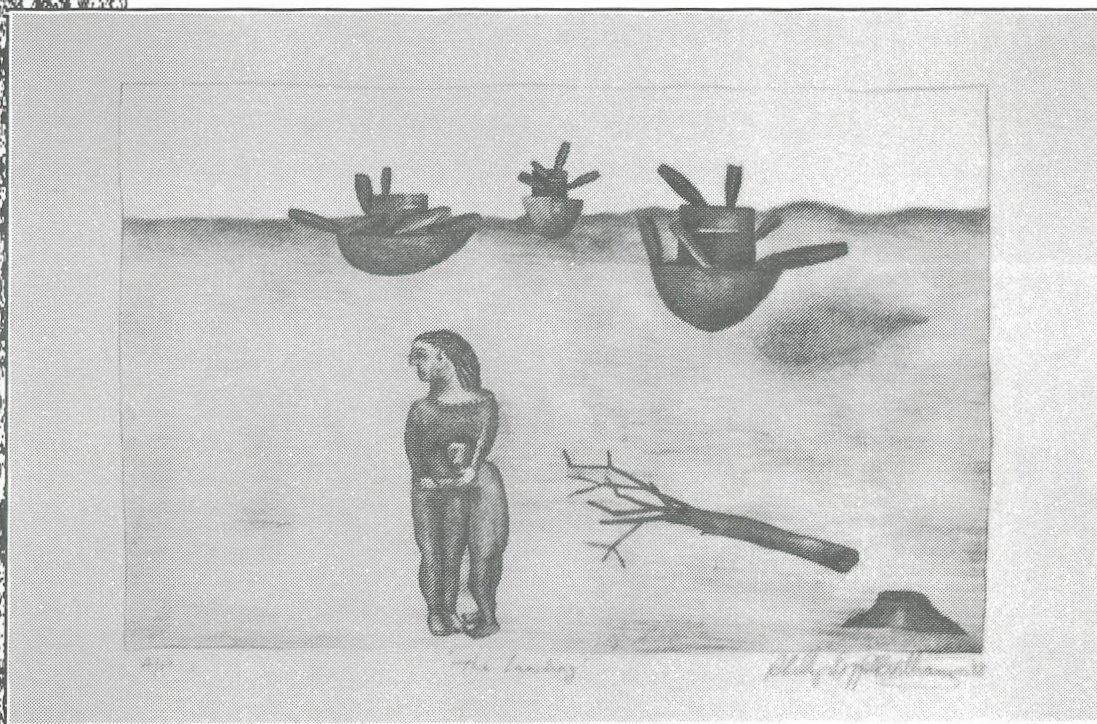


GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY  
GOLD COAST UNIVERSITY COLLEGE



## FERTILE GROUND

An exhibition of contemporary  
Australian works from the Griffith  
University Art Collection.



*'The Landing' by Philip Doggett-Williams. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.*

2 July to 26 July, 1991

**Gold Coast University  
College of Griffith  
University**

Parklands Drive, Southport, Qld. 4215

Curated by **Griffith Artworks**  
All enquiries: (07) 875 7414



The Griffith University Art Collection, from which this exhibition is drawn, consists largely of contemporary Australian art, and is concerned with concepts and relationships as much as with art objects.

The University's art acquisition policies are based on the same educational principles as its teaching programmes - with an emphasis on theory, methodology, interdisciplinary problem solving, and contemporary relevance.

A prime function of the art collection is to re-integrate art into the everyday experience of students, staff and the wider community. Individual works and exhibitions from the collection are available by arrangement for loan to schools, libraries, regional galleries and other public institutions. The remainder of the collection is on display throughout the University, and members of the public are welcome to view the works at some of the most beautiful natural bushland campuses in Australia.

The *Fertile Ground* exhibition and its ancillary arts events have been organised around the notion that art should be presented in a way that is educational and socially relevant as well as exciting and pleasurable.

The exhibition takes a radical approach to the theme of landscape. It is intended to come as a surprise, as the works vary widely in artistic methods and intentions. In the world environment of the 1990's, the landscape is no longer a passive scenic subject, and the onlooker can no longer be disinterested.

This is not only a visual art exhibition, but also a multi-media experience. Special evening viewings will involve interpretations of landscape in contemporary and classical music, literature and theatre. Teachers' notes have been provided to maximise and stimulate school student involvement. Each day and evening that the exhibition is open will provide a different set of experiences for visitors to the show.

