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THE NATIONAL CAPITAL SPACE AND ARTS PRACTICE: 1913–1978

The population of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) during the broader period covered in this history was marked by rapid growth and a degree of transience unprecedented in other Australian cities. This resulted in a lack of historical continuity, and the majority of Canberrans, including contemporary arts practitioners, are largely unaware of the rich history of arts and cultural development in Canberra. If we are to critically examine who we are now, it is essential to understand where we have come from.

Capital constructs

Canberra's two distinct iterations of space – that is, as federal/national capital and as a regional/local community – comprise a unique sociopolitical duality.

The pre-eminent construct of Canberra as Australia's national capital, 'the centre of our national ideas',¹ is both symbolic and actual. As a federal capital city, Canberra provides the physical site for Australia's governing institutions. Principal among these are: the federal parliament located in Australia's Parliament House; the federal administrative departments clustered in the Parliamentary Triangle; and the nation's supreme judiciary body, the High Court of Australia.

1 *Canberra Times*, 'Canberra's population', 19 July 1927, p 4.

Canberra is also home to national institutions that provide actual services to national and local users but which carry the symbolism in their naming as 'National' or 'Australian', and in the national ceremonies and commemorative functions that they coordinate. The first of the national cultural institutions, the Australian War Memorial (AWM), opened in 1943. This was followed by the opening of the National Library of Australia (NLA, 1968), the National Gallery of Australia (NGA, 1982)², the National Portrait Gallery (NPG, 1998, initially sited in Old Parliament House) and the National Museum of Australia (NMA, 2001). The foundation stone of the National Archives of Australia was laid in 1920, and the predecessor to the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) was established in 1935. The latter became an independent cultural organisation in 1984. The Australian National University (ANU) was ratified by a bill of parliament in 1946. From 1992, Canberra School of Art (CSA), which opened on 1 January 1976, became part of the ANU. Additionally more than 80 foreign embassies contribute to the city's national cultural landscape.

The carving out of a functioning local space within this overarching idea of a national capital is complex because the nature of a national capital is, primarily, *national* in focus and in actualisation. While the federal capital city has been identified as encompassing both 'good physical environments where people live out ordinary lives, as well as symbolically rich [environments] that capture the qualities a state wishes to portray to the larger world',³ it has also conversely been identified as more likely than state capitals to become a contested site. This is because a federal government seeks:

to control and develop the capital in the interests of the nation as a whole, while the people of the capital naturally wish to govern themselves to the greatest extent possible.⁴

The national capital is, therefore, a unique and dynamic city construct that allows the possibility for multiple tensions to arise along the boundaries where the symbolic and actual national capital meet the functioning local. These dynamic interplays, which heralded the birth of Canberra as a modern city, began to manifest in the late 1960s.

2 Francis Kelly, 'A national gallery but when?', *Canberra Times*, 15 February 1969, p 11.

3 Beth Moore Milroy, 'Commentary: what is a capital?', in John Taylor, Jean G Lengellé and Caroline Andrew (eds), *Capital cities/les capitales: international perspectives/perspectives internationales*, Montreal, McGill-Queens University Press, 1993, p 86.

4 Donald C Rowat (ed), 'Introduction', *The government of federal capitals*, University of Toronto Press, 1973, pp xi–xii, quoted in Enid Slack and Rupak Chattopadhyay, *Finance and governance of capital cities in federal systems*, vol 1, *Thematic issues in federalism*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009, p 4.

Prior to this – from the city’s establishment in 1913 within the newly excised land named as the Australian Federal Territory, and then from 1927, when the federal government relocated from Melbourne to the newly constructed Parliament House – Canberra existed, first symbolically and then actually, as Australia’s federal capital. In 1938, the Federal Capital Territory was renamed the Australian Capital Territory suggesting ‘changing views ... to a national centre rather than [simply] a federal meeting place’.⁵ The idea of Canberra as a national centre arguably attained its initial concrete form in 1943 when, with a population of less than 15,000, the AWM, opened its doors.

Population growth and social impacts to 1978

Population numbers remained low in Canberra in the 1940s with slow growth experienced until the late 1950s. Although the city was imagined as the seat of federal government from the beginning and inchoately as a national centre, funding and the political will to develop the city was fraught, as factionalism in successive federal governments, and cataclysmic world affairs – World War I, the Great Depression, World War II – constantly intervened to prevent any smooth fulfilment of the capital’s promise. In the late 1950s, the Liberal government, led by Prime Minister Robert Menzies, renewed its commitment to Canberra and the city began to experience dynamic growth,⁶ largely driven by Menzies’ desire to make Canberra ‘a worthy capital’.⁷ To this end, the federal government committed to further transfers of public servants to Canberra and, in 1958, it instituted the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) to oversee the government’s renewed commitment to planned development. The impact of these decisions on growth was profound: the population of Canberra trebled over 12 years; from a base of 30,356 in 1954, numbers rose rapidly to 58,856 in 1961 and then to 96,013 by 1966. The population grew to 217,981 by 1978.

5 Brown, 2014, p 94.

6 It is possible that this rapid upwards population trajectory is unique among federal capitals. Brasilia, the capital of Brazil, is the only other national capital to have been purpose-built. This similarity provided fertile curatorial ground for Jane Barney’s exhibition *Canberra Brasilia* at CCAS in 1998. See Chapter 6.

7 Peter Freeman, ‘Building Canberra to 1958’, National Capital Authority fact sheets, www.nca.gov.au/factsheet/building-canberra-1958-0, accessed 16 June 2014.

The brunt of the negative social impacts that resulted from this rapid growth was borne by the large numbers of women who, as new residents of the national capital, had to carve out a functioning local space from within a national capital city construct that was ill-equipped to serve their growing social welfare needs or the needs of their young families.

An historical precedent to the social activism practised by women in the 1970s occurred in 1927. In March of that year, when federal parliament was officially welcomed into the provisional Parliament House, the Federal Capital Commission (FCC) – the forerunner of the NCDC – estimated Canberra's population at 7,384 people.⁸ This included the housing of parliamentarians in the newly built Hotel Canberra and Kurrajong Hotel, public servants in hostels and houses in the northern and southern inner city suburbs of Ainslie, Reid, Forrest, Kingston and Yarralumla, and workers under canvas in construction camps.⁹ This small but socially varied population included many young families who shared a need for child and maternal welfare services – services not yet provided by government.

