vertical composition that successfully imbues a static, almost slovenly appearance to the subject.
Plate 82 *The Australian*, Lillian Sutherland, 1963, painting, oil on hardboard, 120 x 90 cm, Muswellbrook Shire Art Gallery Collection.

In 1964 she entered and won both *The Albury Religious Prize* and the *Traditional Award* in the *Tumut Art Prize*. In 1967, Sutherland received the award for *Modern Watercolour* in the *Cheltenham Art Prize*. In the same year, she submitted a self-portrait to the *Portia Geach Memorial Award*. The work was hung in this exhibition and received a commendation for what the judges described as a “simple and dignified self-portrait”. She won the *Human Image Prize* in the 1969 *Royal Easter Show* exhibition.

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48 Arts Council of Australia, "The Portia Geach Memorial Award 1967," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1967): Portia Geach Prize is Australia’s most prestigious portrait prize for female artists. It is a celebration of female artists.
Sutherland’s self-portrait was selected for hanging in the 1981 Archibald Prize exhibition and was given a positive mention, accompanied by a photograph of Sutherland with the self portrait in the review of the exhibition in the Sydney Morning Herald.\footnote{Sydney Morning Herald, "Down the Home Straight," Sydney Morning Herald, 31 January 1981.}

**Low Show Group Citations**

The Low Show Group artists received considerable recognition in newspapers, but it is the reviews received in major publications that attest to their contribution to art. Below is a list of publications that include the work of the Low Show Group artists. This is not an exhaustive list and only includes those where information is available.

Norma Allen


Mary Beeston

*Craft Australia*, Spring 1982/83. Pages 33,34.

*Selected Australian Crafts, a Directory*, published by the Craft Council of Australia


who recognize trends in contemporary art inaugurated in 1961. It showcases the best portraits painted from life of some man or women distinguished in arts, letters or sciences by any female resident in Australia. Along with the awards she had received, Sutherland had also been commended in many other exhibitions and was, by that time, represented in collections of the Australian Federal Government, Manly Art Gallery, Muswellbrook Council as well as private collections across Australia.
Elizabeth Martin


Rae Richards


Lillian Sutherland


Madeleine Scott Jones


**Services to Community**

Joan Cairns wrote in 1961, at the time of the group’s first Low Show Group Exhibition:

It was also significant that the show was given by six women who were all known not only for their talent,
but for the active support they had always given to art ventures in Newcastle.\footnote{Margaret Sivyer, "The Low - Show Retrospective," \textit{Exhibition Catalogue} (1993).}

This ‘active support’ by the Low Show Group artists predated the formation of the group and their significant contribution to the community and, in particular, fine arts in Newcastle.

They worked with other citizens for the establishment of the Newcastle City Art Gallery, which was finally completed in 1957, after the long fight for a public gallery that had commenced in 1890. The Low Show Group, through their association with Paul Beadle and other members of the community\footnote{Ian Cutcher, 13 April 2008. Betty Cutcher’s father, Alan Langwill, was on the Cultural Centre Committee and worked hard for the establishment of a cultural centre in Newcastle.} who lobbied for a gallery, played a large part in the establishment of the Newcastle Cultural Centre that would house the city art gallery.

The group knew that a gallery would provide the artists of Newcastle and the Hunter Region with a venue for both viewing artworks and exhibiting their own.\footnote{Rae Richards, Interview, 26 April 2007.} Anne von Bertouch, in a speech she gave at the opening of the Norma Allen retrospective in 1995, highlighted their contribution.

The Low Show Group and the Art Gallery and Conservatorium Committee which on the score of the Roland Pope Gift had pressed for the establishment of a Newcastle City Art Gallery (which it was then) because there naturally would be a war memorial building built after 1945 and they pressed for the War Memorial Cultural Centre and of course then the Low Show Group linked hands and it was on the basis of the beginning of the War Memorial Cultural Centre.\footnote{Anne von Bertouch, \textit{Norma Allen, Retrospective Exhibition Opening} (Newcastle: 1995).}
Community Arts

Art professionals recognized Richard’s ability to produce outstanding artworks and were therefore confident in appointing her as the judge of many art competitions in Newcastle and the surrounding region. The prize money associated with these shows was quite large and the competitions attracted not only artists from Newcastle, but further afield. In 1994, Richards was invited to judge the Raymond Terrace Annual Art Show with prize money of $3,050 and where the proceeds from the show were donated to the local schools in the area. Richards also gave time as a member of the Acquisition Committee of Newcastle Region Art Gallery as an artist representative.

The exhibiting of contemporary artworks, particularly in a commercial gallery, is a risk and unfortunately many gallery owners encountered financial difficulties, as did Joy Foster in the early 1980s with her Armstrong Gallery in Morpeth. However, this was when the existence of a supportive art community became evident, and Foster’s support was reciprocated.

Foster wrote:

My struggle to keep financially viable was helped largely by inheritances from my family as my gallery was rarely running at a profit although a generous decision by Rae Richards to accept my invitation to have a show with me at a time when her brilliant banners were at their zenith in public regard and had reached their highest market value enabled us together to achieve a stunning success critically and financially. I will always be grateful to her for this gesture as she could have exhibited anywhere at that time. That exhibition helped me to keep the gallery open a while longer.

54 NMH, "Prize Money," Newcastle Herald, 23 January 1993. Page 2. For example the Newcastle Show Art Competition developed into a prestigious annual event. In 1993 when Richards was invited to judge the show, the prize money was $4,000, with an acquisitive prize of $2,500. This was a responsibility not to be taken lightly.
56 Joy Foster, 8 January 2008. Interview with the author.
Martin was also willing to help the larger community. Much of Martin’s early art making was accessible to the public in the form of puppets for shows and festival carnival figures. The *Castellet Puppets* were established by a group of Newcastle citizens in June 1956, to perform shows in a puppet theatre in Blackall House in the city.\(^{57}\) Martin was a prominent member of this group and her previous experiences performing for children were an advantage, although she had not attempted such a large public production as her first show *Cinderella*.\(^{58}\)

![Plate 83](image)

*Plate 83  Elizabeth Martin with puppets, 1959, photograph, Newcastle Morning Herald.*

No date on news clipping, Elizabeth Martin Archives, Charles Martin Collection, Newcastle. Photograph courtesy of Newcastle Herald.

The show was given positive publicity in the newspapers and when Martin was interviewed on ABC Radio she said that she hoped “the play will be able to introduce a strong illusion of fantasy for the children”.\(^{59}\) The group planned to introduce satirical plays for adult audiences as they felt “that it was not solely a form of entertainment for children”.\(^{60}\) They also planned

\(^{57}\) NMH, "Puppet Group to Stage Old Story," *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miner's Advocate*, 23 August 1956.

\(^{58}\) The twelve puppets for the first show, which was performed five times in August and September 1956, were all made by Martin with others in the group assisting with the details. (Ibid) Plate 82.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.

\(^{60}\) Newcastle Sun, "First Production by Puppet Group," *The Newcastle Sun*, 23 August 1956.
to introduce Australian themes for plays. 61 Martin and a friend, Margaret Wood, went on and founded the Castellet Puppet Company in 1960, which was to prove a very successful venture. 62 Martin continued to make public artworks and worked for over eighteen months, painting twelve murals to decorate the otherwise austere environment of the children’s ward at Stockton Hospital. 63 The work was completed in 1966. 64

Martin was offered a spot on the children’s Three Cheers Show on NBN television, which was just starting in Newcastle. 65 These charity performances and classes to instruct children on the making of puppets occupied much of Martin’s time for many years, alongside her interest in producing festival masks for the Mattara Festival which commenced in 1961. 66 In 1963, Martin spent two months constructing twelve “larger-than-life carnival heads” 67 (plate 84) to be worn in the Mattara procession.

Martin’s son said he was sure that most of this work was done without payment or, at the most, a token amount was given, that may have covered the cost of materials, but little was left over for labour. 68

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61 Elizabeth Martin, "First Review," Personal journal (1956). Charles Martin archives. The first show made twenty nine pounds which almost covered their expenses including the hire of the hall and advertising.


63 This hospital cared for children with severe mental health problems in the Newcastle Region.

64 NMH, "Artist Elizabeth Martin," The Newcastle Morning Herald 1966. Martin painted these murals using the more inexpensive plastic house paints that were available and the works measured approximately 5ft by 4.5 ft. Their subjects were circuses, nursery rhymes themes, fantastic animals and medieval pageantry. She said “that the mural would help to interest the children in pictures and help them to recognize animals.” (Ibid)

65 Elizabeth Martin. “First Review”, 1956. She “had lots of difficult characters- a mad professor who was fond of doing experiments (and getting blown-up!) Some clowns, a half-witted dragon, and so on.” (Ibid)

66 Martin devoted long hours to the construction of large carnival heads that made their annual appearance in the Mattara procession and were also used in puppet type plays at the City Hall.

67 NMH, "Her Ideas for Heads Came out of Her Own," Newcastle Morning Herald, August 1963. This review was in the Elizabeth Martin archives of Charles Martin and only had the month not the day.)The heads were of “surfies and rockers’, clowns and girls with upswept hairstyles.” (NMH, August, 1963) These were all made in her home and there were difficulties in finding the space to store the completed works.

Madeleine Scott Jones’ contribution was not in public artworks or commissions, but in her valuable and significant fostering of ceramics in Newcastle. Newcastle City Art Gallery commenced their collection of ceramics in the founding days of the gallery, with works by Anne Dangar and John Perceval which pre-date 1953. Their acquisitions of ceramics by prominent Australian potters, combined with the works later acquired, of the avant-garde, Japanese Sodeisha Group, made this ceramic collection one of the most important in Australia. With this focus on excellence, it was fitting that the Newcastle City Gallery should acknowledge the work of regional potters in an exhibition.

69 She did produce a ceramic work for The Greater Newcastle Permanent Building Society Building in Hamilton.
70 Gillian McCracken, "50 Years of Australian Ceramics (Newcastle Region Gallery 28th November to 8 February)," Exhibition Catalogue (2003).
The Gallery Director, Andrew Ferguson, wrote:

Though there was an awakening interest in ceramics throughout Australia shortly after World War II, the majority of the potters exhibiting here did not begin studying until 1961, when the part-time course in ceramics was established at the Wood Street branch of the National Art School, Newcastle. Since then enthusiasm for ceramics has continued to grow. Through consistent production over several years, individual styles are emerging in the work of potters exhibiting here.  

The credit for this exhibition in 1971 was due to Madeleine Scott Jones’ fortunate arrival in Newcastle, and her professional dedication to teaching, as the majority of the exhibitors were her students. They were Barbara Blaxland (Pengelly), Del Colmer, Rosemary Coote, Enid Cryer, Roslyn Earp, Lee Kelly, Alan Mullard, Miriam Mullard, Malina Reddish and Cecily Woods.

While Scott Jones was a hard task master and completely professional in her outlook, expecting a high standard and a serious approach to art making from all, the rewards were high, as many of her students went on to have successful art careers. For her students, Scott Jones became an icon. Madeleine Scott Jones left a great legacy in the area of ceramics – through her art practice, her establishment of pottery courses and her teaching.

Like the other members of the Low Show Group who had made the move to Newcastle, Scott Jones soon considered Newcastle her home and the effort she extended, in both her teaching and her art making practice, reflected her desire to support and enhance the art community of Newcastle.

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72 Ibid.
73 The author was a student of Madeleine Scott Jones from 1975 to 1977.
74 Madeleine Mitchell, 2007. Interview with the author.
Charities and the Fine Arts

The Low Show Group artists contributed to the raising of money for charities, through their participation in various charity exhibitions. This action had a twofold result. The first was that money was raised for specific groups in the community and secondly the audiences who attended charity functions were often not the ones found regularly at gallery openings.

In September 1979, an event to raise funds, through the sale of artworks, was held to aid in buying furniture for the Kendall Grange Special School, at Morisset. The function was in the form of an auction where seventy two works came under the hammer. The Low Show Group artists generously contributed artworks for this worthy cause.75

Anne von Bertouch organized and provided the venue for many of the charity shows which the Low Show Group artists supported. In 1981, Beeston, Martin and Scott Jones were among a group of artists who donated works for a show to support the raising of $4000 for the University of Newcastle, to purchase sets and costumes for Mystery Plays to be staged by the South Australian Theatre Company. These plays, which commenced in 1981, became a biennial event at Newcastle Christ Church Cathedral at Easter.76

Another major exhibition, curated by Anne von Bertouch, was not for the benefit of the art world, but for the everyday citizens who had been devastated by the 1989 Newcastle earthquake. This had caused not only physical damage to buildings but was responsible for many deaths and injuries. Anne von Bertouch organized Floorshow, to raise money for people hard hit by the earthquake. It was in this exhibition that the four Low Show Group

75 NMH, "Very Rare Art for Sale," Newcastle Morning Herald, 21 September 1979.
76 Anne von Bertouch, "Courtyard Show for the Mystery Plays," Exhibition Catalogue (1981). Other artists in the exhibition were Arthur, David and Guy Boyd, John Coburn, Ray Crooke, Pro Hart, Frank Hinder, Reg Livermore and Lloyd Rees and several other Newcastle artists. An excess of the proposed amount was pledged to the Delando Crescent School for Disadvantaged Children who received a cheque for $1,005.
artists still living in Newcastle came together, along with many other local and regional artists, to contribute their work for this cause.\textsuperscript{77}

\textbf{Group Recognition}

Thirty-two years after the first Low Show Group exhibition, the works of the original six artists were presented to the public in a retrospective exhibition that traced their careers from the first show in 1961, through the intervening years of their individual careers, to 1993. The \textit{Low Show Group – A Retrospective}, was curated by Margaret Sivyer at Maitland City Art Gallery. This major show was a tribute to the endeavours of the Low Show Group and an acknowledgement of their importance in the art community of Newcastle.