The exhibition has been curated by Griffith Artworks for the Gold Coast University College of Griffith University to celebrate the first anniversary of its amalgamation with the University. The literary, musical and theatrical components of the show are the work of the Gold Coast University College's Division of Education and the Arts. Along with the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, students from the Queensland College of Art, and other sections of the University, the Gold Coast University College is part of a growing arts focus within Griffith University which makes it one of the most important cultural influences in Queensland, with opportunities to extend this influence nationally and internationally.

Dr Margriet Bonnin  
Director  
Griffith Artworks



*Fertile Ground* is an exhibition of twenty-three works from the Griffith University Art Collection. Twenty-two contemporary Australian artists are represented and their works are collected together under the theme of landscape. However, the works vary greatly in methods, media, visual strategies and artistic intentions. *Fertile Ground* affirms and draws upon the strong tradition of landscape in Australian art while also seeking to re-interpret traditional definitions of landscape and traditional methods of art practice. Contemporary art is produced within a state of pluralism. That is to say, no longer is there any one style, medium or method that is thought to be a "truer" form of representation than any other.

Landscape, once considered an artistic genre with specific aesthetic and stylistic dictates, is now an open-ended subject, able to be interpreted in any number of ways. The idea of landscape can be extended to include terms such as environment, geography and space. Facing ecological crisis, the landscape has become an urgent topic of debate. It is now no longer meaningful to represent the landscape as a passive subject in terms of the picturesque. Rather the landscape must be seen as an active subject capable of change. The artists represented come from a variety of cultural and racial backgrounds. Australian society is a multi-cultural one and the representations in *Fertile Ground* reflect this. *Fertile Ground* consists of twelve pairs of works, each with its own heading. Headings such as Industrial, Suburban Perspective, and Technology are descriptive of the structural apparatus in a modern Western nation, while headings such as Dreamscapes, Night Flights and Waterway emphasise the individual private realm of imaginative experience. *Fertile Ground* attempts to integrate the public and private, the personal and the political, representations of which are traditionally separated. The principal strategy for achieving these unions is one of juxtaposition. This is the placing of art works side by side in space.

An active gallery environment is created, generating dialogues which extend beyond the central theme. The gallery is also an environment, capable of shaping the ways in which art works are seen. Galleries are subject to exterior economic and political pressures. However, inside the gallery, there is created a private, imaginative area where we are capable of envisaging anything from filming Elioth Gruner's cows, to Aboriginal rule, to a "hippopotamus woman" applying ointment to her sore eye. If multiculturalism is a myth, political propaganda, or an ideal, in the gallery space it can be an actuality. *Fertile Ground* has been organised in a specific way in order to highlight the issues which surround each work, but it is hoped that new juxtapositions will emerge in the viewer's imagination. To stimulate this imaginative process and to assist in creating an active gallery environment, *Fertile Ground* is to be accompanied by musical, literary and dramatic performances inspired by landscape and landscape art.

The artworks of Anne Zahalka and Ian North establish a departure point for the exhibition. The concerns which shape their images are the ones which have shaped *Fertile Ground*. Primarily, they signify a dissatisfaction with a traditional concept of landscape and particularly its function in formulating a national identity. Any representation of the landscape will necessarily describe a relationship between the viewer and that which is viewed. This relationship is not a fixed one but is dependent upon the historical attitudes of the artist, the viewer, and the prevailing attitudes of the social order. In describing the mainstream history of Australian landscape art, we are recalling images made by an imperialist, colonising culture. Artists such as Zahalka and North are attempting to re-evaluate these images in the light of their central ideologies.

The white race found its encounter with Australia one of hardship. To this day we inhabit the edges of this vast continent in artificial urban environments while glorifying our red centre and our indigenous flora and fauna as evidence of our uniqueness and our (tourist) culture. Despite the fact that we have never adapted to this land, the landscape in artmaking has been traditionally depicted as a rural utopia, "the wide brown land for me". This is the projection of the landscape as exotic, alien, wild, not part of ourselves or our experience. Similarly figures which were seen as somehow in touch with the land, aborigines, bushrangers, drovers, were romanticised and heroicised. The intense realism of these traditional images heightens their escapist, idealistic visions.

Anne Zahalka's "An Early Morning Shoot" shows a reproduction of Elioth Gruner's "Spring Frost, Emu Plains", 1919, with a collaged, hand-coloured photograph of a film crew superimposed. Zahalka denies the illusionism of both the painting and the photographs by creating an impossible image. At the same time she highlights the use of illusionism as a device. "An Early Morning Shoot" makes connections between early Australian painting and contemporary filmmaking.