Early local engagement with women's welfare needs was evidenced when the Women and Children's Committee established the Canberra Mothercraft Society, with the support of Dr Beatrice Holt, Canberra's first female general practitioner (see Figure 3). 'One of the most active and useful of the many [social] organisations in Canberra',¹⁰ the society adopted 'innovative approaches to child and maternal welfare'¹¹ that sought to provide services across Canberra's early and diverse social divides. Reports presented at its third annual general meeting on 24 July 1929 indicate that, over the previous year, 'the sister-in-charge had paid 897 visits to homes, and that there had been 2,155 attendants at the society's clinics'.¹² The preponderance of women of childbearing age and young families that this statistic implies, reached unprecedented levels from 1961 to 1978.¹³

8 *Canberra Times*, 'Canberra's population', 19 July 1927, p 4.

9 See, for example, Brown (2014, p 77). The Ainslie Hostel became Gorman House Arts Centre in 1981.

10 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'Canberra Mothercraft Society', 26 July 1929.

11 Brown, 2014, p 83.

12 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1929. The society was subsidised by the FCC. Transport for the sister-in-charge was provided by 'Mr and Mrs Barton'.

13 In 1961, in a total population of 58,856, there were 10,885 women aged 20–44 and 20,651 children aged under 14. By 1966, in a total population of 96,013, there were 22,206 women aged 20–44 and 31,708 children aged under 14. In 1973, in a total population of 173,306, there were 45,703 women aged 20–44 and 55,387 children aged under 14. In 1978, in a total population of 217,961, there were 46,049 women aged 20–44 and 65,856 children aged under 14.

Figure 3. Opening of Canberra Mothercraft Society, 1927

Source. The Canberra Mothercraft Society, reproduced with permission

The continuous rapid increases in population over consecutive census dates¹⁴ directly contributed to the rise of women as radical, social activists during the late 1960s and the 1970s, because it was women, particularly those with young families, who were most negatively impacted by the unique circumstances of life in the national capital. Statistical data indicates that, over 17 years, Canberra's population almost quadrupled from 58,828 in 1961 to 217,981 in 1978. Negative impacts included the effects of transience and isolation on residents, both inbuilt factors in a population largely dedicated to realising the government's renewed commitment to consolidating Canberra as the national space. A large percentage of Canberra's population during this period comprised public servants, who, whether single or in family groups, were posted to the city for periods of two years. The isolating effects of transience were compounded by the loss of extended familial and friendship support mechanisms, which were left behind in other cities and towns.¹⁵ Additionally, within the overwhelmingly young demographic, there were

14 Total populations over the period: 1961 – 58,828; 1966 – 96,013; 1973 – 173,306; 1978 – 217,981.

15 'Women in Canberra frequently lacked any of the traditional supports to women at home, they often lacked family and old friends. They had a strong need to create a new community to build up supportive networks' (Paula Simcocks, *Majura Women's Group Newsletter*, 2005, quoted in Skeat, 2006, p 2).

few older woman who might otherwise have extended support to young mothers.¹⁶ The emphases throughout this period were on physically building the national capital, governing the nation, and providing services that supported these endeavours and those engaged in them. Through these decades, the provision of social services for local women and children was the nominal responsibility of the federal government, but with the renewed, principal focus on establishing Canberra as a 'worthy' national capital, government agencies were slow to recognise growing social needs.

By the early 1970s the number of women and children requiring a broad range of social services reached a critical mass. In 1973, in a total population of 173,306, the combined number of women aged 20–44 and children aged under 14 reached 100,190 or 57.81 per cent of the total population. Transience and isolation led to increasing levels of domestic violence and other family dysfunction, and the need for support services became acute.¹⁷

The resulting sociopolitical effects of this dramatic rise in population over the period 1961–78, coupled with the politics of feminism and the wider women's movement from the beginning of the 1970s, stimulated the contribution made by young, progressive, social-activist women. It was these women, in the absence of government-funded support mechanisms, who conceived and enacted service solutions to Canberra's emerging social problems during the 1970s. These included in 1970, Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT; in 1971, Canberra's first family planning clinic; in 1972, the Joint Women's Action group; in 1973, Canberra's Incest Support Centre, known from 1976 as the Rape Crisis Centre and operated as a feminist collective; in 1975, Beryl was established, as was the Women's House in O'Connor, which housed the headquarters of Canberra Women's Liberation (CWL); and, in 1978, the Women's Information and Referral Centre opened as a shopfront service in the city centre.

This emergence of women as social activists also occurred during the rise of the Canberra women's liberation movement, which was active in the capital from 1970.¹⁸ The various impacts of the women's liberation

16 In 1961, for example, there were only 1,667 women aged 50–60 in a total population of 58,856.

17 Domestic violence and family dysfunction in general were not recognised as social problems and, therefore, statistics indicating rates of incidence were not gathered at this time. Oral histories recorded from women who lived in Canberra and brought up their families at this time, and the fact of the provision of these services from the beginning of the 1970s, is evidence of need.

18 See Chapter 4, 'Feminist politics and art: intersections', for further information on women's liberation in Canberra.

movement were felt, to a greater or lesser degree and at different times, in other Australian cities. However, Canberra women were well-educated and often administratively skilled and were uniquely positioned, living in the national capital with access to political decision-makers, to respond to need and then to effect community change with government support.¹⁹ At this time, they were also directly supported by the progressive social policies of the Labor government under Gough Whitlam, elected on 2 December 1972. Whitlam was three times dux of Canberra Grammar and had attended Telopea Park High School, a period he credits with '[strengthening his] ... convictions about the role of the national Government in the nation's affairs'.²⁰ Arguably, this period in Whitlam's life may also have inculcated a belief in Canberra as a vibrantly local, as well as national, centre.

Beryl, run by the Canberra Women's Refuge Collective, was opened on International Women's Day in 1975 by then 78-year-old Canberran Beryl Henderson. Henderson's involvement in first-wave feminism in Australia provided inspiration and impetus to second-wave feminists agitating for social change. Beryl was the second of around 50 women's refuges established in Australia by the end of the 1970s. The first was Elsie, which began as a squat in the Sydney suburb of Glebe in 1972. Inspired by, but in contrast to this, Beryl was established after successful submissions to the federal government in a three-bedroom house on the northern edge of Canberra in Adams Place, Watson.²¹ A grant of \$4,000 from the Department of the Capital Territory (DCT) was allocated to run the refuge. Julia Ryan was a founding member of CWL in 1970. She recalled:

Being Canberra people ... we thought we would ask the government for a house ... [I]t was the Whitlam government and we thought we could talk them into it, which we did.²²

19 Historic examples of organisations that supported educated women were the National Council of Women (ACT) (1939) and the Australian Federation of University Women (ACT) (1944). Canberra's small female demographic around this time is evidenced by an extrapolation of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population data available for 1933 and 1947. In 1933 the number of females over 20 years old in the ACT was 2,445; in 1947 they numbered 4,807.