It was fitting that Joan Cairns (now Watkins) was invited to open the retrospective, as it was she who had opened the inaugural exhibition in 1961. All of the surviving artists were in attendance, Sutherland and Martin had died. Betty Cutcher, now Beadle, travelled from New Zealand for the opening of the exhibition. Michael Hedger, in his role as art reviewer for the \textit{Newcastle Herald}, acknowledged the Low Show Group artists’ long careers and gave a brief, but concise overview of each of the artist’s work.

Norma Allen had twelve works in this exhibition. They were all oil paintings, with the exception of one watercolour. The consistent theme of portraits dominated her participation in this exhibition. The dates of the paintings spanned from 1959 to 1993 and the works varied in size from 89 x 165 cm to 27 x 32 cm. Hedger wrote that her “more recent work is characterised by a further paring down of form, but is emotionally charged.”\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{77}———, "Floorshow: For the People Hit Hard by the Earthquake," \textit{Exhibition Catalogue for von Bertouch Galleries} (1990). The sum of $10,626 was raised from artworks sold, donations and money from catalogues.

Mary Beeston’s input comprised of eight works. It is interesting that, despite the recognition she had received with her textile works, it was painting and mixed media that was shown in this exhibition. Beeston’s earliest work was a small, 1961 painting, *Still Life with Pewter*. Hedger wrote, her “interest in texture and subtlety of surface has not diminished with the more recent collages, which can be described as warm and light hearted.”

Betty Cutcher (Beadle) remained consistent in the choice of sculpture as her favoured art form throughout her career. However, two of the later works in this exhibition were sugar-lift aquatints produced in 1991 and 1992. Included in her collection of works were three early wood sculptures and a bronze from 1969. The cast bronze and silver medallions she had become renowned for, particularly in New Zealand, were also exhibited. For many of the Newcastle audience, this was the first time they had the opportunity to view these later works. Hedger pointed out the difference between the two sculptors’ works in this retrospective. “Of the two sculptors, Betty Cutcher shows the contemporary strength of study of the rounded forms of the Moore school. Her carvings like The Race and Tall Form, show the same sensuality, nuances of the media.”

Elizabeth Martin’s early works in this retrospective were linocuts and drawings, but it was the ceramic sculptures that dominated this collection in both number and appeal. Hedger wrote: “The humorous works, like Bacchante, are more successful since they seem closely related to the clay itself.”

Like Beeston, Rae Richards confined her exhibition contribution to painting. Her banners were not included. Both of these artists had said that painting was their first love and it was evident in this retrospective. Richards had ten oil on masonite paintings, that dated from 1959

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79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
to 1992. Most of these were representations of the landscape, from the ocean to the Upper Allen River. Also included were the 1960s works dealing with legends, including *The Magi* and *Riders on the Wheel of Death*. It was the later landscape that Hedger praised in his review. "Rae Richards made her work the most abstracted of the group and led to experimentation in the style of and form and gained a new ease."  

Throughout her career, Lillian Sutherland had concentrated on painting and drawing. Her works in this exhibition consisted of two large oil on board paintings, three drawings, and three watercolours. The watercolours in the exhibition were her in later 1988 works. Hedger described Sutherland’s work as "characterised by a sparseness of detail and colour."  

Hedger’s footnote at the end of the review revealed how times had changed:

"It is amusing to speculate at how younger artists would react to a review describing them as 'Newcastle housewives who have made time in between home chores to prepare work' (Newcastle Sun newspaper, November 10, 1960)."

The Newcastle and Hunter public were reminded of how important this women’s collective’s contribution was to the cultural advancement of the art scene in Newcastle. Thirty years after the first Low Show Group exhibition, all the surviving artists were still enthusiastically making art and were still supportive of each other. Despite being "Newcastle housewives who found time between chores to prepare work", they were honoured by this retrospective as being the fully professional artists they had hoped to become.

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82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
Individual Recognition

Allen, Beeston and Richards were all recognised for their achievements in art through their local, individual retrospective exhibitions while Sutherland was surveyed in a Sydney show.

In 1995 Maitland City Art Gallery recognised the contribution to art made by Allen in *Retrospective Exhibition of Works by Norma Allen*. In this survey show, sixty oil paintings, seven acrylic paintings, twenty-two drawings and thirty-nine maiolica ceramic pieces were exhibited. Among these were thirty-three portraits, the earliest one completed in 1959.86

Richards’ long career in textiles/fibre was reflected in a retrospective exhibition at Maitland City Art Gallery in February 1994.87

In 1996, the exhibition *Survey in Retrospect: Paintings by Rae Richards* 88 showed paintings spanning the period from 1959 to 1995, and demonstrated “the changes in style and the strong line of development with some exploratory diversions in the process.”89

Stowell wrote that Richards had returned to the use of a palette knife in her art practice which was the perfect choice for “articulating scumbled blocks of oil paint.” This was a technique she had used in her early paintings when she was depicting rainforests where the light illuminated the trees “into the lofty gothic arches of sunk Lyonesse and the castles and cathedrals of a fabled age”.90

87 ———, "A Retrospective Exhibition of Fibre Work by Rae Richards." The ‘A Retrospective Exhibition of Fibre Work’ catalogue included her impressive list of exhibitions, commissions and awards. Forty-one works made up the exhibition, which covered the period from 1966 until 1992. Many were on loan from private and public collections and the collection of the artist.
89 Margaret Sivyer, "Survey in Retrospect," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1996). The exhibition was made up of eighty works with oils on board, masonite and canvas, and gouache on paper.
In August 2008, the Lake Macquarie City Gallery held a retrospective survey of Richards’ works. This survey showed paintings, textiles and ceramics and, although she had previously exhibited at this gallery, this was her first retrospective there.

In March/April 2003, Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery honoured both Mary and Larry Beeston in an exhibition titled *Beyond Two Lives* which showcased the works of both artists over the last thirty years. This exhibition was instigated by Laurie Short, Dinah Beeston and Jim Beeston to “honour the significant contribution made by Larry and Mary Beeston to the cultural life of this community and beyond”. Janet De Boer, Editor of *Textile Fibre Forum Magazine* and Executive Director of *Australian Forum for Textiles Art*, wrote a tribute to both Mary and Larry Beeston in the catalogue for this exhibition. She wrote:

> The works that stand out for me are *Academic procession*, with its perfect use of colour, abstraction and a sense of dance performance, and the piece that Mary herself called a true milestone, *The Hunter Tapestry* for the Great Hall of the University of Newcastle (all 45 square metres of it). I believe that she knew that this piece truly took them beyond being competent commission artists. It is a genuine and lasting culmination – dance of that great river, the fantastic glowing colours, the carefully researched imagery is so much more.

Mary Beeston was not only the designer of these two major commissions which are now part of the Newcastle heritage, but she supervised every stage of the entire project. De Boer wrote that Mary Beeston “thought like a painter but created works that were specific to her knowledge of the weaving medium and especially the way colour and yarn must work in with the final imagery.” Beeston also chose the fibre for the weavings. For Newcastle the

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93 De Boer, "Beyond Two Lives: Larry and Mary Beeston."
94 Ibid. 

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commissioning of these large projects has resulted in some of the best examples of Beeston’s work being retained by this city. De Boer wrote:

Her ability to rise to the challenge of site specific commissions is unequalled, to the best of my knowledge, in Australian textile arts. Furthermore, I am not aware of another location in Australia which has been rendered so frequently in what I would call an affectionate and tactile exchange between community (the Hunter Valley) and the artists who love it.95

The University of Newcastle bestows honourary degrees on citizens of Newcastle, and others, who have excelled in their field of expertise. In March 1992, a Master of Arts (Art, Design and Communication) was awarded to Mary Beeston and her husband Larry, for their contribution to the arts in Newcastle.96 Newcastle had at last showed their appreciation of the contribution that these artists had made to teaching, scholarship and art practice and Mary Beeston was recognised for her valuable contribution to the academic side of the fine arts, for her lectures and workshops at regional and national conferences; serving as an art critic, writing text books and contributing to journals.

Finally, it is important to recognise the role of the Low Show Group in accepting the new ideas coming from Modernism. The Low Show Group artists’ investigations into Modernism, through the influence of Passmore and their other teachers, contributed to the general acceptance of this form of art in a community, that, previously had a negative response to Modern art.

95 Ibid.
Modernism

The Low Show Group women artists made an important contribution to the cultural life of a city up to that time complacent in its negativity about art, in particular anything that smacked of modernism.  

The Low Show Group artists’ embrace of modernism was acknowledged by Michael Hedger when he reviewed the Low Show Group Retrospective at Maitland Gallery in 1993. “The show’s power lies in the artistic developments of these Modernists.”  

When the established conventions in fine arts change, it has often created controversy as audiences may feel threatened by their lack of knowledge. This is not exclusive to the fine arts and may occur in the many areas of the arts. As Becker explains:

The distribution of conventional knowledge changes. What everyone once knew can cease to be part of the equipment of an ordinary, well-socialized member of society and become something that only better-prepared, more serious participants in art activities know.  

Becker distinguishes between the “serious audience member” and the more professional participants. He said:

Serious audience members however do not know all the things that the other more professionalized participants in the art world know. They know no more than they need to know to play their part in the cooperative activity, which is to

97 Foster.  
98 Hedger, "Career Highlights Featured in Low Show.” Hedger is a fine arts academic and author of Public Sculpture in Australia 1995 Craftsman House. At the time of the review he was also a curator at the Newcastle Region Art Gallery.  
100 Ibid. Page 50.
understand, appreciate, and support the activities of those called artists in that world.\textsuperscript{101}

When that conventional knowledge changes it stops being what the ordinary person understands and becomes what only the more serious participants know. This often leads to controversy when members of the audience have not had the opportunity to be educated in this ‘new’ art and do not understand what Becker terms “the elements of a different language of the medium.”\textsuperscript{102}

Prior to the establishment of the Newcastle City Art Gallery the quality of the art available for public viewing was poor and public understanding of art was poor. In 1940, Reg Russom was concerned with the lack of education about the fine arts in Newcastle.\textsuperscript{103} He expressed his concern that, although some of the paintings in the City Art Collection that were hanging on the walls of the City Hall were worthwhile, others were “absolutely awful”.\textsuperscript{104} In the article “Wrong Conception of Art – Newcastle Galleries Deplored” he said:

Pictures in the four Newcastle galleries open to the public, not only lack interest but they continue to be a danger to art students, who may be tempted to pay them too much honour as high class works.\textsuperscript{105}

He went on to describe the standard of artworks in the four venues, which were not really galleries, but sites where artworks were displayed:

City Hall: some pictures fair, some very poor.

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid. Page 50.

\textsuperscript{102} Newcastle was not unique in their non-acceptance of Modernism. Similar discussions and arguments were being waged all over Australia. The difference was that in many places there was a more informed discussion, due to a more art educated public.

\textsuperscript{103} His views were documented in the \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald} in March 1940

\textsuperscript{104} NMH, ”Museum Room for Gallery,” \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald}, 19 April 1940.

\textsuperscript{105}———, ”Wrong Conception of Art : Newcastle Galleries Deplored,” \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald}, 30 March 1940.
His concern was for the public’s understanding, but more so for the students’ education in art. He considered that the wrong message about art was being communicated and he felt that the lack of interest in art in Newcastle was understandable, if the art presented to the citizens of the city, was of such a low standard.107

In the 1930s, *The Newcastle Morning Herald* found the controversy of modernism of interest to the general public and proceeded to increase the number of articles addressing issues in art.

In 1954, the selection of the Lyndon Dadswell design for a major sculpture to be installed at the entry of the Newcastle Cultural Centre was the catalyst for a great outcry against modernism. Initially the decision by the council to include a sculpture by a major Australian artist was welcomed by the art community of Newcastle. A national competition was held which invited artists to submit ideas and, in October 1954, the submission by Lyndon Dadswell was selected.108

The design for the sculptures incorporated two bronze figures, each eleven feet high, a male and a female (untitled), which would signify the participation of both sexes in the conflict of World War Two. The figures were to be placed in the foyer of the building and would face the inscription “In minds ennobled here the noble dead shall live.”109

106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Norm Barney, “‘Monstrosity’ Wins over Critics,” *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 23 September 1995, Page 40. Other works by this artist were featured in the Canberra War Memorial and the Melbourne War Memorial.
109 Ibid., This inscription was the result of another national competition won by Jessie Sheridan-McLoughlin of Cessnock who won a refrigerator for her work.
Dadswell’s untitled design evoked conflicting responses. The RSL, (Returned Soldiers’ League) some of the aldermen of the City Council and many members of the public, all protested against the chosen design.\(^{110}\) Opposition to the project became so great that it even polarized the members of the City Council.\(^{111}\) The main opponent was Alderman J.H. Rundle, who announced that the sculpture was a ‘monstrosity’.\(^{112}\) There was much debate in the community and considerable discussion before the finance committee agreed to approve the design. The go ahead for construction was issued in October, 1956. Even after the agreement was signed, the controversy still raged within the council.\(^{113}\)

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Plate 85  *The Dadswell Figure Group*, Lyndon Dadswell, installed 1957, bronze sculpture, Newcastle War Memorial Cultural Centre. Photograph featured in *Artemis* Nov/Dec 1973, Newcastle Region Gallery. Photograph courtesy of Newcastle Herald.