Both rely on their on hyperreal imagery in order to convey an atmosphere of fantasy and romance. The inappropriateness of such collaging questions the relevance of traditional Australian landscapes for today's culture.

Ian North's "Pseudo Panorama II. Australia. 1987. Ulysses deriding Polyphemus" is a similarly collaged work of reproduction and photograph. The central image is a photographed reproduction of Turner's "Ulysses deriding Polyphemus" 1829 and refers historically to the origins of the European landscape tradition. The romantic, heroic ideal of taming the wilderness is born of colonial imperialist attitudes to the landscape.

In the eighteenth century a classical Greek or Roman allegory was incorporated into the landscape in order to educate and morally edify a highly literate, landed aristocracy. During the nineteenth century this edification process became more subtle and disguised, as evident in pictorial devices such as the panorama or the prospect, or in aesthetics of the sublime and the beautiful. The visual devices of the panorama displayed in North's sweeping wheatfields are the elevated position of the viewer, the all-encompassing entirety of the panoramic view, an uninterrupted continuity and a detailed naturalism. These devices are subverted by the central splice in the photographic image. They work to create a sense of edified wholeness, knowledge, ownership and culture in much the same way as the central Greek allegory. The inclusion of the Greek allegory highlights the European 'roots' of such visual strategies and questions their relevance for constructing nationalist cultural icons of Australian identity.

If we do not view the landscape as a natural paradise or a romantic scenic wonderland, but instead wish to incorporate our contemporary Australian experiences of it into our artmaking, how are we to do so? Firstly, it is useful to consider the term environment as opposed to landscape and the broadening effect this has on our visual preconceptions. The term environment can be linked with any number of terms - political, domestic, home, natural, industrial, and so on. It is a word which signifies the experience of landscape, that we are always situated within a particular environment, that we are acting upon it, shaping it even as it is shaping our perceptions of normality and reality. The term environment is similar to the discursive term context. It is more useful and meaningful to define elements within a context rather than as abstract absolutes. Our experience of the landscape is multivarious - it comes to us through picture books, film and television, and through direct interaction with urban, suburban, domestic and natural surroundings every day.

In order to visualise the landscape we must contextualise it. Visual art's increasing reliance on and incorporation of the written word is evidence of this effort. Marie McMahon and Stephanie Outridge-Field incorporate text into their works in order to visualise the environment in a political context and upset the status quo. The clear intricately designed patterns of the screenprint and its confrontational inscription "Pay the Rent", contrast sharply with the scribbly ceramic design and its mysterious title. McMahon represents the natural landscape in clear-cut terms whereas Outridge-Field presents the constructed cityscape as chaotic and confusing.

As these works intimate, the political environment is not simply one of issues and rights. It is rather a more fundamental concern for the way society is structured. The female figure in Marie McMahon's landscape stands in an authoritative pose but in bare feet and on undeveloped land. What are Aboriginal definitions of power, authority, ownership, rule and rent?

The map is a powerful symbol for the political, social and scientific structures which we impose upon the landscape. Areas of the landscape we may consider totally "natural" are in fact only known to us because they have been delineated upon a map, given a name and measured.

Mike Parr and Adam Wolter explore the idea of the map as a form of social surveillance. Wolter's computer generated image is a reminder of the ubiquity of such abstract imagery (from defense equipment to video games, clothing design to art objects) and how adept we have become at deciphering and decoding. The populist feel of "Graphic Map Travel v3.0" is underwritten by the specialist technology, science and mathematics which enable its production. Where Wolter plays upon our visual abilities to decode the map, Mike Parr examines the way the map is encoded onto us. Through enforced normality, time-tables, a specialist education and workforce we are individualised by an institutional order. By creating an image that is at once an aerial map and a self-portrait, Parr visualises the interdependence of the institution and the personal subject.



It is difficult to characterise a national identity when the structural apparatus of society is increasingly internationalist (the formation of multi-national conglomerates, economic communities, global communication networks, international aid and investment). Huge populations of people are being severed from their homelands and resettled in alien environments. Australia has been challenged to meet the needs not only of an indigenous population culturally impoverished by imperialism but also of migrant communities establishing roots in Australian soil.