20 Brown, 2014, p 88. Telopea School opened in 1923 and was 'one of the earliest public buildings undertaken by the [Federal Capital Advisory Committee] and the first school completed by the Commonwealth' (Brown, 2014, p 87).

21 'We were very aware of what was happening in Sydney around the formation of Elsie, and that was our inspiration' (Julia Ryan, quoted in Choudhury, 2015, p 23).

22 Choudhury, 2015, p 24.

Developing arts and culture to 1978

From 1927 art was considered integral to establishing a national perception of Canberra as culturally literate.²³ In these early days this was imagined as community-based:

As a centre of culture Canberra will be dependent in the early stage on the establishment of its University, but meanwhile art societies and the like may accomplish useful endeavour.²⁴

The earliest of these societies was the Artists' Society of Canberra (ASOC), active from 28 June 1927.²⁵ In recess from July 1934, it re-emerged in August 1945. Also founded in 1945 was the Canberra Photographic Society,²⁶ followed in 1948 by the Canberra Art Club.²⁷

Art classes began at Canberra Technical College in 1942. Agostino reveals that in 1941, Charles Bean, then chair of the AWM, proposed to the leader of the Opposition, Joseph Collings, 'that Canberra be developed as an art centre, and that an art course be established at Canberra Technical College'.²⁸ The first classes offered were in freehand and model drawing and landscape painting. By 1952, the ACT Pastoral and Agricultural Association (P&A) began inviting Technical College staff to assist in an expanded arts and craft section at the P&A's annual show – held in the far

23 Brown relates what is arguably the first instance of a local artist presenting work that is particularly identifiable as Canberran when, in 1927, the artist Eirene Mort offered a book of her drawings to the FCC to mark celebrations of the opening of the federal parliament: 'She evoked,' writes Brown, 'an agrarian landscape of nostalgic decline, as if to set it against the coming city, and to confer its own legitimacy on the growing city' (Brown, 2014, p 90). In 2017, CMAG staged a comprehensive exhibition of Mort's work and life titled *Eirene Mort: a livelihood*, 30 September 2017 – 25 February 2018, curated by Dale Middleby.

24 *Canberra Times*, 19 July 1927.

25 From 1952 to c 1966, ASOC met at Riverside Centre, Barton; 2004–06, Canberra Technology Park, Watson; 2007 – July 2010, Unit 2, Geils Court, Deakin West; August 2010–, Blaxland Centre, 25 Blaxland Crescent, Griffith. Data collated from ACT Heritage Library visual arts ephemera collection.

26 Established 11 September 1945, the Canberra Photographic Society met from 1945–51 at 2CA Theatre, Mort Street, Civic; 1951–52, Institute of Anatomy, Acton; 1952–66, Riverside Centre; 1966–2005, Griffin Centre, Bunda Street, Civic; 2005–, PhotoAccess, Manuka. In the mid-1980s, the society was incorporated as Monaro Camera Club. Data collated from ACT Heritage Library visual arts ephemera collection.

27 The Canberra Art Club was incorporated as Canberra Art Workshop Group in 1975. The club met until 1982 at 8 Riverside Centre and then at B Block, Kingsley Street, Turner; 1982–84, ANU Arts Centre; 1984–2002, Studio 13, Kingston Art Space (later Leichhardt Street Studios), 71 Leichhardt Street, Kingston; 2002–09 M16, 16 Mildura Street, Fyshwick; 2010–, Blaxland Centre. Data collated from ACT Heritage Library visual arts ephemera collection.

28 Agostino, 2009, p 3.

northern suburb of Hall – envisaging that the ‘increased competition’ this would encourage would add to ‘cultural relations between rural and city sections of the population’.²⁹

The developments in the cultural scene accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s, evident in the fast-growing numbers of informal and formal groups and associations. Among the informal initiatives was the 1960s Wednesday Group, comprising women who, in the absence of extended families, came together in meetings that, while nominally social, provided a focus for creative initiatives. In the 1970s, the Thursday Group, which comprised around 15 women potters associated with the Craft Association of the ACT (formed in 1970), continued this example, as did the Majura Women’s Group (convened in 1981). Throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, these groups acted in much the same way as art societies, providing a sense of social cohesion and opportunities for creative community expression.

A key formal development was the growth of craft-based activities.³⁰ The Craft Association was established at the Canberra Theatre Centre (CTC) and, from the beginning, it displayed a high degree of activity, coordinating weekend workshops, discussions, slide and film evenings and an annual members’ exhibition.³¹ Professionalism was foregrounded, with members admitted after an assessment process requiring that work be of a ‘consistent high standard and ... [an] original design’.³² By October 1977, when the organisation held its inaugural annual exhibition at its new premises in Watson, a large contingent of 37 craft workers exhibited 170 works, marking ‘an important stage in the growth of the crafts in Canberra’.³³ This dynamic and enduring community organisation changed its name in 1973 to the Craft Council of the ACT and again in 1998 to Craft ACT: Craft and Design Centre.³⁴ By the mid-1980s, the demonstrated strength

29 *Canberra Times*, ‘Art and craft prizes at Hall’, 16 February 1952, p 2.

30 The Craft Association of Australia (NSW) was formed in 1964, signalling the beginning of a national focus for the many craft groups operating throughout the country. The peak body, the Craft Council of Australia, was convened in 1971 following the emergence of craft associations in all states and the ACT.

31 John Scollay, the ACT chapter’s inaugural president, opened the first members’ exhibition at Narek Galleries on Saturday 15 May 1971. See *Canberra Times*, ‘Diary dates’, 14 May 1971, p 9.

32 *Canberra Times*, ‘Tour of craft studios’, 8 August 1974, p 14.