\(^{110}\) Ibid.

\(^{111}\) Newcastle Sun, "Foyer Statuary Caused Storms of Discussion," *Newcastle Sun*, 22 October 1954.

\(^{112}\) Ibid.

When the centre was officially opened in October 1957, Dadswell’s sculptures took pride of place in the foyer (plate 85) and many earlier opponents came around to a more favourable opinion.\(^\text{114}\)

William Dobell’s painting of Mary Gilmore, which in itself had proved controversial, was loaned to the City Gallery for seven days for that year’s Cultural Festival. The Lumsdon cartoon\(^\text{115}\) (plate 86) reflected the view many people had about contemporary art at that time.

![Lumsden cartoon, Lumsden, 1957, Newcastle Morning Herald. Local Studies Section, Newcastle Region Library. Courtesy of Newcastle Herald.](image)


John Passmore and other lecturers at the Newcastle National Art School had introduced the ideas behind modernism to the Low Show Group artists.

\(^{114}\) Newcastle Sun, "Art Gallery Was Originally Part of Children's Library," *The Newcastle Sun Cultural Centre Supplement*, 22 October 1957. One irony of the argument over the sculpture was that the members of the Cultural Centre Women’s Auxiliary raised the six thousand pounds to pay for the work. This project was headed by two of its foundation members, Mrs. D Thompson and Mrs. K H Forsyth. The money was raised through hundreds of functions from musical evenings, lamington drives to luncheons, held from the beginning of the cultural centre scheme.

\(^{115}\) *Newcastle Morning Herald* on October 23, 1957.
Passmore took up his appointment in Newcastle on 13 May, 1954. On the same day the *Newcastle Morning Herald* published an interview with him where he pointedly proclaimed “Australian Art ‘Backward’”. He had spent eighteen years in England working, and studying art. He had also made frequent trips to Europe, and in particular France, where the leading art movement was based, with Picasso as its acknowledged head. He said that although there were half a dozen artists in touch with the developments in art abroad, Australia is “right out of the art current” and “it is our task to accelerate Australian development in art.” It was with this philosophy he approached his teaching.

Through their experiences at the Newcastle National Art School, the members of the Low Show Group were introduced to modernism and implemented some of its tenets in their art making practice. Reviewers readily accepted their work and the public purchased their art. These artists did not set out to confront viewers, or distort the human form and, consequently, their work did not cause the same level of controversy as that of Dadswell or Dobell.

Through the teachings of Passmore, Beadle and Cowley the Low Show Group artists had become interested in colour as a device to achieve beauty in their works. While they were less interested in realising utopian social goals, they were strongly involved in social action to create a more progressive art world. While some of these artists continued to use conventional subject matter, they did so with an understanding of the new ideas of colour and

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117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
120 Art Gallery of NSW, "John Passmore 1903 to 1984 (Retrospective)," *Exhibition Catalogue* (1986). Page 16. Prior to his time in Newcastle he had taught at Julian Ashton School, where some of his students went on to become prominent artists in the Sydney art world. The artists were Peter Upwood, John Olsen, John Shaw and William Rose.
abstraction. They were not modernist innovators, but rather pioneers in their acceptance and application of Modernism in the context of a small non-metropolitan, Australian centre.

Conclusion

The contributions made by the Low Show Group artists to the cultural life of Newcastle, and in particular to the fine art world of the region, range from their participation in such popular areas as television, carnivals and shows to the more academic area of their acceptance and implementation of modernism. The eclectic nature of their contributions does not diminish their value, and their movement between fine art and craft can be seen as a positive virtue. As Kerr suggests, in many cases “unselfconscious, creative combination of “high” and “low” art is white Australia’s major contribution to the visual arts.”

Chapter Eight examines what contributed to the success of the Low Show Group and applies the theory of Becker’s art world to analyse the factors that explain their success.

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CHAPTER 8

A SUPPORTIVE ART WORLD

In previous chapters the contribution of the Low Show Group of artists to the changing art culture of Newcastle was considered. In this chapter, the factors that lead to their success as professional artists and as agents of change are evaluated. Some of these factors were products of the times in which they worked, while others were aspects of the social networks they formed and which flourished around them. As Becker points out:

All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number, of people. Through their cooperation, the artwork we eventually see or hear comes to be and continues to be.¹

A Supportive Art World

In order for artists to be successful Becker points out that they need to “mobilise resources.”² By this he means that artists need to develop material resources and personal resources. The Low Show Group worked together to develop the material resources they needed to pursue their professional careers, such as galleries and educational institutions. As well they gathered around them personal resources, which consisted of a pool of people available to undertake

² Ibid. Page 68.
special tasks or to be of general assistance. These people ranged from gallery directors and curators to friends and family who supported their ambitions.

The Low Show Group artists began their careers at a point when the economic and sociological progress of the city had encouraged the development of a middle class and the consequent establishment of cultural institutions. Previously, Newcastle had not provided a cultural climate that was supportive of local artists and which could address the multifarious factors that would lead to a supportive structure. These factors include the provision of professional art education; an exciting calendar of exhibitions in public and private galleries, leading to both an interest in art by the public and a willingness to attend exhibitions and buy works. These factors include the appropriate publicity, critical reviews and development of patrons and mentors in the area of fine art. The culture of Newcastle had already begun to change when The Low Show Group of women emerged. They were part of this process of change.

Becker says that his is not a “functionalist theory that suggests that activities must occur in a particular way or the social system will not survive. The social systems that produce art survive in all sorts of ways, although never exactly as they have in the past.” What makes the success of the Low Show Group significant is that, despite the initial absence of the fully supportive art world that Becker put forward as being necessary for an artwork to exist, they were able to recognise and take advantage of the changing cultural environment around them to forge new ways of acting as professional artists.

A supporter of fine art in Newcastle, as previously discussed, Reg Russom, had contacts in Sydney that assisted the initial development of the art school and the fine art community. The

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3 Ibid. Page 77
Low Show Group of artists had experienced a positive educational environment, with teachers who also acted as mentors. The established art school was in the process of upgrading when they became students and had attracted good teachers to the staff. These teachers, Beadle, Passmore and Cowley, had different strengths, which they generously shared with the students. Their positive attitudes created a favourable learning environment, which introduced the Low Show Group students to a broad spectrum of art and instilled in them a passion for learning that continued throughout their careers. It brought them together through their mutual aspiration to succeed as artists and together they formed a supportive collective.

Initially they had sent their work off to other regions of Australia for exhibitions and competitions, but they also needed to establish a reputation in the city in which they lived and worked. However, an element missing in their desire to achieve professional success and support was an audience. Becker explains the necessity of this type of support for an artist to establish a professional reputation in the following way:

Distribution has a crucial effect on reputations. What is not distributed is not known and thus cannot be well thought of or have historical importance.\(^5\)

The Low Show Group artists were making artworks that they felt deserved an audience, other than family and friends. When an artist exhibits and sells their artworks, they are expanding the collective activity to embrace an audience. Becker wrote:

Someone must respond to the work once it is done, have an emotional or intellectual reaction to it, see something in it, and appreciate it.\(^6\)

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\(^5\) Ibid. Page 95.  
\(^6\) Ibid. Page 4.
They did not wait to be invited into exhibitions but initiated the action of exhibiting early in their careers. If they had only sent their works to areas outside the Newcastle region the local population would not have had the opportunity to purchase their art. This connectedness could only happen if there was a commercial gallery in Newcastle. As no galleries existed, these women took the initiative and made the decision to establish their own “channel of distribution” through the Low Show Group exhibitions. Despite not having a permanent professional location, these artists improvised by using the studio basement of one of their member’s home.

In 1960, there was a growing middle-class and educated audience for all forms of the arts with the expansion of the Newcastle University College and Newcastle Technical College and the influx of professionals. The group wisely compiled a list of prospective buyers. The audience for the Low Show Group exhibitions initially was composed of friends and acquaintances. This tight social network included not only a ready made audience, but also included those employed by the local newspapers to review the Low Show Group exhibitions and other exhibitions they were involved with. This network contributed to their initial success. The group were able to expand their audiences and the policy of low prices gave access to working-class buyers. The support they received from a growing and informed audience gave them confidence and enabled those artists to continue producing work.

At the time of their first Low Show Group exhibition in 1961, the coverage of fine art in the local newspapers had increased. The inclusion of an art reviewer to the staff of the Newcastle

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7 Ibid. Page 6.
8 There are indications that this list was used by Anne von Bertouch when the Low Show Group joined her gallery.
9 However, notices in the newspapers indicated that the general public was welcome on the Saturday of the exhibitions.
Morning Herald and The Sun newspapers came about through the increase in the activities of the fine art community in Newcastle and the growing interest of the general public in art. However, although the newspapers gave the writers the title of ‘art critic’, most of the media coverage could only be described as art journalism. While there was an increase in public exposure to the fine arts, there was little art criticism, a not uncommon situation in Australia, particularly in regional areas. However, it was not only through the art features and reviews in the newspapers that the Low Show Group artists gained publicity. A strong network of similarly minded people had formed through their contacts with music, drama and fine art in Newcastle and through the university and technical college. They formed the audiences who attended the Low Show Group exhibitions on the Friday night openings. The Low Show artists’ link with this network enabled them to utilise it to increase their audience and support. Consequently, their financial success and the publicity around their exhibitions placed the group in the public eye. The critical review carries a lot of persuasive power, for it can encourage or discourage potential audiences. Positive reviews, like sales, enhance the artists’ reputation. The media coverage of the Low Show Group’s exhibitions by the reviewers was generous, but not highly critical.

Becker said that the evaluation of the artwork by the art critic is necessary as “only by this kind of critical review of what has been done can participants in the making of artworks decide what to do as they move on to the next work.”10 These positive reviews provided some guidance and incentive for the artists and were certainly supportive of their endeavours. The reviews focussed on the acceptable aspects of their art and in turn encouraged audiences to attend the exhibitions, where some then became collectors.

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The selling of artworks, like positive reviews, enhances the artist’s reputation and confirms professional status. The four Low Show Group exhibitions were all sell-outs and their popular success in this area was acknowledged by the press and this enhanced their future sales. Without support from the public, in buying their works, their reputations would not have grown. The works of the Low Show Group artists were popular with public and private collectors. The number of solo exhibitions in commercial galleries, where the artists were invited back many times, indicates their attraction for the buyers and the galleries. The Low Show Group achieved this success by ‘mobilising personal resources’.

**Patrons, Mentors and Supporters**

The Low Show Group was helped by a loosely connected network of patrons, mentors and supporters. Becker remarks “that in a patronage system some person or organisation supports the artist …The people who can afford to support artists this way come from the wealthy classes of society.”¹¹

Individual wealthy patrons of the arts in the traditional sense would not have been common in what was considered the ‘working-class’ city of Newcastle. If they did exist, it would be likely that they would have chosen to support an artist from the larger metropolis of Sydney or Melbourne. Yet patrons do not have to be wealthy persons, but can also be churches, institutions or passionate individuals.¹² Such patrons began to emerge after the opening of the Newcastle City Art Gallery, and became active when the artists of the Low Show Group began their careers.

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Probably one of the most important patrons was Gil Docking, who supported local artists by including them in exhibitions held in his gallery. He was genuinely interested in the Low Show Group artists and fostered a close professional relationship, which included their selection for the first exhibition to be held in the new Newcastle City Art Gallery. He also purchased their works for the Newcastle City Art Gallery collection. Many of the works by Newcastle women artists (and the Low Show Group artists) were purchased or donated during the directorship of Gil Docking (1958-1965) and his successor David Thomas (1965-1975). Future directors did not give local artists the same support.

It was the arrival of Anne von Bertouch in Newcastle, and her eventual establishment of the first ‘professional’ commercial gallery of its kind outside of a capital city, that subsequently persuaded the Low Show Group that there was no further need for their annual exhibition. Much has been written about von Bertouch’s contribution to the Newcastle art community, and her participation in many other aspects of society in this city.

A commercial gallery does not have a single function as a place of distribution, but is itself a complex framework for a broad support system in the art world. Becker says dealers who specialise in contemporary artworks are entrepreneurial in that they are willing to take risks and “bets on an unknown work”. Anne von Bertouch certainly took a risk when she accepted the Low Show Group to be part of her ‘stable’. Yet it was her support of local artists and in particular women artists, not only those established in their careers, but those still

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14 This list can be found in the archival records of Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
15 This was the issue highlighted in an analysis and assessment report of the Newcastle Region Art Gallery in 1991 by Katrina Rumley for the Newcastle City Council. (Newcastle Region Art Gallery archives.)
emerging, that made her an important patron in Newcastle. She did not bind artists to a sole contract with the gallery and they were free to exhibit where and when they chose. She had already made the acquaintance of the Low Show Group artists when she invited them to participate in the inaugural Collectors Choice exhibition in 1963.\(^\text{19}\) The von Bertouch Galleries regularly showed the works of local artists, but the list of both group and solo exhibitions the Low Show Group participated in throughout their careers was extensive.