Phillip Doggett-Williams' "The Landing" is a naive allegory of the social violence done to post World War II migrant cultures. The gunboats of "The Landing" are symbols of violence while Jo Davidson's harboured ship symbolises transport to haven. "Resolution" is a positive work, the clear strong features of the human face prevail over the stark industrial skyline. However both artists have used the profile to signify an underlying ambivalence and sense of estrangement. Doggett-Williams tenders the mother-child as a symbol of vulnerability - the victim of social violence and hope for the future.

Nicholas Nedelkopoulos' vision of multicultural Australia is far more sinister and satirical. Cultural diversity is subsumed and controlled by a consumer mentality. The central pyramid of electrical appliances suggests that, like the ancient Egyptians, Australians are slaves to monument building - amassing possessions, paying off mortgages, simulating "TV True Love".

Ron McBurnie's "A dog's progress" provides the social microcosm to partner Nedelkopoulos' macrocosm. Both artists use the hills hoist as a central symbol of the suburban experience. The beloved back yard, hallmark of Australian home-ownership, responsible for the sprawling size of our cities, is an ambiguous space. It is both natural and constructed, both public and private.

McBurnie's image is part of a body of work entitled "A Rake's Progress". The original "Rake's Progress" was produced by William Hogarth in the eighteenth century and dealt with the story of a young man who, after inheriting a considerable amount of money from his miserly father, dwindled away his inheritance through disreputable activities. McBurnie, in re-inventing Hogarth's rake adopts the role of social commentator. This traces an alternative tradition to the romantic modernist vision of the artist as hero, social outcast, genius cum madman.

Most of the artists in *Fertile Ground* adopt the role of social commentator. This is indicative of the visual artists' increasing desire for social relevance and a demystification of artistic process and interpretation. It is paralleled by the shift in education to interdisciplinary study and an incorporation of cultural policy into aspects of business and political activity.

To parallel the shift in the role of artist from an alienated visionary genius to social participator and commentator, aesthetics undergo a change in signification. Aesthetics, under modernism, form a self-referential system in order to signify the hallmark style and philosophy of an individual or an avant-garde movement (in a primarily linear historical mode). In contemporary art production aesthetics function as visual strategies in order to contextualise and deconstruct a given subject (in a primarily synchronic mode).

In the industrial environments represented by Andrew Arnaoutopoulos and Mandy Martin the human figure is conspicuously absent. This emphasises the alienating and dehumanising nature of these urban work spaces. It also allows the artists to explore industrial spaces in aesthetic terms of design, outline and pattern. Both artists have used a stippling effect in their application of bright colour, contrasting sharply with the stark geometric industrial buildings. The formalist artistic process countermands the bleak subject matter, creating a positive artistic response. In Martin's "Factories 3" the menacing razor back roof is rendered in an expressive texture of primary colours.

"From the Factory No. 32" was created in response to past observations of the incidental build up of paint that occurred around printing machines in the industrial workplace. Arnaoutopoulos focusses upon the random, chaotic elements in the ordered, unimaginative factory environment, situating his own artistic labour strategically between the functional and non-functional. The painstaking, delicate application of gouache emphasises the traditional hand-made nature of artistic work.



Marian Drew's "Tim Visits the Rotunda II" and Mike Brown's "Spacedrift and Sun" include no hand-made signature trace in their work. Both artists extend artistic processes in order to interface with popular culture. Brown appropriates the popular printed surfaces of advertising, comic strips and video screens. The superimposition of two geometrically printed surfaces produces moire effects - creating illusions of depth, weight, suspension and movement.

Marian Drew's image was made using a complex procedure involving slide projectors, flashes and hand-held torches of various colours and strengths, working from absolute darkness and using long exposures of fifteen minutes and more. "Tim Visits the Rotunda II" is a mysterious, imaginative work of science fiction fantasy. Drew highlights the constructed nature of the photographic process, questioning its traditional use as documentary realism and stimulating the viewer's imagination to construct fictional narratives.

The technology which Brown and Drew have featured in these works and incorporated into their practice is closely linked with popular culture. Technology, on one level, enjoys popular usage. However, the specialist education and huge amounts of capital investment needed for its production and development is the cause of elitist labour structures. In appropriating the surfaces and stimulating the myths of popular culture, Brown and Drew reverse this trend, bridging the gap between professional and amateur practice.