33 Sasha Grishin, ‘A festival-like atmosphere’, *Canberra Times*, 8 October 1977, p 18.

34 The organisation was initially housed at 1 Aspinall Street, Watson. On 13 October 2000, it re-opened in North Building, Civic Square, London Circuit, Canberra City, in the same building as CMAG. Directors: 1973–74, Derek Wrigley (vice-president); 1974–78, Margaret Vanduren; 1978–86, Meredith Hinchliffe; 1986–88, Jane de Stoop; 1988–94, Joy Grove; c 1994–2000, Jenny Deves; 2000–03, Catrina Vignando; 2003–09, Barbara McConchie; March 2010 – end March 2016, Avi Amesbury. Data collated from ACT Heritage Library visual arts ephemera collection.

of the work by the organisation's members led arts consultant Timothy Pascoe to conclude that the crafts constituted the pre-eminent plastic arts form in Canberra.³⁵

Another sign of growing civic maturity was the increasingly broad range of employment on offer in the national capital. It therefore followed that many who accepted postings to Canberra from larger Australian cities and from overseas countries were educated and visually and culturally literate. Art societies had indeed 'accomplished useful endeavour' from the 1920s and, from the 1940s, the New South Wales (NSW) Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), along with its national successor the Arts Council of Australia (ACA), provided local access to travelling visual arts exhibitions. Missing from the visual arts landscape, however, were local commercial galleries and the opportunity they provided to view and purchase contemporary Australian visual art. By 1962, with the city's population at around 60,000,³⁶ Hendrieka (Riek) Le Grand judged the national capital ready for such an endeavour and established Canberra's first commercial art gallery, Studio Nundah, at her home on Macarthur Avenue, O'Connor.

The mother of Canberra sculptor Michael Le Grand, Riek Le Grand settled in Canberra in 1955 with her husband Henri, who had accepted a position in the early 1950s at Canberra Technical College. The couple were partners in a pottery business in Holland and immigrated to Sydney in 1950. Studio Nundah was renovated in 1965 by modernist architect and Canberra resident Theo Bischoff, and renamed Nundah Gallery. Bischoff's architectural features – which included cypress pine floors, matte-black ceilings and hidden lighting tracks – provided the young Michael Le Grand with 'an education in sophistication and taste' and memories of "artists tramping through the house" during his school years'.³⁷ Nundah Gallery, which closed in 1975, remained Canberra's only commercial gallery for 11 years, until Joyce (Joy) Warren founded Solander Gallery in 1973.

Joy Warren (1923–2015) settled in Canberra in 1952, with her architect husband Robert (Bob) Warren (1920–2002). Bob was 'enticed by the possibilities the relatively fledgling city offered' to design and build

35 See Pascoe, 1985, p 57.

36 1961 population: 58,828.

37 Helen Musa, 'Michael le Grand: sculptor or "boy racer"?', *World of Antiques and Art*, 81, August 2011 – February 2012, p 78.

‘good quality housing at affordable prices’.³⁸ Joy was a performer for 15 years with Canberra Repertory Society (Canberra Rep) (for which Robert designed many sets), and opened an eponymous public relations company. By 1973, when she established her gallery at 2 Solander Court, Yarralumla,³⁹ Canberra’s population had reached 173,306. Warren’s background in business and public relations helped to ensure the gallery’s success and, in June 2013, Solander Gallery celebrated 40 years of continuous operation. A talented self-promoter, Warren recalled on this 40th anniversary that:

we had absolutely nothing to look at, not from the government, no National Gallery, no National Portrait Gallery, nothing like that. If you wanted to see art, you had to come to Joy’s place ... It has been my aim and privilege to bring top Australian painters from all over Australia to the capital.⁴⁰

This talent for self-promotion resulted in the promulgation of the erroneous fact, oft-repeated in Warren’s obituaries, that Solander Gallery, as opposed to Studio Nundah/Nundah Gallery, was the first commercial gallery in Canberra.

It was a testament to the large segment of Canberra’s population who could be considered wealthy, established and visually literate, that Warren was able to show and sell Indigenous art as it contemporaneously emerged from Australia’s Western Desert, as well as continuously show the majority of Australia’s mid-career and established artists. In addition, she exhibited ‘Papua New Guinean, Indonesian, African, Eskimo, Turkish, Mexican, Peruvian, Indian and Japanese art ... some of the earliest exhibitions of such art to be held in the nation’s capital’.⁴¹

Ruth Prowse’s Gallery Huntley joined Nundah and Solander galleries in 1974. Prowse (1920–2005) settled in Canberra in 1959 with her husband, Keith, who accepted a job with the Department of Primary Industry.

38 John Farquharson, ‘Warren, Robert George (Bob) (1920–2002)’, *Obituaries Australia*, oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/warren-robert-george-bob-1002, accessed 2 April 2012.

39 From August 1986 – 1997, Solander Gallery was located at 36 Grey Street, Deakin; May 1997 – closure in 2014, 10 Schlich Street, Yarralumla.

40 Joy Warren, quoted in Sally Pryor, ‘40 years since the day art came to town’, *Canberra Times*, 29 June 2013, www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/40-years-since-the-day-art-came-to-town-2013-0628-2p33h.html, accessed 2 July 2014.

41 Sasha Grishin, quoted in Sally Pryor, ‘Canberra farewells Joy Warren, doyenne of the local art scene’, *Canberra Times*, 5 January 2015, www.canberratimes.com.au/act-news/canberra-life/canberra-farewells-joy-warren-doyenne-of-the-local-art-scene-20150105-12i598.html, accessed 8 November 2015.

She worked variously as a nurse at the Canberra Hospital, a secretary at the British High Commission and at ANU. A degree in zoology and cell biology at that institution was followed by her enrolment as a PhD candidate. In 1974, the year after Warren opened Solander Gallery, Prowse left her PhD and established Gallery Huntley at her home in Savage Street, Campbell, where, for the next 30 years, she exhibited and sold Australian and international art and built 'an extensive private collection'.⁴² Gallery Huntley closed in 2005. Prowse had a lasting influence on the development of a local contemporary arts practice; she often travelled to Europe where she met printmaker Jorg Schmeisser (1942–2012), and Gallery Huntley represented both Schmeisser and printmaker Petr Herel before their respective appointments to CSA as head of the Printmaking Workshop (in 1977) and head of the Graphic Investigation Workshop (in 1979). According to Sasha Grishin, the inaugural head of the ANU Department of Fine Art (established 1977), Prowse 'played an important role as conduit' in encouraging both artists to settle in Canberra.⁴³

Abraxas Gallery also opened in 1974 (mid-1974–end 1978), in La Perouse Street, Manuka. Founded by Susan Stanton and Lindsay Moloney, it was considered 'more radical'⁴⁴ than other Canberra galleries, providing the only opportunity, at that time in the city, to view conceptual, post-object art contemporaneously with galleries in southern capitals. Many Australian artists, including Gary Shead, Jenny Watson, Keith Looby and Richard Larter, held exhibitions there early in their careers. Stanton and Moloney also held monthly meetings at the gallery from 1976 to discuss issues such as 'art and art criticism', 'radicalism and art' and 'sociology and the arts'.⁴⁵ In 1975, Ron and Betty Beaver established their eponymous Beaver Galleries at their home in Red Hill, specialising mainly in three-dimensional craft works. During the 1980s, Beaver Galleries moved into its current location comprising four galleries under one roof, designed by the Beavers' architect son, Ross. Since 1991, under the second-generation ownership of son Martin and his wife Susie, Beaver Galleries has exhibited a broad range of Australian artists working in various media and at various stages of their careers.