Anne von Bertouch’s relationship with the Low Show Group artists went beyond that of a gallery director. After she had sold a work she wrote to the artist to tell them who had purchased it and where it was going. When the Low Show Group artists went away, either in Australia or overseas, they wrote to her and if they were gone for some time she responded.\(^\text{20}\)

However, it must be acknowledged that this was a two-way relationship and that some of the success of the von Bertouch Galleries can also be attributed to the art of these women. A long association continued, both professionally and personally until their deaths.\(^\text{21}\)

Other patrons emerged throughout the careers of the Low Show Group artists. Several institutional patrons, such as The University of Newcastle and the Newcastle Christ Church Cathedral, supported these artists through large commissions, which have been described in Chapter 7. Other groups commissioned works from these artists for clubs, commercial buildings, schools and government buildings. Several of the artists of the Low Show Group undertook commissions on a smaller scale, such as portraits, specific subject matter, book covers and design works.

\(^{19}\) Rae Richards, Interview with the author, 26 April 2007.

\(^{20}\) Anne von Bertouch kept a carbon copy of all the letters she wrote to her artists and filed them in the appropriate artist’s file, along with any correspondence she received from them. These can be found in the Anne von Bertouch archives which have recently been donated to the Local Studies Section of Newcastle Region Library.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.
The growing involvement of the community in the fine arts encouraged other local women, and those from the surrounding areas to become involved in supporting the fine arts. By doing this they became supporters and mentors in the careers of the Low Show Group artists. Although these women did not consciously see themselves as feminists, their passion for art united them in varying degrees through their involvement in the growing art scene in Newcastle and Hunter Valley from the late 1950s. Through their actions, the Low Show Group contributed to the strong network of women supporters and mentors in fine art that developed after 1960 in Newcastle. In turn, their support of the Low Show Group artists assisted the group to succeed in forging successful professional art careers.

By 1979 Dianne Beevers could write:

> It should be said that the region has as a matter of course been accustomed to women committed to the arts, and has apparently accepted the validity of the professional women artist and her art with an equanimity admirable and rather surprising for a city noted mostly for its industrial life.²²

In the light of their previous absence in public life and as professional artists, this was a major change for women.

It is acknowledged that not all patrons, mentors and supporters were female, and that the male supporters were extremely valuable in the development of the Low Show Group artists. However, the number of female supporters was large and warrants recognition. In this examination several local women have been selected for mention, Viola Bromley, Shay Docking, Jill Stowell, Joy Foster, Margaret Sivyer and Gael Davies. Throughout the long careers of the Low Show Group, these women were prominent in their encouragement of the group. However, this is not an exhaustive list and would benefit by further study.

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Mackie and Adams, in their essay about Newcastle women artists wrote:

It is also interesting to note that at this time male artists such as Gleghorn and even Dobell for a time worked away from Newcastle, while the interest in painting and ceramics in the late ‘50’s and early ‘60’s [sic] was being taught, fostered, purchased, made and shown by woman, many of whom were here because their husbands were here to work in this ‘man’s town’.23

These husbands were not working class, manual labourers, but educated professionals. Many had arrived at a time between 1950 and 1960, when Newcastle was rapidly expanding both economically and culturally and had slowly changed from a male oriented, working class, industrial city. Many of the wives were well educated and many had established professional careers before they arrived in Newcastle.

Shay Docking, the wife of Gil Docking, was an established artist in her own right. She and her husband came to Newcastle in 1958 and stayed until 1965. During that time she continued to exhibit nationally and internationally, but also locally with a solo exhibition at von Bertouch Galleries in 1963. She continued to have solo exhibitions at von Bertouch, in 1967, 1971, and 1980.24 The women of the Low Show Group had a close association with her through her involvement in the local fine art scene.

Viola Bromley, a Sydney artist who accompanied her husband to Muswellbrook near Newcastle in 1957, when he took up the position of a mine manager,25 first met the Low Show Group women, through exhibiting with them in several group shows in Newcastle. Bromley was central to the establishment of the Muswellbrook Open Art Prize, which

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25 Muswellbrook Shire Council, The History of Muswellbrook (Muswellbrook: Muswellbrook Shire Council, 1985). Page 39. This competition was an acquisitive prize, and so from the inaugural exhibition in 1958, it facilitated the establishment of an excellent collection of contemporary Australian art for the gallery.
commenced in 1958 and still exists today. Bromley and Norma Allen participated in this first exhibition. In the following ten years, the Low Show Group artists continued to submit works in this competition, competing with some of Australia’s top artists. In Muswellbrook, as in many other regional areas, it was women who were the driving force in the establishment of a serious art community. Bromley continued to support the Low Show Group through her association with Muswellbrook Art Gallery and also as a colleague, participating in exhibitions with the group. The Low Show Group artists continued to exhibit with the Muswellbrook Gallery over a period of time.

Another ‘wife’ and professional in her own right, Jill Stowell arrived in Newcastle in late 1959, when her husband John was appointed to the teaching staff of the University College. This was Stowell’s first contact with the Low Show Group women. She joined the staff of the *Newcastle Morning Herald* in 1985 as art reviewer. She admired the Low Show artists’ ability and her reviews of the Low Show Group artists’ exhibitions, over the years, give clear insight to the professional support she gave these women.

The establishment of the Newcastle City Art Gallery had fulfilled one need in the fine arts community, but there were no commercial galleries in Newcastle. Joy Foster, a journalist, who after a period overseas returned to Newcastle, said:

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\[26\] Ruth Urig, "Masters in Muswellbrook," *Artemis, Newcastle Regional Gallery Journal*, no. October (1971). Page 12. In view of the work so far acquired, it is evident that this is a wonderful way for the Council to build up an excellent collection for a reasonable outlay. Looking back over published prices of paintings sold during the past few years, one can note that most of the painters represented are now regularly demanding higher sums for their work than the present value of the prize. Some of the names to conjure with are: Fred Williams, Michael Kitching, Thomas Gleghorn, Michael Shannas, David Aspen, and Margo Lewers. Others who have figured prominently in the world of competitions in the past two years are: Judy Cassah, William Peascod, Strom Gould, Cameron Sparkes and Lillian Sutherland. The eminence attained by many of these painters over recent years must have enhanced the value of the works owned by the Muswellbrook Council by an appreciable amount. The Muswellbrook Acquisitive Prize commenced in 1958 by means of an annual competition sponsored by the Municipal Council in association with NBN (Channel 3, Newcastle) and Esso Standard Oil (Australia Ltd)”. (Ibid). Page 12.

\[27\] Jill Stowell, 2008. Biographical information written by Jill Stowell, *personal email to the author*, 2008. Page 1. Further biographical information may be found in Appendix B.
My visits to the Newcastle Art Gallery were my regular and most satisfying pastime after my return in 1954 to Newcastle which I found to be a desolate and boring place.\(^{28}\)

Foster also saw the need for expansion in the fine arts community in Newcastle and, like the Low Show Group women, became active in this area. She became the art reviewer for the Newcastle Sun in 1962. She reviewed the artworks of the Low Show Group over a long period of time. Foster covered the story of the opening of von Bertouch Galleries in 1963, with her article titled *Artists Open Gallery*. However, Foster’s association with the Low Show Group changed and her role as mentor increased. In 1966, Foster commenced working with Anne von Bertouch in her galleries.\(^{29}\) She worked alone in the gallery for the first twelve months as von Bertouch was working in Sydney. Foster wrote that:

> By the time I began to work at von Bertouch the Low Show Group artists were regarded as doyens of art in Newcastle and were certainly accorded the respect this title owed them. Mary Beeston was possibly regarded as the leading artist among them although later Lillian Sutherland went on to a wider acceptance by exhibiting in Sydney where it was all “at” in those days.\(^{30}\)

Foster continued to work at von Bertouch Galleries until the end of 1976, when she left to establish her own gallery, the Armstrong Galleries at Morpeth, near Maitland (1977). This was housed in a historic stone building in the main street of the town.\(^{31}\) The members of the Low Show Group were invited to exhibit in this gallery and continued their successful professional association with Foster.\(^{32}\) Joy Foster had a long association with the Low Show

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\(^{29}\) Ibid. Page 1. At this time von Bertouch was in Sydney running the Hungry Horse Gallery with Kim Bonython and wanted someone to run her gallery. Foster was excited about the job and cancelled her plans to leave Australia, to take up the position.

\(^{30}\) Ibid. Page 1.

\(^{31}\) Further biographical information on Joy Foster can be found in Appendix B.

\(^{32}\) Rae Richards, Interview, 26 April 2007.
Group artists, through her different roles as art reviewer, assistant director of von Bertouch Galleries, and finally through her own gallery.\footnote{Foster. Biographical information, \textit{Letter to the author}. Page 1.}

As the director of Maitland City Art Gallery, Margaret Sivyer was also a staunch supporter of the art community in Newcastle and the Hunter, and indeed the Low Show Group of artists. Sivyer’s entry into the Hunter’s art scene was later than the women discussed previously, yet her support was significant to the careers of the Low Show Group artists. She commenced her association with Maitland City Art Gallery in 1972.\footnote{Maitland Mercury, ”Time to End 30 - Year Era for Margaret," http://maitland.yourguide.com.au (accessed 23 January, 2008). Page 1.} Sivyer had a continual battle with the local council over financial assistance and recurring issues of censorship. Like Viola Bromley, she worked hard to establish the gallery, to institute credible judges and valuable art prizes and to support the artists of the area, particularly women artists.\footnote{Ibid.} The Low Show Group was included in many group shows, solo shows and retrospectives in this gallery.

\textit{The Maitland Art Prize} was established in 1957. Like the \textit{Muswellbrook Open Art Prize}, it is one of the oldest art prizes in the country, and artists who have submitted works over its fifty-one year history included Sidney Nolan and William Dobell.\footnote{———, ”Art Prize Belongs to the People,” www.maitlandyourguide.com.au (accessed 21 April 2008).} Sivyer took over the running of the art prize and was a tireless worker, aware of the need to keep the exhibition to a high standard.\footnote{Ibid. Unfortunately, in 2008, the Maitland Council, without consultation from the public, radically changed the Maitland Art Prize. The prize money was reduced from $10,000 to $1,500 and more significantly, it no longer encompassed all forms of art but was reduced to a sculpture prize.} Her career with the Maitland Gallery spanned thirty years.

Although Gael Davies was not present at the commencement of the careers of the Low Show Group, like Sivyer, she provided a firm platform on which to build their ongoing careers.
Davies joined the von Bertouch Galleries in 1974, and continuing there until the death of Anne von Bertouch and the closure of the gallery in 2003. During that time, she came to know the women of the group well and curated many of their solo exhibitions. She also curated the Rae Richards retrospective exhibition at Lake Macquarie Regional Gallery in 2008.

There were also a number of women artists who were exhibiting at the same time and were associates of the Low Show Group women. They include Cecily Mitchell, Judy Hepper, Virginia Geyhl and Rhona Scott.

**Family support**

Even with the professional and public support given to the Low Show Group artists, their task would have been more difficult without the support of their families. As Virginia Woolf pointed out in her essay, *A Room of One’s Own* a woman needs money and a room of her own to have the personal liberty to create. In the post World War II period in Australia the expectation was that the wives of professional men would stay home and be satisfied by being wives and mothers.

Like many of their supporters, several artists of the Low Show group had come to Newcastle when their husbands had relocated as white-collar professionals. Financially they were wealthier than many working class women, and for several, their husbands were the wage earners. However, here were periods where Elizabeth Martin was the sole breadwinner and had to rely on sales of her work for the family income. Scott Jones, who was widowed with

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38 Biography in Appendix B
three children, supported her family through her art making and teaching, as did Webb, who never married. For these women art making and teaching became a way to gain independence and financial support.

As the Low Show Group artists gradually embarked on professional careers in art, their children were older and not in need of the same level of care required by young children. These women were able to attend art school and through the support of their family, to develop home studios and even hold exhibitions in their home.

Several of the families of these artists moved house to accommodate the careers of their wives and mothers. The Richards moved house twice, the first time to gain a larger studio with privacy and an ocean view and then again to alleviate the isolation caused by the distance of this home at Dudley, from friends and the art scene in Newcastle. The Cutchers moved to an acreage at Lake Macquarie where Betty Cutcher could have her own studio and an aesthetic environment in which to work. The Beestons made a similar move as both Larry and Mary needed a larger studio. The Allen family moved from suburban New Lambton to a home on the hill in Newcastle overlooking the sea. Scott Jones moved from a small terrace on the hill in Newcastle to a property at Speers Point that could accommodate a pottery studio.

Possibly the most telling example of support, both emotionally and professionally, was provided by Larry Beeston. Anne von Bertouch described how “Mary and Larry combined their talents of painting and weaving respectively to become a formidable team.”\textsuperscript{40} Mary described her husband as my best critic.\textsuperscript{41} They became art partners and from 1973 through working as a team derived their income from their collective art works.