Similarly, Helen Lillecrapp-Fuller's "Brisbane River (green)" bridges the gap between the public and the private spheres. The work is presented as a public documentary - the plain language title, the simple snap-shot style black and white photographs, and the collaged objects presented as further physical "evidence". The photographs depict the muddy mangroves with their emerging suckers and half-submerged objects (oil drums and a garden bench). The artist has overpainted the photographs in green oil paint and sewed a porcupine quill onto each one. Building multiple layers, the artist has veiled the work in a subjective intimacy, creating a realm of privacy.

Lillecrapp-Fuller's photographs are taken of the muddy mangroves at low tide along the edge of the Brisbane Botanic Gardens. Her inclusion of the local environment within an artwork builds up an Australian regionalist culture without recourse to nationalist icons. Similarly, Doug Spowart's scene of Brisbane by Night works to build a strong regionalist culture without specifically addressing the issue of Australian identity. "Faking-up Comet Halley" is a humorous comment on the event of Halley's comet. The media build-up promised spectacular views to the naked eye when the comet was barely visible even with binoculars. Spowart playfully exposes the way photography may construct reality rather than merely record it. Visual art production is constantly subdivided, hierarchically, into local, regional, national and international markets - with proportionate increases in valuation and profit. The international and national arenas create markets for landscape based largely on the individual aesthetic style of the artist (where the artist is considered to be not only gifted but highly professional). Local landscape production emphasises a uniform aesthetic, sourced in the realistic and the picturesque. Sold largely as amateur art, such artists are thereby not entitled to international or national recognition or standing. Regionalist culture seeks to create a dialogue between the spheres of local/ (inter)national, country/city, periphery/core.

Bill Robinson's "Starry Night" subtly generates such a dialogue. The work is a local depiction of Robinson's own farm yard in a naive style. The image includes nationalist references to the Ned Kelly tradition in Australian painting. The title "Starry Night" refers internationally and art historically to a work by Vincent Van Gogh. Robinson's naive style and perspectival games are reminiscent of Van Gogh's. This enables a re-evaluation of both Van Gogh's images (distorted by fame and market value) and local naive art production (not considered entitled to either).

In attempting to bridge such social divides as amateur/professional, public/private, periphery/core, *Fertile Ground* is attempting to forge a holistic social view. "Paperbark" by Hossein Valamanesh symbolises such a view. The natural, organic materials of bark and bamboo have been collaged into the abstract symbol of the squared circle. It is a metaphoric convergence of the particular and the universal, the eternal and the ephemeral.

*Fertile Ground* has thus far assessed the landscape in terms of mediation - as it comes to us through historical sources, technological maps, popular culture, and artistic subjectivity. In a



sense these representations are all fictions. They can be played off one another, deconstructively, in order to gain a critical perspective on reality. *Fertile Ground* hopes to stimulate such critical insights. Alternatively, we can delve deeper into the realm of fiction - where the landscape becomes a metaphoric realm of social and personal fantasy.

The images of Peter Booth and Lynette Cooney are derived from their dreams. Booth's untitled image is sourced in dreams and childhood memories of the blackened industrial landscape of Sheffield, England where he was born. The work is left untitled as it is a metaphor for the realm of the unconscious which preexists language. Booth's unconscious landscape erupts with a vital force. The central conical peak is a symbol of primal energy.

In contrast, Lynette Cooney's image is accompanied by an elaborate narrative. Cooney's dreamscape is metaphoric of social experience: the man falling victim to playful aggression; the alienated, unbeautiful woman standing beneath a bright light in a pink robe; the pressing crowd. Cooney invents a fictional narrative which elaborates crucial moments of socialisation, experiences of loss and desire.

When our dreaming becomes tied to the actual landscape, then may we become environmentally conscious. Then we may cease to romanticise the landscape and recognise it as part of ourselves. Banduk Marika's "Yalambara" is neither simply a landscape nor a self portrait - rather it is both. The represented goanna is the actual goanna, emphasised in the central tracks as a food source, as well as also signifying Marika's spiritual creator, Djankawu, and her family totem. Marika has permission to represent the goanna as long as she produces her own background design. Thus Marika celebrates her traditional communal culture using the Western methods of linocut and an individual style.

Perhaps the Western equivalent for such a marrying of the self and the environment is Mike Parr's "The Map". Instead of dreaming the landscape into the self, the self has been mapped onto the landscape. Western culture has certainly made its mark.