42 Deborah Clark, 'The legacy of Ruth Prowse', *Canberra Museum and Gallery*, www.liveguide.com.au/Events/736280/Ruth_Prowse/The_Legacy_of_Ruth_Prowse_2012, accessed 10 November 2015.

43 Sasha Grishin, 'A gift our city can savour', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 March 2012, www.smh.com.au/entertainment/a-gift-our-city-can-savour-20120312-1uubu.html, accessed 11 November 2015.

44 Sonja Kaleski, 'City's private galleries versus keeping art for the people', *Canberra Times*, 3 December 1981, p 29.

45 Peter George, 'For art's sake', *Canberra Times*, 29 April 1976, p 3.

The last of the important commercial galleries to open in Canberra during this period was Judith Behan's Chapman Gallery in 1976. Behan (1934–2008) moved to Canberra with her husband Ron, who was posted to the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in the early 1970s. When Ron was promoted to colonel and transferred to Melbourne, Behan chose to stay in Canberra with their two young children. Chapman Gallery opened in their home in Chapman, where she 'pioneered' the 'ethical and professional display' of Indigenous art.⁴⁶ She brought elements of taste and discrimination to exhibitions and became close to the artists she supported. The gallery remained open under her directorship until 2007 and for a further seven years under Behan's chosen successor, Kristian Pithie.

Between 1962 and 1976, therefore, six commercial art galleries opened in the city, five of these in the 1970s, and five of them initiated and run by women. Four of these women, arriving with husbands who were posted to or who chose to relocate to the national capital, came from various careers in other centres and in Canberra. In addition, three of the women – Warren, Prowse and Behan – enrolled, after establishing their galleries, in art history courses at ANU under Grishin. Until the 1980s, they dominated the commercial art market in the nation's capital.

As well as these important commercial galleries, a number of smaller galleries opened and closed during the period. The first of these, the Centre Gallery, was operated by Dr Darcy Williams from 1958 to 1961.⁴⁷ This was the first instance of Canberra's penchant for home-based galleries, a predisposition that in 1984 would lead the NCDC to release a draft proposal concerning the location of art galleries in residential areas.⁴⁸ Anna Simons Gallery was registered from the early 1960s until c 1977 and active prior to 1967 and from 1975 to 1977.⁴⁹ Gallery A (Canberra) opened in the Town House Motel in 1964 and closed after 1966, and Macquarie

46 From c 1984 to 2006, Chapman Gallery was located at 15 Beaumont Close, Chapman; 1976 – c 1984, 31 Captain Cook Crescent, Griffith; 2007, re-opened at 1/11 Murray Crescent, Griffith. Directors: 1976–2006 Judith Behan; 2007 – 31 October 2013, Kristian Pithie. Sasha Grishin, 'Canberra's visual arts landscape: an art critic's view', *Art Monthly Australia*, 259, May 2013, p 28.

47 Centre Gallery was located at 33 Ainslie Avenue, Civic, just off London Circuit.

48 See Chapter 2.

49 The Anna Simons Gallery was initially located at Simon's home in Campbell, then at CTC Playhouse, where Simons also managed Macquarie Galleries Canberra. In 1969 the gallery moved as Macquarie Galleries to 23 Furneaux Street, Forrest, and remained there when Macquarie Galleries withdrew in 1972; it closed c 1977 (deregistered 21 February 1977). Data extrapolated from ACT Heritage Library visual arts ephemera collection.

Galleries Canberra was established in 1965 and closed after 1978.⁵⁰ Macquarie Galleries hosted Canberra artist Rosalie Gascoigne's inaugural exhibition in 1974 and was closely associated with both Anna Simons, who directed Macquarie Galleries from 1965 to 1975, and Macquarie Galleries Sydney. Further dedicated gallery spaces included the Australian Sculpture Centre, which opened on 5 June 1966 (Donald Brook exhibited there that year);⁵¹ Narek Galleries (from 1972);⁵² and Fantasia Galleries⁵³ (established in 1973), which hosted Australia's foremost feminist artist Vivienne Binns' first Canberra exhibition, *Experiments in vitreous enamel – silkscreened portraits of women*, in May 1977.⁵⁴ Arunta Galleries was active from 1973,⁵⁵ as was ceramicist Hiroe Swen's Pastoral Gallery,⁵⁶ with Lasseters Gallery (from 1975),⁵⁷ Griffith Gallery⁵⁸ and La Perouse Gallery (active between 1976 and the end of 1980).⁵⁹

The Canberra exhibition scene was extremely diverse during the 1960s and 1970s. As well as the six important commercial galleries and the fluctuating numbers of smaller galleries, a variety of non-dedicated exhibition venues arose prior to and during these decades. Prior to 1960, occasional venues included the 2CA Theatre (established in 1943), the Riverside Gallery (active from the 1950s to 1966) and Wesley Uniting Church (Wesley Centre – founded in 1955). Canberra's large civic buildings provided important exhibition spaces in the 1960s, including the Albert Hall, the ANU (from 1963) and the CTC (from its opening on 24 June 1965). Within CTC were the Playhouse Gallery,

50 From 1965–67, Macquarie Galleries Canberra exhibited at Canberra Theatre; 1969–72, Macquarie House, 23 Furneaux Street, Forrest; 1976–77, 35 Murray Crescent, Manuka. Director: 1965 – c 1972, Anna Simons.

51 The Australian Sculpture Centre was located at 83 Dominion Circuit, Deakin. Director: Lesta O'Brien.

52 Narek Galleries was originally located at Old Tanja Church, 1140 Bermagui Road, Tanja, via Tathra, NSW. Until June 1977, 23 Grey Street, Deakin; 16 July 1977 – c 1996, 'Cuppacumbalong', Naas Road, Tharwa; 1996 – c 2001, Pialligo Plant Farm. Closed December 2004, reopened at Tanja.

53 Fantasia Galleries was firstly located in Scullin and then in Manuka, specialising in prints. Proprietor: Susan Gillespie.