\textsuperscript{40} Anne von Bertouch, “Beyond Two Lives: Larry and Mary Beeston”, \textit{Exhibition Catalogue} (2003)  
As Becker pointed out, without personal resources of this kind the artist is limited in what they can achieve. The willingness of these women’s families to assist them to develop their own studios, to earn their financial independence and to aspire to professional status as artists allowed them to find that “room of their own.”

Mutual Support

While these women were supported by their families, colleagues and friends, probably their most important support came from each other. Throughout their long careers they continued to work together and to back each other in their professional lives. This is in stark contrast to the experience of many other artists, both male and female, where the continuing generosity and loyalty of colleagues is rare. Peter Richards, when opening the *Norma Allen Retrospective* in 1995 said:

Norma Allen was one of a group of six female artists who worked together in Newcastle through the 60’s and 70’s [sic]. An extraordinary group of professionals, each working in her own way or medium but at the same time being very supportive of each other.42

Later in their careers they were to look back on the formation of the group and assess how valuable it had been in establishing their careers. In 1989, Beeston discussed the early influence of the group on her art making practice in an interview with Sonya Celtlan.43 Celtlan said:

Being part of a group was very important to Mary. She particularly wished me to acknowledge in this lecture that she feels she owes a

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43 Sonia Celtlan is a Newcastle art critic/historian. She has lectured at the Newcastle National Art School and was Education Officer for Newcastle Region Gallery.
great deal to Norma Allen, Lillian Sutherland, Charles Pettinger, Betty Cutcher (now Betty Beadle) her fellow students and to Rae Richards (although at a later time).\textsuperscript{44}

Jill Stowell wrote about the importance of Richards’ experiences, as part of the Low Show Group, in her introduction essay for Richards ‘Survey in Retrospect’ 1996.

By one of fate’s fortunate coincidences, her fellow students included a talented and determined group of women; Norma Allen, Mary Beeston and Lillian Sutherland. With the advent of Rae, they were it appears the first Newcastle-based painters to gain acceptance beyond this area.\textsuperscript{45}

But could they have done more than just being successful provincial artists?

\textbf{Regional and Social Limitations}

While aspects of their social and cultural environment had helped their careers, the Low Show Group artists experienced two factors that limited the effectiveness of their art practice. The first was the fact that they were provincial artists and the second was the expectations placed on women at this time.

When the Low Show Group artists built professional careers in the fine arts, they were recognised as Newcastle artists although several had exhibited their work overseas and in major centres such as Sydney and Melbourne. They were publicly recognised and successful only at the local level. Joy Foster points out:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Sonya Celtlan, "Mary Beeston Painter and Designer," (Newcastle: Newcastle Region Art Gallery, 1989). Page 5.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Jill Stowell, "Rae Richards as Painter," \textit{Artemis, Newcastle Regional Gallery Journal}, no. October - December 1996 (1996): As this was a painting exhibition Stowell only discussed the painters of the Low Show Group in this reference. Page 2.
\end{itemize}
“The stigma of belonging to a provincial city was a decided handicap to all those artists (the Low Show Group) and it is a pity that they never reached the standing attained by perhaps lesser artists in the capital.”

Art that is identified as coming from outside the big cities often has a reputation of being less important and certainly less sophisticated. Here Becker’s comments on distribution are pertinent. He explains that:

The process is circular: what does not have a good reputation will not be distributed. This means that our later consideration of what constitutes great or important art will have to keep in mind the way distribution systems, with their built-in professional biases, affect opinion about what belongs in those categories.

Unlike many of their male counterparts these artists chose, in the main, to remain in Newcastle. Perhaps more could have been done to support them in developing their wider reputations. Foster certainly felt that Anne von Bertouch perhaps could have done more, when these artists became part of her stable. She points out:

Anne never acknowledged the existence of provincialism when it came to classifying artists. This was all very well but it did not help further the careers of the artists excluded from entering the mainstream. In her defence it has to be granted that she had her work cut out keeping her gallery solvent in a limited market.

It also may have been that their tight social network contributed to their failure to reach out and make contact with audiences outside of Newcastle. They gained this local support initially when they staged their own exhibitions and, when they exhibited with the von

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46 Foster. Page 2.
48 Foster. Page 2.
Bertouch Galleries, they took their audience with them. This audience was not the general public but an elite group that resulted from the ‘blow-ins’ connected with the Newcastle University College, the Newcastle National Art School and the Newcastle City Art Gallery.

Anne von Bertouch was assured of a financially supportive, local, upper middle class audience, when these women were included in exhibitions. While Anne von Bertouch was supportive in providing an exhibition venue, The Low Show Group artists certainly contributed to her success as a gallery director in the Newcastle area.

Foster also questioned the failure of these artists when it came to promoting themselves in Sydney. She argues:

> It may have been chiefly that they were all married women, comfortably off, and unwilling to push their own barrows, rather than the rejection of their talents in the big city.49

While women of this period might have considered pursuing their careers as individuals, the reality was that society expected them to be primarily wives and mothers, caring for their husbands and children. Usually wives accompanied husbands in moving to better their careers, and this is how several of the Low Show Group came to Newcastle, rather than husbands following wives. There was a strong gender expectations for all women, even for artists, and this often lead to conflicting aspirations.

In an interview conducted by Mackie and Adams in 1979, Richards confirmed this reality. She said:

> Women artists are disadvantaged in that there is a conflict of interests. There are times when you can’t just leave everything. Women just don’t have that final selfishness that men can.50

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49 Ibid. Page 2.
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She also raised the point that “certain roles were expected of women and that at many times they were committed to the necessities of others, but on the other hand many male artists support their families doing awful jobs.”\textsuperscript{51} Mackie and Adams, in addressing the issues of parochialism and gender bias, pointed out “perhaps the most insidious form of discrimination is that we impose unwittingly upon ourselves (the woman artist).”\textsuperscript{52}

After interviewing Newcastle women artists in 1979 Mackie and Adams addressed the issue of woman artists “not pushing their barrows.”\textsuperscript{53} They wrote that:

We found that many of the artists were not aggressively assertive, that they were reluctant to ‘push’ their work, were not competitive and did not wish ‘to be seen as pushy’. Despite the fact that many of these artists have work of excellent quality we are of the opinion that there are several reasons for this lack of self confidence. Possibly the most overriding being the fear of not being understood and the fear of rejection.\textsuperscript{54}

Perhaps this is due to stereotypes around women’s work. They point out:

Perhaps women have imbibed the negative idea about whatever is women’s work is undervalued. Maybe it takes longer to learn to value your own work if you’re a woman.\textsuperscript{55}

The Low Show Group women held strong views on the situation of women artists. Despite the powerful support they received from other women and from each other, they did not consider themselves to be feminist artists. Richards certainly claimed that the members of the Low Show Group were not feminists.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{50} Mackie and Adams, "Issues." Page 13.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. Page 15.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. Page 15.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Rae Richards. \textit{Interview with the author}, 2007.
Beevers points out that there is a distinction between a feminist woman artist and the art of a woman. Many women artists are separate from “any sexist orientation” and wish to be recognized on the “basis of worth as an artist, not as a woman artist”. Richards has indeed confirmed that this was the philosophy of the Low Show Group artists.

Mackie and Wilson interviewed Newcastle women artists for their essay, Issues arising out of having recently surveyed some women artists working in the Newcastle area, and asked them “if discrimination had been felt while putting their work in the public arena? They all felt “that there were no problems at a local level and saw this as a result of a unique situation where support had come from women gallery owners”. The situation for Newcastle women artists had improved, although there were still some vestiges of sexism.62

A Supportive Art Community —Newcastle 2009

In 2009, the city of Newcastle now has a strong cultural community that supports many local artists. As Becker pointed out, this has required the cooperation and joint activity of a large number of people.

Marcus Westbury stated: “Since the closure of the BHP in 1999, post-industrial Newcastle has flourished particularly in the infrastructure to accommodate a stronger variety of cultural activities.” This can be seen in the restoration of historic buildings on the newly revitalized foreshore that frames the now attractive harbour. The functions of these buildings have also

58 Ibid.
59 Richards.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid. Page 14. That is not to say that Newcastle women artist were exempt from sexual discrimination. Birgette Hansen-Chawner, who was a significant artist in the 1970s in Newcastle, was told by a Sydney gallery director that she “should stay at home and have babies”. (Ibid)
changed; from abandoned wharf warehouses and railway workshops, to centres of cultural activity. These early industrial buildings enhance the landscape and in the near future, will house museums, theatres and exhibition spaces and are supported by an enthusiastic public.

A scheme, *Renew Newcastle*, is an initiative supported by Local, State and Federal Governments, the University of Newcastle and the local business community. It is designed to continue the expansion of the cultural community, through the use of vacant buildings in creative ways. Today, Newcastle, with its close proximity to Sydney, less expensive rents and housing and the growing support of the community, attract artists, writers and musicians to live and work here.

The hard work of individuals and groups in the community, dedicated to building a richer environment in a city that people bypassed on their way to somewhere else, have now made it a favourable place for cultural activities.

It took great energy and involvement to create this supportive and informed art community. This research has shown the bleak beginnings of Newcastle, the harsh environment for women and the poor support for the visual arts. It acknowledges the changes that evolved in the 1950s, with the growth of the art school and university. It has focussed on the period from 1960, when the Low Show Group and their supporters changed this landscape, to build a supportive art world, which can be seen as underlying many of Newcastle’s cultural institutions and current fine art community.
GENERAL CONCLUSION

Joan Kerr had the idea of seeing Australia’s visual past as “a vast range of images, which rearranged and reordered, can tell us new stories about ourselves”.¹ In researching the Low Show Group and their supporters, there are several stories that have relevance to current art practice. Their stories are about art making, innovation, flexibility, collaboration and love of art.

The Low Show Group artists were above all compulsive producers of art, in many cases they worked up until they died. Not all of their work will be considered of ‘lasting significance’. However, some of their works were exhibited with artists such as Arthur Boyd, Sali Herman, Robert Dickerson, John Perceval, Charles Blackman, James Gleeson, Thomas Gleghorn, Brett Whiteley and Lloyd Rees. They had solo exhibitions in galleries such as the Macquarie and Wagner Galleries in Sydney; North Adelaide and Bonython Gallery in Adelaide; Leveson Street Gallery in Melbourne; overseas in galleries in Edingurgh; Amsterdam; Japan and China; and were collected by galleries such as Australian National Gallery; Powerhouse Museum and the Victorian State Collection. Major institutions, such as AMP Society, banks, councils, universities and churches commissioned them, and this work is installed in major public venues.

While the Low Show Group artists were not artistic innovators in the modernist sense, they were good cultural innovators at a time when Newcastle was lacking a supportive art world. They assessed what was needed and were able to establish art careers by providing their own support system, while also contributing to that of other artists. They lobbied for the establishment of a city art gallery, influenced other potential commercial gallery owners to

open galleries in Newcastle and became teachers to develop their discipline areas. They built a network of fellow artists, mentors and supporters and, in turn, became mentors to their own students and thus continued the cycle of support.

The Low Show Group artists were flexible in their approach to their art practice, for although trained initially in painting and drawing, they were able to master other art and craft disciplines. They also experimented with materials and processes, working in different styles and exploring new concepts. They were adventurous in their embrace of modernism at a time when it was still controversial, so they were instrumental in providing their audience with new and fresh experiences. In this way they were also able to give their students an insight into contemporary practice.

Until the formation of the Low Show Group, the only art group in Newcastle had been the Society of Artists, which operated in a formal and hierarchical manner. In contrast to this form of culture, the many kinds of collaboration by and around, the Low Show Group provided a model for the development of groups where the members are all equal, working together to achieve common goals.

Consequently these artists contributed to a supportive fine art community during the period 1960 to 1970 that was virtually built by women in contrast to the previous masculine dominance in fine art.

As Becker points out the nature of art worlds change, some are born and some die.\(^2\) The contribution of the collective activity of the Low Show Group certainly initiated lively change in the art world of their time. Becker claims that, “new worlds develop around

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innovations — technical, conceptual or organisational changes.” ³ While the artwork of the Low Show Group was unique and inventive, it is their reliance on collaboration that was truly innovative and may provide a model for those artists who need to build a new form of art world.

³ Ibid
APPENDIX A

THE LOW SHOW ARTISTS’ CURRICULA VITAE

NORMA ALLEN (nee Newey)

BORN
Newcastle 1919.

PARENTS’ OCCUPATIONS
Father was a partner in the printing firm Newey and Beath.

EARLY SCHOOLING
Intermediate Level, Newcastle Girls High School.

EMPLOYMENT
After leaving school she became a tracer for the Newcastle District Water Board.

ART TRAINING

MARRIED
1941.

CHILDREN
Stephen, 1945.
Mark, 1948.

ART TEACHING
Newcastle National Art School (part-time).
Rankin Park Hospital.
WEA Newcastle.
Society of Artists.
Community Programmes.
University of Newcastle.