Milton Budge's "Mother-to-be Becomes Mother" is a luminous work which marks a meeting place for the cultural divisions in Australian society. The traditional landscapes of the Aboriginal Western Desert painters are inaccessible to a white audience. They may only be accessed through a title or sometimes an explanation of the particular dreaming by the painters. It is interesting that these works have been recognised by an international market, where their dreamings may be read as abstract patternings, furthering the representation of the landscape as exotic and alien. Complex issues of sacredness and copyright surround these works. Conversely, much urban Aboriginal art is overtly didactic, addressing specific issues (political, environmental, historical), without recourse to traditional imagery or subject matter.

"Mother-to-be Becomes Mother" lies strategically between these necessary extremes. Its easily read narrative is of traditional content while its spectacular use of non-traditional pink exhibits a joyous reception of Western opportunities. Such a naive attitude to both the sacredness of Aboriginal content and Western stylistics is a subtly ironic play on constructed notions of the primitive, while remaining a positive celebration of Aboriginal culture. Crucially the work is a fertility dreaming. Budge proposes that our cultural meeting place must be life-centred and nurturant. Such is the holistic vision of *Fertile Ground*.

Beth Jackson  
Griffith Artworks



## LIST OF WORKS

Artist	Title	Date	Medium	Dimensions (cms, height x width) image framed
Anne ZAHALKA	An Early Morning Shoot	1983	Type C colour photograph	24.7 x 34.5 42.2 x 52.4
Ian NORTH	Psuedo Panorama II. Australia, 1987. Ulysses deriding Polyphemus	1987	Type C colour photograph and acrylic paint	35.5 x 92.8 49.5 x 103.8
Marie McMAHON	Pay the Rent	c.1982	Colour screenprint poster	75.9 x 55.7
Stephanie OUTRIDGE-FIELD	"You say the fish are dead? Is that where the Uni is?" (from "Hello Queensland" series)	1983	Colour on porcelain clay slab	16.7 x 22.0 (irregular) 25.0 x 27.0
Mike PARR	The Map (from the Australian Bicentennial Print Folio)	1988	Etching	64.6 x 45.6 cms 86.2 x 67.5 cms
Adam WOLTER	Graphic Map Travel v3.0	1989	Computer generated image, laser printed	29.0 x 35.0 50.5 x 55.2
Phillip DOGGETT-WILLIAMS	The Landing	1988	Lithograph	22.0 x 32.0 48.0 x 57.0
Jo DAVIDSON	Resolution	1984	Oil on canvas	74.3 x 74.5 76.5 x 77.0
Ron McBURNIE	A dog's progress	1990	Etching	10.0 x 7.5 39.4 x 35.0
Nicholas NEDELKOPOULOS	That Great Australian Dream	1984	Etching and aquatint	100.0 x 50.0 127.6 x 76.0
Mandy MARTIN	Factories 3	1982	Colour screenprint	56.0 x 76.0 66.5 x 86.5
Andrew ARNAOUTOPOULOS	From the Factory No. 32	1984	Gouache on paper	25.5 x 20.3 37.7 x 42.3
Mike BROWN	Spacedrift and Sun	1984	Tonesheet on acetate	21.7 x 16.5 41.3 x 34.5
Marian DREW	Tim Visits the Rotunda II	1985	Type C colour photograph	40.4 x 39.0 60.0 x 58.5
Helen LILLECRAPP-FULLER	Brisbane River (Green) A	1982	Photographs and collage on paper	7.5 x 51.0 (irregular) 28.0 x 69.6
Helen LILLECRAPP-FULLER	Brisbane River (Green) B	1982	Photographs and collage on paper	7.5 x 51.0 (irregular) 28.0 x 69.6
Doug SPOWART	Faking-up Comet Halley	1987	Silver gelatin photograph	24.8 x 37.0 44.7 x 55.2
William ROBINSON	Starry Night	1985	Pastel, pencil and gouache on paper	56.0 x 75.5 73.3 x 93.0
Hossein VALAMANESH	Paperbark	1983	Lithograph with collaged bamboo and bark	46.0 x 26.0 72.5 x 52.0
Peter BOOTH	Untitled	1976	Charcoal pastels and acrylic paint on paper	49.5 x 47.0 70.5 x 68.0
Lynette COONEY	Dream with Hippopotamus Woman, shadows of people and crocodiles	1986	Handcoloured etching	13.8 x 20.4 cms 33.5 x 38.8 cms
Banduk MARIKA	Yalambara (from the Australian Bicentennial Print Folio)	1988	Colour linocut	69.9 x 41.9 90.0 x 61.2
Milton BUDGE	Mother-to-be Becomes Mother	1989	Acrylic on canvas on board	50.0 x 103.0 (framed)



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RGAQ