54 As advertised in the *Canberra Times*, Saturday 8 May 1977, p 12. This exhibition was initially presented at the George Paton Gallery, under curator Kiffy Rubbo, in 1976. See Chapter 4 for an extrapolation of Binns' importance to Canberra's emerging artists.

55 Arunta Galleries was located on Limestone Avenue, Ainslie.

56 Pastoral Gallery was located at Bimbimbi, Old Cooma Road, via Queanbeyan. In 1974, Hiroe Swen started Bimbimbi Potters in the same location.

57 Lasseters Gallery was located at Rudd Street, Canberra City.

58 Griffith Gallery was located at 14 Bremer Street, Griffith.

59 La Perouse Gallery was located at 57 La Perouse Street, Manuka.

Canberra Theatre Gallery and Link Gallery.⁶⁰ In the 1970s, venues used for occasional exhibitions included the David Jones department store in the city centre (from 1971); Yarralumla Marine Centre (active from 1972 to c 1991); YMCA (for a brief period from 1971); Albert Hall; Deakin High School (from 1975); Tuffin's Music Studios (active from 1976); and John Curtin House and the National Jewish Centre (in 1978). Exhibitions held in these venues included those from local community groups, schoolchildren, special interest groups and travelling exhibitions.

In considering Canberra's galleries during the 1970s, it is important to note the role played by the opening of the National Gallery of Australia (NGA, then known as the Australian National Gallery), first mooted for 1974. The Commonwealth's commitment to building Australia's pre-eminent manifestation of the visual arts in Canberra compounded the difficulty of discerning the needs of local emerging visual artists within the national capital paradigm. The erroneous perception that local visual artists would be the best resourced in the country once the NGA opened gained currency as the 1970s progressed.

Another focus for emerging visual arts practice was the annual Civic Permanent Art Award created in 1971. In 1976, the award was won by Indigenous artist Trevor Nickolls. Nickolls' significance to the early exhibition calendar at BRG and to the trajectory of Urban Indigenous art in Australia is described in Chapter 4.⁶¹ A further indication of the growing health of the ACT as a locus for emerging contemporary arts and activism occurred in March 1975 when the Festival of Creative Arts and Sciences, which became known as the Down to Earth ConFest, was held at the Cotter River. This public expression of the countercultural movement brought many interstate activists and artists to Canberra, some of whom, such as BRG member Cherylynn Holmes, would return in the early 1980s to study at CSA.⁶²

60 CTC opened on 24 June 1965 in Civic Square, Canberra City. The Playhouse opened on 18 August 1965 and was rebuilt in 1998; Canberra Theatre Gallery was established in June 1966 and closed after 1978; Playhouse Gallery was established on 1 May 1969; the Link building opened in October 2006. Data collated from ACT Heritage Library visual arts ephemera collection.

61 See Chapter 6 for further information on Trevor Nickolls and *Dreamtime machinetime*.

62 See Chapter 4 for a fuller account of this period and the role played by Cherylynn Holmes.

Federal government commitment to public art from 1960

The NCDC was responsible for activation of the federal government's commitment to an ambitious public art program in the national capital. In 1961, with Canberra's population at 58,928, the commission unveiled the first major civic sculpture: a totemic 4-metre-high bronze titled *Ethos*, by Australian sculptor Tom Bass, centrally located in Civic Square. Its commission and placement can be seen as a symbolic articulation of Canberra as a future centre of enlightenment and culture.⁶³ Sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, *Ethos* was one of only a handful of public artworks present in Canberra in 1961. Other works swiftly followed at ANU, including bronze and iron screens and 'an abstract piece of sculpture in the courtyard of the Physics building'.⁶⁴

Menzies took a direct interest in the ACT's proposed public sculpture program. In September 1963, he requested information from Gordon Freeth, minister for the interior, about some 'proposals the NCDC had in mind for pieces of sculpture to be placed in Canberra'.⁶⁵ Freeth's reply enclosed notes from NCDC Commissioner Sir John Overall that detailed the commission's progress and thinking to date. Acknowledging a 'growing public interest in this and other arts', Overall explained that 'so far the Commission has done very little due principally to the difficulty in obtaining work which is considered suitable'.⁶⁶ Overall advised that he had sought the opinions of senior administrators including eminent art historian Sir Kenneth Clark; Sir William Holford, professor of town planning at University College, London; and Sir Colin Anderson, who the Menzies government invited to advise on Canberra's planning and development. Following this, Overall appointed a 'small committee of experts' to advise on the selection and design of sculptural works. These experts included director of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) (1942–56) Sir Daryl Lindsay; deputy vice-chancellor ANU and

63 'Sculpture and artworks in the ACT, policies and practices prior to 1982', NC-76/00122, Archives ACT.

64 John Overall, Notes, 18 September 1963, Personal Papers of Prime Minister Menzies, NAA M2576, 44, Canberra, p 39. Lithuanian artist Vincas Jomantas' sculpture, *Pursuit of scientific knowledge*, is located in the courtyard of the Physics building at the ANU.

65 Gordon Freeth, Minister of the Interior, letter to Sir Robert Menzies, Prime Minister, 20 September 1963, NAA M2576, 44, p 37.

66 Overall, Notes, NAA M2576, 44, p 39.

master of University House Arthur Trendall; Herald chair of fine arts at the University of Melbourne (1947–78) Joseph Burke; and dean of the Faculty of Architecture and professor of town and country planning at University of Sydney Denis Winston. The calibre of Overall's initial advisers and subsequent committee members indicates that the NCDC and the government were serious in their approach to public sculpture in the ACT. Menzies confirmed his interest by responding 'Could I have a talk with Mr Overall on this subject at some convenient time?'⁶⁷

In its sixth annual report of 1962/63, the NCDC explained that 'Sculpture, used with care and restraint, must add interest to buildings and landscape'.⁶⁸ The words 'care and restraint', and the careful selection of advisers, indicate a conservative, cautious but above all ambitious approach to public art in the national capital. Commissioner Overall would undoubtedly have felt great responsibility given the precedents the NCDC was setting and the personal interest of the prime minister.

From the end of the 1950s, commissioned artwork in all new ACT schools became 'a requirement stipulated in architectural design briefs'⁶⁹ – an enlightened innovation that showed the NCDC's commitment to widespread public art. The first of these, completed in September 1960, marked the entrance to Lyneham High School in Canberra's inner north. Painted by Sydney artist Cedric Flower, it comprised 24 square metres of murals 'depicting highlights of Australian history from first settlement', no doubt to encourage a national historical perspective among students.⁷⁰ The commitment to public art and sculpture was particularly important during the 1960s, both in service to the federal government's desire to build a worthy national capital and, in examples such as the commitment to art in schools, for the benefit of the local population. It was designed to encourage civic and national pride and arguably indicated that the government viewed the arts as integral to a balanced society.