REPRESENTED
Newcastle Region Gallery.
University of Newcastle.
Stanthorpe Gallery, Queensland.
Booragul High School, Newcastle.
Maitland High School, Hunter Valley.
Private collections in Australia and overseas.
COMMISSIONS
Memorial portrait of Headmaster, Mr. R F Hodge, Maitland Boys High School. 
Portraits of: Mr. C O’Neill, Mrs. James Essington Lewis, Mrs. Francis Clack, Mrs. Gem
Flood and Mrs. Paul Cant.

AWARDS
1959 Arts Council of Australia (Cessnock Branch) First prize, open section.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS
1997  *Painting and Maiolica*, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1995  *Survey Exhibition*, Maitland City Art Gallery, Maitland.
1982  *Paintings and Maiolica*, Armstrong Gallery, Morpeth.
1977  *Paintings and Drawings*, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1965  *Paintings and Drawings*, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS
1982  *Mattara Spring Festival Invitation Art Award*, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1978  *Arts Festival*, Stanthorpe Gallery, Queensland.
1974  *Group Exhibition*, Jura Gallery, Coffs Harbour.
1972  University of Newcastle.
1972  *Hunter Valley Artists*, Newcastle City Art Gallery.
1967  Portia Geach Memorial Award.
1965  *Sulman Exhibition* Art Gallery of NSW.
1965  *Third Hunter Valley Review*, Newcastle City Art Gallery, Newcastle.
1961  *L J Harvey Memorial Prize*, Queensland Art Gallery.
1960  *Regional Survey Exhibition*, Newcastle City Art Gallery, Newcastle.

CITATIONS
*Artists and Galleries of Australia and New Zealand*, Max Germaine, Craftsman House,
MARY BEESTON

BORN
South Yarra, Melbourne, 1917.

PARENTS’ OCCUPATION
1919 Manager - Australian Wire at BHP Newcastle.

EARLY SCHOOLING
Home schooling with nanny until 9 years old.
Newcastle Church of England Grammar School until Intermediate level.
Abbotsleigh, Sydney as a boarder until matriculation.

EDUCATION
Australian College of Physical Education.

EMPLOYMENT
Physical Education, Dunedin, New Zealand.
1939 Physical Education, Church of England Grammar School.
Keep-fit classes at the YWCA.
1940 Australian College of Physical Culture, Sydney, as Chief of Staff.
1942 Supervisor of female labour at Ryland Brothers Wire Mill.

MARRIED
Larry Beeston, 1939.

CHILDREN
Richard, 1944.
Jim, 1946.
Dinah, 1949.

ART TRAINING

TRAVEL
1973 Study tour, Scandinavia, UK and Mexico. Researched community education in weaving, spinning, and craft marketing. Report of research was submitted to the Crafts Council of New South Wales.
1978-9 Research and study tour Thailand, Nepal, India, Kasmir, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Greece; research into Islamic colour and design, particularly textiles.
1990 Research in Japan, individual papermakers, methods, equipment, supplies, Yuzen dyeing.
ART TEACHING
1970 - Lecturing and Tutoring in painting, pure design and pure colour, and in colour and design applied to Spinning, Dyeing, Tapestry, Embroidery, Quilt-making, Creative Knitting, in NSW, ACT, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania, and New Zealand.
Arts Council of NSW appointments – Craftsman in Residence with Larry Beeston, 6 months in Balranald, assisted by the Crafts Board of Australia Council.
1987 Community Workshop on Design at Hay, resulting in the completion of a quilt designed by students under supervision.
1989 Tutoring tour in applied colour and design from the Southwest Project NSW.
1988-89 The Embroiderers’ Guild of NSW, Newcastle, tutoring in colour and design.

CONFERENCES
1982 First Australian Fibre Conference, Melbourne.
1982 New Zealand Woolcraft Festival.
1983 New Zealand Woolcraft Festival, and lectured.
1987 Papermakers, Hobart.
1988 Tapestry Symposium.
1993 Seminars and two symposiums at Goulburn Gallery.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS: PAINTING.
1982 Armstrong Gallery Morpeth.
1971 Bonython Galleries Adelaide.
1972, 66, 64, Leveson Street Gallery, Melbourne.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS: TAPESTRY DESIGN (woven by Larry Beeston)
1989,83, 80, 74, 69, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1987 81 Beaver Galleries Canberra.
1987 Ube City, Japan.
1985, Lake Macquarie Gallery Retrospective, NSW.
1983 Weswall Gallery, Tamworth.
    Old Bakery Gallery, Sydney.
1979 Solstice Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland.
Galleries Maverick, Amsterdam, Holland.
1975 Thrumster Gallery, Port Macquarie, NSW.
1973 Pokolbin Gallery, NSW.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS: Papermaking
1982 Morpeth Gallery.

RETROSPECTIVE EXHIBITION
2003 *Beyond Two Lives* Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery.

GROUP AND PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS, PAINTING
   *Maitland Art Prize Exhibition*, Maitland, NSW.
   *Prime Painting Prize Exhibition*, Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
1994 *Newcastle AH&I Show*.
   *Maitland Art Prize Exhibition*, Maitland, NSW.
   *Newcastle Bight Environmental Art Award Exhibition.*
   *Newcastle Prime Painting Prize Exhibition.*
   *Postcodes Travelling Exhibition*, Arts Council of NSW.
   *The Third Act*, Fibre Artists of the Hunter, Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
   *Outback Prize Exhibition*, Broken Hill City Art Gallery.
1993 *The Low Show Retrospective*, Maitland City Art Gallery.
   *Maitland Art Prize Exhibition*, Maitland, NSW.
   *Wyong Shire Festival of Arts*, NSW.
   *Scone Art Prize Exhibition*, NSW.
1989 *Christmas Exhibition*, Weswal Gallery, Tamworth, NSW.
   *Arts for the Forest Exhibition*, Pavillion Gallery, Bondi, Sydney.
   *Fibre Artists of the Hunter*, Maitland City Art Gallery, NSW.
1986 *Maitland Art Prize Exhibition*, NSW.
   *Artist in Residence and Student Exhibition*, Balranald, Victoria.
1985 *Port Stephens Art Show Acquisitive Prize Exhibition*, NSW.
   *Newcastle Permanent Building Society Exhibition*.
   *Muswellbrook Regional Gallery Exhibition*, NSW.
   *Maitland Art Prize Exhibition*, NSW.
1975 *Nude Exhibition*, Leveson Street Gallery, Melbourne.
   *International Women's Year*, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1972 *Newcastle AH&I Show Exhibition*.
   *Hunter Valley Artists*, Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
   *House Show*, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1971 Newcastle AH&I Show Exhibition.
Hobart Museum & Art Gallery Invitation Exhibition.
1970 Hobart Museum & Gallery Invitation Exhibition.
1969 H.C. Richards Prize, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane.
Gold Coast City Art Prize Exhibition.
Newcastle AH&I Show Exhibition.
Newcastle May Day Exhibition, Newcastle Trades Hall.
1967 H.D. Richards Prize, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane.
Third Hunter Valley Review, Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
Newcastle Prize Exhibition, Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
Newcastle May Day Exhibition, Newcastle Trades Hall.
1966 H.D. Richards Prize, Queensland Art Gallery.
Helena Rubenstein Portrait Competition, Newcastle and Perth.
1965 Sulman Exhibition, Art Gallery of NSW.
Newcastle AH&I Show Exhibition.
1963 Sulman Exhibition, Art Gallery of NSW.
Transfield Exhibition, Sydney.
Royal Easter Show, Sydney.
Hunter Valley Review, Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
WD & HO Wills Exhibition, Sydney.
Wynne & Sulman Exhibition, Art Gallery of NSW.
Transfield Exhibition, Sydney.
H.C. Richards Prize, Queensland Art Gallery.
1960 Regional Survey, Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
1957 Maitland Art Prize Exhibition.
Newcastle Art Prize Exhibition.

GROUP AND PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS: Tapestry Design (woven by Larry Beeston)
1984 Second Skin, Beaver Galleries, Canberra.
Interchange Invitation Exhibition, Crafts Council of ACT.
Beaver New Gallery Invitation Exhibition, Beaver Galleries, Canberra.
Albury Regional Art Centre and Travelling Exhibition.
Ardendale Fibre Exhibition, Armidale.
Weswal Gallery, Tamworth. NSW.
Craft Council of the Northern Territory, Alice Springs.
Textiles Artist Group, Blaxland Gallery, Sydney.
Joy Exhibition, St Johns Cathedral, Brisbane.
Royal Show Adelaide.
The Australian Forum for Textile Arts Tutors Exhibition, Ararat Gallery.
Tamworth Fibre Exhibition, Tamworth.
Mattara Festival, Newcastle.
1981 Blake Prize and Blake Travelling Exhibition, Art Gallery of NSW.
Craft Expo Sydney.
*Miniature Textiles Exhibition*, Ararat Regional Gallery.
*First Australian Fibre Conference Tutors Exhibition*, Meat Market, Melbourne.

1980-81 *Newcastle Clay and Fibre Travelling Exhibition*, Newcastle Art Gallery.
1980 *Craft Council of NSW Travelling Exhibition*.
   *Centenary Exhibition of Australian Craft*, Meat Market, Melbourne.
   *Second Skin*, Beaver Galleries, Canberra.
   *Textiles Eight Views*, University of NSW Union.
   *Blake Prize for Religious Art*, Art Gallery of NSW.
   *Tamworth Fibre Exhibition*, Tamworth Gallery.

   *Arts Victoria, 78 Crafts Purchase Exhibition*, Melbourne.
   *Crafts Council of NSW Travelling Exhibition*.
1976 *Second Skin*, Beaver Galleries, Victoria.
   Handweavers and Spinners Guild of NSW, Opera House, Sydney.
   *Craft Council of NSW Biennial Exhibition*, Sydney.

GROUP AND PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS: Papermaking
1992 *Creation Exhibition*, Yamakawa, Tokushima, Japan.
   *Directions Exhibition*, Goulburn Regional Gallery.
   *The Artists Book Show*, Wollongong University, toured NSW and Queensland galleries and libraries.
   *Mini Exhibition*, Kami Yamagata Town, Ibaraki, Japan.
   *Fibre Artists of the Hunter*, Newcastle Region Art Gallery.

AWARDS: Textiles
1980 Grant, Crafts Board of Australia.

AWARDS: Painting
1994 *Newcastle Show Prize* for regional theme.
1992 Honorary Master of Arts (Art, Design and Communication)
   University of Newcastle for service to the community.
1985 *Port Stephens Art Exhibition*, acquisitive prize.
1980 *Muswellbrook H C*.
1972 *Newcastle Show Prize*.
1969 *Newcastle May Day Art Prize*.
1967 *Newcastle May Day Art Prize*.
Blue Mountains Acquisitive Prize.
1966 Helena Rubenstein Regional Prize for Portraiture.
1965 Newcastle Show Prize.
1964 Albury Prize (City’s Choice).
1963 Fairfax Prize for Human Image.

REPRESENTED: Paintings
Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
Regional Galleries in Albury, Broken Hill, Goulburn, Katoomba, Maitland, Lake Macquarie and Wyong.
Artbank of Australia.
Newcastle University.
Christ Church Cathedral.
Cessnock Council Collections.
La Trobe University College of Northern Victoria.
Greater Newcastle Permanent Building Society.
Private Collections in Australia and overseas.

REPRESENTED: Textiles
The Art Bank of Australia.
Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.
Victorian State Collection.
Ararat Regional Gallery.
The University of Newcastle (The Hunter Tapestry, Academic Procession, Autumn).
Christ Church Cathedral (Lenten Alter Frontal, The Ten Virgins).
Newcastle Courthouse.
St Pauls Chapel, Sydney University.
Holy Trinity Church, Concord West.
St Joseph Church Toronto, NSW.
Cessnock City Library.
The Australian Federal Police Complex, ACT.
Madison Motor Inn, Newcastle.
Ube City Collection, Japan.
Private Collections in Australia and overseas.

REPRESENTED: Papermaking
Goulburn Regional Art Gallery Collection.
Maitland Regional Art Gallery.
Private Collections Japan, America, Australia.

BIOGRAPHIES
Artists and Galleries of Australia and New Zealand, 1984, 86, 90, Max Germaine.

WORKS CITED IN
Selected Australian Crafts, a Directory. Published by Craft Council of Australia.
1984, 86 Craft Australia Year Book.
1984 Special Supplement, Craft Australia.
1982, 83, Craft Australia.

AUTHOR (WORKS PUBLISHED)
1986 Commissioned by William Collins to write Spinning and Weaving for their Support Yourself Series of paperbacks.
1983 Articles and reviews in Textile Fibre Forum.
1982 Review SA Craft (Spring).
1981 Reviews and articles, Craft NSW.
1981 The First Fibre Conference Report.
1979 Fibre and Textile critic for Newcastle Herald.
Study brief for James Stokes’ book, Surviving as an Artist.
1977, 78 Reviews and articles in Craft Clarion, Craft Council of NSW.
1977, 78 Australian Handweavers and Spinner Guild of NSW.
1971 Articles in Artemis Newcastle Region Gallery Publication.

DIED Newcastle 2002

BETTY CUTCHER (nee LANGWILL)

BORN
1924 Lake Macquarie, south of Newcastle.

PARENTS’ OCCUPATIONS
Her maternal grandfather was F.G.Castleden the well known Newcastle architect, responsible for many significant buildings in the city including the Warriors Chapel in Christ Church Cathedral.
Her father was a business man in Newcastle.