67 RG Menzies to the Hon Gordon Freeth, note, 15 October 1963, NAA M2576, 44, p 36.

68 National Capital Development Commission, *Sixth annual report*, Canberra, 1962/63, p 17.

69 Ling, 2013.

70 *Canberra Times*, 'Artist finishes school murals', 13 September 1960, p 7.

Australia's Liberal governments have traditionally sought private investment in arts and cultural funding. Thus, the commission's hopeful – though unfounded – belief that the provision of public sculpture and art was among the 'opportunities for development open to private benefactors which the Commission hopes will be taken up in future'⁷¹ aligned with the government's wishes. The NCDC retained responsibility for the placement of public art until the beginning of the handover to self-government in 1989, when this responsibility devolved to the Commonwealth (within the parliamentary zone only) and successive ACT governments through the ACT Legislative Assembly.

Funding arts and culture in Canberra during the 1960s and 1970s

The delivery of funding to arts and cultural programs in Australia has historically been problematic, given the vast distances between the country's population centres. In Canberra, the nexus between the city's status as national capital and the cultural needs of its small local population created additional difficulties. On one hand, for the local population, Canberra was predominantly an urban/suburban community and a regional centre. On the other hand, as national capital, it was the locus of national governmental, administrative and, increasingly, national cultural functions. Explicitly understood in these national cultural functions was that Canberra would begin to reflect a national identity of excellence in arts and culture, both to the rest of Australia and internationally.

The problem throughout the 1960s and 1970s was that the population was simply too small to sustain the national flagship companies that the federal government envisaged as appropriate for the national capital. From the establishment of the Australian Council for the Arts in 1967 until the advent of the Australia Council for the Arts in 1973 (Australia Council), the federal government's definition of 'the arts', almost without exception, was concerned entirely with the performing arts. In this, it closely followed the funding path previously set from 1954 by the Australian Elizabethan

71 NCDC, 1962/63, p 17.

Theatre Trust (AETT).⁷² The focus on funding performing arts had an important bearing on the developing visual arts sector in Canberra from the 1970s through to the completion of the handover to self-government in 1992. This narrow definition of the arts, and the insistence on funding the development in Canberra of flagship companies seen as appropriate for a national capital, would result in extreme reactions among local arts and cultural practitioners by the mid-1980s, as Chapter 2 reveals.

The historic and important exception to this vision of the arts as performance-based was the setting up of the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board in 1912.⁷³ This Board constituted the first commitment to federal government funding of visual arts in Australia and was the first instance of an Australian federal government's awareness, under Labor Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, that the power of visual art could be harnessed to building the nation's cultural memory. The board comprised artists and those working in the arts, and its purpose was to advise the Historic Memorials Committee (also established in 1912) on the commission and collection of portraits, by Australian artists, of notable Australian Government figures. It was replaced in 1973 by the Acquisition Committee for the proposed national gallery in Canberra, when its increased responsibilities

72 This is recognised historically, in Bill Hayden's response, in the House of Representatives on 2 November 1967, to the government's announcement that HC 'Nugget' Coombs, chairman of the AETT and governor of the Reserve Bank, would be appointed chairman of Aboriginal Affairs and of the new Australian Council for the Arts: 'I wish,' said Hayden, 'in no way to detract from the qualities of Dr Coombs as a central banker and public servant and one of Australia's most able public administrators. What I want to do is to bring to the Government's attention the tremendous amount of criticism that is being voiced concerning the way in which the affairs of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust have been handled and the concern of people involved in arts and letters.' Calling for a public enquiry into 'the state of arts and letters', Hayden concluded that '[t]he Government is virtually just establishing a body that will be manipulated by the same old brigade that has been running the Elizabethan Theatre Trust for too long. In addition, it is obvious that the Government's propositions in this field are related only to the performing arts. These are only one segment of the field of arts and letters in the Australian community' ('Aboriginals', House of Representatives, 26th Parliament, 2 November 1967, p 2629, *Historic Hansard*, built by Tim Sherratt, historichansard.net/hofreps/1967/19671102_reps_26_hor57/#debate-22, accessed 11 February 2015). For further examples of the continued emphasis on the performing arts see: John Gorton, 'Recommendations of the Australian Council for the Arts for 1969/1970', news release, PM No 85/1969, 3 December 1969, historichansard.net/hofreps/1967/19671102_reps_26_hor57/#debate-22, accessed 11 February 2015.

73 Ruth Bereson has written, in relation to the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board, that 'structures that were intended to link government's interests and the arts had been sewn into the fabric of government after Federation (1901)' ('Advance Australia – fair or foul? Observing Australian arts policies', *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 35, 1, 2005 pp 49–59).

included 'advi[sing] the Commonwealth government, building a national collection, providing works for official buildings in Australian and overseas, and for touring exhibitions'.⁷⁴

Historically, prior to the establishment of the Australian Council for the Arts in 1967, funding for the arts fell largely to two key organisations: the AETT, established in 1954, and the Arts Council of Australia (ACA) from 1966.⁷⁵ The first of these, the privately funded NSW-based AETT, can be usefully considered as the (only) forerunner to the Australian Council for the Arts, given its focus on excellence in the performing arts.⁷⁶ It was funded with £90,000 of private money (equal to \$3,188,076 in 2019) and £30,000 pounds from the federal government (equal to \$1,062,692.31 in 2019).⁷⁷ Nugget Coombs (from 1968 to 1974 inaugural chairman of the Australian Council for the Arts) was instrumental in raising the private funds that allowed the Trust to be convened as a non-profit public company limited by guarantee. Over the next 15 years, individuals and companies investing in the arts via the Trust were entitled to generous tax concessions.⁷⁸ Its funding provides an early example of the combination of government and private sector partnership funding for the arts that would become a foundational concept of arts funding from the 1975 Liberal government, under Malcolm Fraser, onward.

74 Margaret Seares, with assistance from John Gardiner-Garden, *Cultural policies in Australia*, Sydney, Australia Council, June 2011, p 8.