EARLY SCHOOLING
Newcastle Church of England Girls Grammar School, gaining her New South Wales Leaving Certificate in 1940.

EMPLOYMENT
Enlisted in the WAAF (in Deniliquin working on the Wirraway aircrafts). At the end of the war she returned to Newcastle and worked for a short time at Stewarts and Lloyds.

ART TRAINING

MARRIED
Colin Cutcher, 1946.

CHILDREN
Ian, 1948.
Jillian, 1950.

MOVED FROM NEWCASTLE
1965, for New Zealand.

EXHIBITIONS (Newcastle)
Numerous group exhibitions up until 1965 when she left Newcastle.
1960 Newcastle City Art Gallery.
1959 *Newcastle City Art Festival*, Newcastle City Art Gallery.

KNOWN DOCUMENTED EXHIBITIONS (New Zealand)
Society of Sculptors and Associates, New Zealand.
1989 Group exhibition FIDEM (international order of artists) Helsinki (bronze medallions).

MEMBERSHIPS

DIED
New Zealand 2002.

This CV remains incomplete. There is very little information on Betty Cutcher’s career in New Zealand despite contacting her children.
ELIZABETH MARTIN (nee Holman)

BORN

ART EDUCATION
Exeter, Devon classes in antique drawing, life drawing and anatomy.
Regent Street, Chelsea Polytechnic.
Newcastle National Art School.

ART EMPLOYMENT
Designed paper-book jackets (free lance).
Designed advertising posters (free lance).
Permanent position as a designer in the studio of Technical & Trade Advertisers.
Newcastle National Art School.

MARRIED

CHILDREN
Charles, 1948.

ARRIVED IN NEWCASTLE
From England 1939

SOLO EXHIBITIONS
1986 von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1983 Morpeth Galleries, Morpeth, NSW.
1982 Morpeth Galleries, Morpeth, NSW.
1982 von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1979 Morpeth Galleries, Morpeth, NSW.
1978 von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1975 von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1954 Frederic Ash Building Newcastle NSW.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS
1975 International Women’s Year Newcastle Artists, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1967 Hunter Valley Review, Newcastle City Art Gallery.
1965 Hunter Valley Review, Newcastle City Art Gallery.
1963 Hunter Valley Review, Newcastle City Art Gallery.
1960 Regional Survey 2, Newcastle City Art Gallery.

AWARDS
The first Newton John Award presented at the University of Newcastle was an Elizabeth Martin terracotta sculpture in 1975.
1966 *Bradford Mills Prize for Painting* at the Maitland Art Show.
1964 First Prize in the *Newcastle Show Art Section*.

**REPRESENTED**
- Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
- Maitland City Art Gallery Collection.

**COMMISSIONS**
Drawings and watercolours of Lysaghts Australia for the managers, Parry-Odeden and Vincent Wardell.

**BIBLIOGRAPHIES**
*Artists and Galleries of Australia and New Zealand.*

**NEWCASTLE REGION ART GALLERY COLLECTION**

**CITATIONS**

**DIED** Newcastle, 1989.

**RAE RICHARDS (nee MOUAT)**

**BORN**
23 September, 1927, Melbourne, Australia.

**EDUCATION**
High School and trained as a librarian.

**MARRIED**
Peter Richards, 1947.

**CHILDREN**
- Phillip, 1948.
- Jeffrey, 1952.
- James, 1954.
MOVED TO NEWCASTLE
1957.

ART TRAINING
1945 Melbourne Tech Art School.
1944 Melbourne Gallery School.

ART EMPLOYMENT
1968 - Established first ever adult art classes with WEA Newcastle, conducting regular day and evening sessions, summer schools and weekend seminars at Morpeth Centre.

HONOURARY POSITIONS
1989-1999 Member, Acquisition Committee of Newcastle Region Gallery (as an artist representative).

TRAVEL
1974 Overseas Study Tour.
1966 Overseas Study Tour.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS
2008 Retrospective, Lake Macquarie Regional Gallery.
2001 Paintings, Panels and Platters, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1997 Paintings, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1996 Retrospective – Paintings, Maitland City Art Gallery, NSW.
1994 Retrospective – Banners, Maitland City Art Gallery, NSW.
1990 Paintings, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1986 Paintings and Banners, Morpeth Gallery, NSW.
1984 Paintings, Cooks Hill Gallery, Newcastle.
1981 Banners, Morpeth Gallery, NSW.
1980 Paintings, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1975 National Trust, Solo Exhibition, Simpson’s Cottage.
1974 Banners, Qantas Galleries, London.
1973 Banners, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1972 Banners, Macquarie Galleries, Sydney.
1969 Banners, John Gild Galleries, Perth.
1968 Banners, Macquarie Galleries, Sydney.
1967 Banners, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1966 Banners, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1965 Paintings, Little Gallery, Sydney.
SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS
2008  John Paynter Gallery, Newcastle.
2002  Diversity, Maitland City Art Gallery, NSW.
2000  Constructing Futures, Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Newcastle.
1998  Newcastle Artists Works, Japan Sister City.
1999  Reflections and Anticipation - The Journey Towards the Third Millennium, Maitland City Art Gallery, NSW.
1997  Invitation Exhibition for Menkens Foundation, Newcastle.
1996  Signifiers, Lake Macquarie Gallery, NSW.
       Tomago House, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1995  Hung, Drawn and Quartered, John Paynter Gallery, Newcastle.
1993  The Low Show Retrospective, Maitland City Art Gallery, NSW.
1992  Influences of John Passmore, Maitland City Art Gallery, NSW.
1990  House Show, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1987  Hunter Valley Artists, Newcastle Region Gallery, Newcastle.
1982  Inaugural Mattara Selected Prize Exhibition.
1975  NBN Selected Prize Exhibition, Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
1974  17 Women Artists, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1973  Craft Australia, Art Gallery of NSW (Australia’s choice of crafts for the 1974 World Craft Exhibition, Toronto, Canada).
1972  Hunter Valley Artists, Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Newcastle.
1968  Wynne Prize Exhibition, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney.
1960  Regional Survey, Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Newcastle.
1959  Newcastle Art Festival, Newcastle Region Art Gallery, Newcastle.

COMMISSIONS
AMP Society, Melbourne.
The University of Newcastle Great Hall.
Christ Church Cathedral, Newcastle.
Church of St. John Mark, Chester Hill.
Society for Crippled Children, Belmont, NSW.
Newcastle High School, Newcastle.
St. Joseph’s High School, Merewether.
St. Patrick’s College, Manly.
Uniting Church, Woonona.
Junction Primary School, Newcastle.
Women’s College, University of Sydney.
REPRESENTED
Christ Church Cathedral, Newcastle.
Newcastle Region Gallery, Newcastle.
Maitland City Art Gallery, NSW.
New South Wales Department of Education, Sydney.
AMP Society, Hobart and Sydney.
Reserve Bank, Sydney.
Private Collections in Australia, USA., Mexico, Great Britain and EIRE.

CITATIONS
Artists and Galleries of Australia and New Zealand, Max Germaine.
Women Artists of Australia.

WORKS IN NEWCASTLE REGION GALLERY COLLECTION
Tanilba Dreaming, 1962, oil paint on canvas, 106.5x71.0 cm, with frame.
Adoration, 1971, gouache and ink, 68.8 x 50.0 cm, from the triptych Journey of the Magi (No 3 Adoration), purchased from the exhibition Hunter Valley Artists.
Persimmons, 1991, oil on canvas, 30.2x40.5 cm. Gift of the artist selected by the director.
Other works in collection from von Bertouch bequest of 2003.

LILLIAN SUTHERLAND

BORN
Newcastle 1924.

EDUCATION
Matriculated and trained as a teacher.

ART TRAINING
1954, Newcastle National Art School.

MARRIED
John Sutherland.

CHILDREN
John, 1945.
Patricia, 1949.
Christopher, 1958.

MOVED FROM NEWCASTLE
Mid 1960s.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS
1988 Von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle, NSW.
1986 Wagner Art Gallery, Paddington.
1985 Von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle, NSW.
1984 Wagner Art Gallery, Paddinton.
1983 Von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle, NSW.
1982 Wagner Art Gallery, Paddington.
1981 Von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle, NSW.
1979 Munster Arms Gallery, Melbourne.
1978 Von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle, NSW.
1977 Munster Arms Gallery, Melbourne.
1973 Von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle, NSW.
1971 Toorak Art Gallery, Melbourne.

MAJOR GROUP EXHIBITIONS
1988 Australian Painters, Hong Kong.
1988 Recent Watercolours, Wagner Gallery, Paddington.
1985 Australian Contemporary Paintings and Graphics in Focus, Hong Kong Art Centre, Hong Kong.
1972 Exhibition by Five Artists, Toorak Art Gallery, Melbourne.
1971 Exhibition by Four Women Artists, Canberra.
1963 Australian Art Exhibition, Kuala Lumpur.
Exhibited in Blake, Transfield, Archibald, Wynne and Sulman Exhibitions.
Portia Geach Portrait Exhibition.
Maude Vizard Wholohan Portrait Exhibition, Adelaide.
Canterbury Religious Art Exhibition, Melbourne.
Sale Prize Exhibition.
Exhibited annually in von Bertouch Galleries Collectors' Choice.

AWARDS
1969 Human Image, Royal Easter Show, Sydney.
1967 Modern Watercolour, Cheltenham.
1964 Traditional Art Prize, Tumut.
1964 Religious Art Prize, Albury.
1963 Traditional Prize, Muswellbrook Art Prize, Muswellbrook Gallery, NSW.
1962 Bradford Cotton Mills Prize, Maitland, NSW.

REPRESENTED
Australian National Gallery Collection.
Manly Art Gallery.
Muswellbrook Council Collection.
St. Vincents Hospital, Victoria.
Maitland City Collection Private Collections throughout Australia, America, Hong Kong, London and France.

NEWCASTLE REGION ART GALLERY COLLECTION
Big Rock at Brady Creek, 1988, watercolour on Arches paper, 76.6 x 57.7 cm. Purchased from Lillian Sutherland.
Quinkan Country, Cape Peninsula, purchased from exhibition May/ June, 1988, von Bertouch Galleries, catalogue no.22.

CITATIONS

DIED Sydney, 1989.

MADELEINE SCOTT JONES, MITCHELL (nee SCOTT)

BORN
England 1919.

PARENTS’ OCCUPATION
Father, Doctor.

ART TRAINING
1946 – 49 Camberwell School of Arts, London.

MARRIED
Harri Jones (died 1964).
Sydney Sterling Mitchell, 1970 (died 1975)

CHILDREN
Sian 1948
Rhiannon 1954
Ruth 1955

MOVED TO NEWCASTLE
From England 1959.

ART TEACHING
1952-59 Portsmouth College of Art teaching pottery design.
1950-52 Camberwell School of Arts, London teaching studio pottery.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS (Australia)
1977 von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1970 National Sculpture Gallery, Canberra.

GROUP EXHIBITIONS (Australia)
1975 International Womens Year, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle.
1971 Hunter Valley Pottery, Newcastle City Art Gallery.
1970 Australian Pottery, Newcastle City Art Gallery.
1967 Regional Survey III, Newcastle City Art Gallery.
1961 Regional Survey, Newcastle City Art Gallery.
Annually in Collectors’ Choice, von Bertouch Galleries.
Annually with the Potters Society of NSW.

REPRESENTED
Newcastle Region Art Gallery.

*Madeleine Scott Jones did not keep a comprehensive record of her art career.

CITATIONS

DIED
Newcastle 2010

LOVONI WEBB

BORN
Jesmond, Newcastle 1925.

EARLY SCHOOLING
Jesmond Public School.
Newcastle Girls High School (intermediate level).
Business College.
ART TRAINING
Post Graduate Studies, City Art Institute, Sydney (full-time course).
   Teaching Certificate (Art).
1947 East Sydney Technical College (part-time painting course).

MARRIED
Did not marry.

MOVED FROM NEWCASTLE
To Sydney 1956.

ART TEACHING

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

GROUP EXHIBITIONS
1992 *Influences of John Passmore Exhibition*, Maitland City Art Gallery.
1989,87,84,83 Ivan Dougherty Galleries, Sydney.
1985,82,81 *Muswellbrook Art Prize*, Muswellbrook Art Gallery.
1982,75,67 *Portia Geach Portrait Prize*.
1975,74,73,72 *Muswellbrook Art Prize*, Muswellbrook Art Gallery.
1966,64,63,62, *Salman Exhibition*, Art Gallery of NSW.
1977,65 *Archibald Exhibition*, Art Gallery of NSW.
1965,64,62 *Muswellbrook Art Prize*, Muswellbrook Art Gallery.

TRAVEL
Many trips after she retired from teaching in 1980.
1979 England, Europe.

MEMBERSHIPS
Art Gallery Society, Art Gallery of NSW.
College of Fine Arts Alumni Association.
National Trust.

DIED Newcastle 2008.

This CV is not complete.
APPENDIX B

ADDITIONAL BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF SIGNIFICANT ARTISTS AND SUPPORTERS

Anne von Bertouch (1915-2003) – Gallery owner and director

Anne von Bertouch was born Anne Catherine Whittle in Eastwood, 1915. She was educated at Sydney Girls’ High School, Hobart Technical College, Armidale Teachers College and the University of Sydney. Her early career was as an infants’ school teacher, then as a physical education teacher at Riverside High School, followed by ten years at Fahan Private School in Hobart. She married Roger von Bertouch, an art teacher, in 1939. In the 1950s, she and her husband made the decision to ‘drop out’ and they travelled north to establish an artists’ colony on the shores of Myall Lakes, near Foster in NSW. When their property was reclaimed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, they moved to Newcastle to open a commercial art gallery. As von Bertouch had trained both as a teacher and an artist, she was suited to the task at hand.¹ The von Bertouch Gallery was the first professionally run gallery in Newcastle and the first of its kind outside of a capital city.² The remarkable life and work of Anne von Bertouch in Newcastle is memorable.³

Viola Bromley (1919–1990) - Artist

Born in Sydney in 1919, Bromley first studied with Desiderius Orban at his studio in Sydney. She was also a member of the Contemporary Art Society. Bromley abandoned an established

artistic career in Sydney to accompany her husband to his place of employment, in this instance, with mining operations in Muswellbrook. Finding herself in a new environment, her work reflected the less appealing aspects of that surrounding landscape. Bromley found herself residing on the boundary of a new open cut mine, with a view that could not be overlooked. Bromley said:

“Environment plays a large part in shaping a painter’s work. When I came to live in Muswellbrook 15 years ago, the Open Cut stirred my imagination, and for a long time this theme dominated my painting. It took a few years to get out of my system what most people described as ‘that ugly great hole in the ground’.”

After arriving in Muswellbrook, she joined a local art group and also became a member of the Cultural and Recreational Advisory Committee, a body established to assist the council with town beautification and cultural matters. She was a member of the Executive Committee of the Regional Galleries Association and played an active part in establishing the Muswellbrook City Art Gallery.

The debates around modernism that had disturbed the citizens of Newcastle were present in Muswellbrook at the time of the inaugural art prize. Very few of the residents of that town had been exposed to art in general in 1958, and the appearance of ‘modern art’ in a public venue was met with derision. In an interview for the History of Muswellbrook, Bromley recalled:

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5 Ibid.
8 Newcastle Region Art Gallery, "Viola Bromley 1919-1990."Curriculum Vitae, Newcastle Region Art Gallery archives.
“The howls of rage from local residents when the first exhibition was opened and an aggressively modern painting by Thomas Gleghorn ‘Death of Voss’ was awarded the open prize and purchased as the first work for the Muswellbrook Collection. The local press was inundated with letters of protest. Some of these extended to three columns and muttered darkly that the town had been sold a pup, and complaining bitterly about the modern art on display, saying it was impossible to tell whether the figures in the painting were ‘inside out or upside down.’”

In 1958 the Muswellbrook Open Art Prize was to be a one off event, but it was Bromley who proposed that a trust fund be established to enable the art prize to be an annual occurrence, with the eventual aim of building a gallery to house the collection. The Open Art Prize continued to grow and eventually, when the venue in which the exhibition was mounted became inadequate, it was moved to the Town Hall. When again the space became too small, the decision was made to make a permanent home for the exhibition and collection. Throughout this period, Bromley was at the forefront of the committee that instigated the necessary action.

In the inaugural Muswellbrook Open Art Prize in 1958, the award for the local section was won by Bromley with a painting, Rock Patterns, which was subsequently acquired for the collection (plate 87). Throughout her career her works dealt primarily with the landscape.

10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
A major painting, purchased by the Newcastle City Art Gallery from the artist in 1964, *Open-Cut Mine Theme, No 3*, was a work that dealt with Bromley’s recurrent theme of the open cut mines of Muswellbrook. The materials used for this painting, in the Newcastle Region Gallery Collection, were quite experimental for the time. Bromley used a mixture of oil, P.V.A. and marble chips on hardboard.\(^\text{13}\)

A painting of the same subject also titled *Open Cut*, had previously been selected as the winner of the Local Section of the *Muswellbrook Open Art Prize* in 1959 (plate 88).

\(^{13}\) Newcastle Region Art Gallery archives.
Gil Docking (1919- ) – Gallery director

Gilbert Charles Docking was born in Bendigo, Victoria on 26 February, 1919. He studied at the Royal Melbourne Technical Art School prior to WWII and was a Flight Lieutenant with Squadron 455, Coastal Command, United Kingdom, during WWII and a POW in Germany in 1944-45. After the war he graduated in Fine Arts & Philosophy at Melbourne University (BA) in 1952. He produced visual education teaching aids for a Commonwealth Unit.

In 1952 he was appointed Education Officer at the National Gallery of Victoria and held that position until 1956, then becoming an art teacher at Mt Scopus College until his appointment as the first Director of Newcastle City Art Gallery in 1958.
In an interview he recounted his time in Newcastle, as the first Director of the Newcastle City Art Gallery. He said his first purchase for the Newcastle City Art Gallery was a Charles Blackman painting of a girl standing on a beach with a boat and night sky. After he had acquired the work he had to explain why this work was a good acquisition to the Pope and City Collection. Other works he purchased around that time included Arthur Boyd, John Percival and Joseph Lycett.

Docking established the Hunter Valley Reviews in which all works submitted were required to have been completed in the past twelve months. This encouraged local artists to continue painting new works. As there were no other professional commercial galleries in Newcastle at that time, the Newcastle Gallery offered all works in its solo exhibitions for sale. These events were popular and enjoyed by the public and buyers who supported them.

To develop and encourage public interest in the new city gallery, solo shows of individual artists from other cities that were held at the Newcastle Gallery, enabled the people of Newcastle and local artists’ to gain exposure to current works being produced by practicing artists elsewhere.

The city council facilitated these exhibitions by making available a council road truck to collect the works of artists from their studios in Sydney and transport the exhibition to Newcastle. The artists were enthusiastic about being given this opportunity to exhibit in a public gallery with no cost to themselves and without having to transport their works to Newcastle and back. Works in the solo exhibitions were for sale and fifteen percent commission was retained by the gallery towards the purchase fund. Circulars of exhibitions were posted to the public and notices placed in the local newspapers.

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Joy Foster (1931- ) – Journalist, gallery owner and director

Joy Foster was born in Mayfield in 1931 and was educated at Newcastle Girls High School, Sydney University and New England University (which at the time was a college of the University of Sydney). She graduated with an arts degree, majoring in languages. After working in Sydney, Foster returned to Newcastle in 1954 to work as a journalist for the Newcastle Sun. In 1962 Gil Docking, the Director of the Newcastle City Art Gallery asked Foster to write reviews for the Newcastle Sun and also to read reviews for the ABC radio. He wished to “get out to people” information about the art world. At the time, Foster was attending life drawing classes at the Newcastle National Art School with Brian Cowley and working on her own art making.

Cecily Mitchell (1912-1969) – Artist

Cecily Mitchell (nee Hewitt) was born in Stockton and remained a resident of Newcastle throughout her life. She attended Cooks Hill Intermediate High School and, like many other females of that time, only stayed at school until the age of 15. She then enrolled at the Newcastle Technical College to study mechanical drawing. At the completion of the course, she was employed by the Hunter District Water Board as a tracer. However, marriage and the birth of three children ended that career and it was in 1952 that she joined the Newcastle National Art School as a part-time student. Mitchell had been a student of both Passmore and Beadle and her early work included landscapes and portraits in both oils and watercolours.

16 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
It was a chance encounter with flower illustration that changed her direction from the subject matter and style she experienced as a student. She was asked to complete a series of six watercolour drawings for her sister, and when Paul Beadle saw them he organised a solo exhibition for her at the Newcastle National Art School in 1954.19

In 1959, the Newcastle City Art Gallery honoured Mitchell by offering her a solo exhibition at that gallery. Both the 1954 and 1959 exhibitions were opened by William Dobell.

Her interest in art extended further than her own art making, to an enthusiastic involvement in the emergent art community, which was concerned with the lack of a city gallery. She was an original member of the Newcastle Art Gallery and Conservatorium Committee and became their first vice-president.20 Plates 89 and 90 show the floral illustrations for which she became well known.

Plate 89 *November Lillies*, 68.3 x 34.9 cm. *Geraniums*, Plate 90 (right) 47.7 x 38.1 cm. Cecily Mitchell, 1958, watercolour on paper, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

19 Ibid.
**John Passmore** (1904-1984) – Artist, Teacher

John Passmore was born in Sydney in 1904. He worked as a commercial artist while studying at Julian Ashton’s Art School between 1918 and 1933. He travelled to Britain in 1933 where he stayed, apart from several brief trips to Europe where he was introduced to the works of Cezanne and Picasso. It was Cezanne’s principles of form achieved by colour that he was most interested in. Following his return to Australia in 1951 he taught at Newcastle Technical College and East Sydney Technical College. His work became increasingly abstract and in 1956 he took part in a avant-garde exhibition, *Direction 1*, at the Macquarie Galleries with Robert Klippel, John Olsen, William Rose and Eric Smith. A retrospective exhibition, *John Passmore*, was held at the von Bertouch Galleries in 1985. It showed work by Passmore done before and during his period in Newcastle. He died in Sydney in 1884 at the age of 80.

**Reg Russom** (1887- 1952) – Artist and teacher

Russom was born in Sydney in 1887 and, even as a youth, was considered something of a prodigy. He had a pencil sketch purchased by the Sydney Gallery when he was seventeen. He studied under Julian Ashton and exhibited with the Royal Art Society. He later moved to the United States of America. “On 1 January 1914, the *Lone Hand* stated: that Russom was better known in America than in his own country, for he left his Australia for San Francisco at the age of nineteen.”

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23 Barry Pearce, 1984-5.
26 Ibid.
After spending five years in the west, where he contributed to illustrated daily and Sunday papers, he went to New York. He was employed in drawing for most of the leading magazines. His first big success was when he did a series of drawings for *Life* “in which he pictured the transit problems of the future. In these, the aerial railways and the air-ship specials dwarf the motor age to insignificance.”27

He returned to Australia and settled in Newcastle in 1932, where he taught, first as a part-time teacher and later full-time, at the Newcastle National Art School until his death in 1952.28

His long career and significant contribution to the art world of Newcastle was acknowledged in a memorial exhibition of his work in 1952.29 A further tribute to his endowment to Newcastle was the establishment of the *Reg Russom Memorial Art Prize*, which was first awarded in 1955 for a drawing of the human figure. This prestigious prize is an annual acquisitive prize of $1000 to an artist under the age of 31. There is also now an encouragement award of $250 sponsored by Eckersley’s Art Supplies.30

**Margaret Sivyer** - Gallery director

Sivyer commenced her association with Maitland City Art Gallery in 1972, when the National Trust offered Maitland City Council the use of Brough House for the city art gallery. She became a member of the volunteer group, *Maitland Art Gallery Society*, and in 1984 was appointed its foundation director by the council, on a part-time basis. In 1993, Sivyer took on

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27 Ibid.
28 Andrew Greenhough, "Paul Beadle" (Master of Arts in Art History, University of Auckland, 1986), A copy of this thesis is in the Newcastle Region Art Gallery. It does not contain page numbers.)
29 Ibid.
the role of full-time director and stayed in that position until November 2003. Her association with the gallery did not end there as she has since been researching and recording the history of the gallery.  

Sivyer had a continual battle with the local council over financial assistance and recurring issues of censorship. Up until 1997, the office of the gallery was run from a granny flat in her home opposite the gallery in Brough House.

The Maitland Art Prize, established in 1957, like the Muswellbrook Open Art Prize, is one of the oldest art prizes in the country. Artists who have submitted works over its fifty one year history, include Sidney Nolan and William Dobell.

Margaret Sivyer received an OAM for services to the arts and community of Maitland.

**Peter Sparks (1924 - 1984) - Artist and art writer**

Peter Sparks, born in 1924 in Coolamon, New South Wales, trained at the National Art School Sydney after WWII under the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme. He was a painter and printmaker and his work is included in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia. He moved to Newcastle, where he taught part time at the Newcastle National Art School, and became the art critic for the Newcastle Morning Herald newspaper.

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He died in 1984. The *Peter Sparks Memorial Prize* was held at von Bertouch Galleries in 1985. He was the brother of the Sydney artist Cameron Sparks.\(^{34}\)

**Jill Stowell (1933-) - Art writer**

Jill Stowell was born in Melbourne in May, 1933. She attended the University of Melbourne and graduated with an Honours Degree in History in 1954 after which she left Australia to continue her education in Europe. Her five year abroad included studies in formal art history at the University of Freigurg im Breisgau, Germany. Stowell arrived in Newcastle in late 1959, when husband John was appointed to the teaching staff of the University. It was here that she met Rae Richards and Madeleine Scott-Jones who have remained close friends.

Jill was in the first intake of the Newcastle Gallery Guides, represented Newcastle on the national board of the guiding organisation and commenced reviewing for the then Newcastle Morning Herald in 1985. She has written histories of the Maitland Regional Art Gallery and the Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery plus catalogue essays and occasional pieces.

From 1969 until 1992, she was Secretary and Organiser of the Newcastle Branch of Musica Viva Australia. She received an OAM for services to the arts in 1999.\(^{35}\)

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