75 From 1943, when NSW adopted the British model of community arts delivery via the CEMA/ Arts Council of Australia, through to the late 1960s when the federal government – after reviewing funding mechanisms in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom – largely adopted the British model of professional arts funding delivery with the Australia Council, successive federal governments have looked to Australia's colonial forbear for arts funding models. Thus, broadly speaking, in Australia as in England, arts funding has been directed into these twin areas: firstly, what could be termed professional excellence, with a view to encouraging and supporting those art forms that would improve the national mindset and represent the country as broadly cultured and internationally educated; and, secondly, what could be termed domestic art and culture for the masses, or art and culture based in and run by and for communities. This latter model was exemplified through ACA.

76 The AETT was established following the visit to Australia of the British Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip. Bereson writes that it was 'a de facto arts agency [that] had a considerable impact on what was considered to be artistic production for one and a half decades' (Bereson, 2005, n 4).

77 Reserve Bank of Australia pre-decimal inflation calculator.

78 In October 1955, the premiere performance of *Medea*, the first production of the AETT-formed Australia Drama Company, was held in Canberra's Albert Hall, arguably in a nod to the city's national capital status. The hall's history is revealed in historian Lenore Coltheart's *Albert Hall: the heart of Canberra* (2014), wherein Coltheart defines the building as Canberra's 'unofficial town hall' (p 126) and, for 37 years, as its 'theatre and concert hall for professional artists performing in Canberra' (p 129). Albert Hall relinquished that status in 1965 with the opening of CTC, the first federally initiated performing arts centre completed in Australia.

The influence of the AETT was vast and its reverberations continue today, despite its liquidation in March 1991. Although it provided 'significant financial support for performing arts organizations through tax breaks and through Musica Viva, a semi-autonomous agency still in existence', it continually garnered strong criticism, including the lack of arts practitioners on the Trust's board.⁷⁹ Labor parliamentarian Bill Hayden was aware of the AETT's domination of 'national arts and letters', referring to it 'as a sort of ruthless ogre'.⁸⁰ And yet, the AETT wrought profound changes in Australia's cultural landscape, providing funding that would otherwise not have been available to performing arts companies. Additionally, it was responsible, in part or in whole, for the establishment of a number of major organisations, many of which are now deeply embedded in Australian cultural life.⁸¹

In the history of arts funding and development in Canberra, the second key organisation, the ACA, played a crucial role from 1948 to the end of the 1980s.⁸² It began in 1946 in NSW, and was modelled on the state's CEMA (established in 1943), the historical precursor of which was Britain's CEMA (established in 1940). It was comprised of various state and territory Arts Councils that, in 1966, became the ACA.⁸³ This national body received its first funding from the Australian Council for the Arts in 1969. The purview of the ACA was, as in United Kingdom, to provide artistic and cultural experiences for regional communities and schools. This was seen to be particularly important in Canberra because, although the federal government had renewed its commitment to developing the city as a national capital in 1958, its geographical location and small population confirmed it as a regional centre well beyond this date.

The ambitious idea of Canberra as a future national centre for the arts remained strong throughout the 1940s. This was indicated again when CEMA's president Sir Robert Garran changed the name of the ACT branch of the organisation to the Arts Council Australia (ACT Division) on

79 Bereson, 2005.

80 Hayden, 1967.

81 These included the Australian Opera Company in 1956, Trust Ballet Company in 1957, Young Elizabethan Theatre Players in 1958, Australian Ballet Foundation in 1961, Australian Ballet School in 1963 and, with the University of New South Wales (then the New South Wales University of Technology), the National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA) in 1959.

82 The ACA lapsed between 1953 and 1961 and was reconstituted in February 1962; it became the Arts Council (ACT) in 1993.

83 Britain's CEMA was established by the Pilgrim Trust, which was founded in 1930 with a £2 million endowment from American railroad entrepreneur Edward Harkness (see www.thepilgrimtrust.org.uk).

26 May 1948, at a time when Australia's state and territory Arts Councils were identified only by the name of their state or territory.⁸⁴ This also anticipated the Arts Council's national status by almost 20 years. Annual fees were modest: in 1948 an annual subscription increased to 5 shillings (approximately \$14 today).⁸⁵ Planned events for that year included a Brahms and Schubert festival at Albert Hall in June and a Great Britain handicrafts exhibition, accompanied by a travelling curator, in October. Although it showed a loss for the year of 3 shillings 8 pence (\$10.41), Garran explained that 'CEMA was not out to make money but to bring culture to the people'.⁸⁶

The ACA (ACT) was pivotal in the development of Canberra's cultural landscape over the next 40 years, with the exception of an eight-year period from 1953 to 1961 when the organisation lapsed. Through its committees, the organisation delivered musical, theatrical, dance and literary events; hosted diverse community meetings; organised summer schools and festivals such as Canberra Day celebrations and Canberra youth and folk festivals; involved itself with education and the arts, including dance and theatre; hosted varied community workshops and ran a diverse schools program, including school holiday programs. From 1969, it also redistributed small amounts of funding to a broad range of community arts organisations from funds allocated to it by the two iterations of the federal funding body the Australian Council for the Arts/Australia Council for the Arts.⁸⁷ The organisation consistently lobbied at federal and local level for increased funding to the arts. From its earliest days it ran a program of visual arts exhibitions, mostly travelling exhibitions hosted in turn by each of the state and territory Arts Councils.

The ACA's (ACT) most egalitarian venture was Sunday in the Park. This ran from the mid-1970s through the 1980s in Commonwealth Park. Beginning in 1975 with a six-week season over summer, the following year it extended to 10 weeks from the first Sunday of December, finishing in late March. More than 100,000 Canberrans, out of a population of 230,000, enjoyed the 10 weeks of entertainment during the 1976 summer season.⁸⁸ Over the period, Sunday in the Park remained a multicultural

84 CEMA in the ACT was established in October 1945 as ACT Division of CEMA.

85 \$55 using GDP (relative average income).

86 *Canberra Times*, 'Canberra division of Arts Council: new name for CEMA', 26 May 1948, p 2.

87 Records of the Arts Council of Australia, MS 4570, NLA (Canberra).

88 Mr Valentine McKelvie, administrator, ACT division of the Arts Council, quoted in *Canberra Times*, "'Sunday in the Park' praised', 26 October 1977, p 9.

affair with a cyclic array of various national dance troupes, plays, puppetry, folk music, jazz, circus, brass bands and stalls, and was at different times assisted with funding from the Department of the Capital Territory, the Apex Club of Ginninderra and the *Canberra Times*.⁸⁹

More than any single event over the two decades, Sunday in the Park revealed residents as avid consumers of a broad range of community-focused, local cultural products. This citywide pull towards the local remained at odds with the insistent desire of funding bodies, particularly throughout the 1980s, to develop and fund one 'flagship' company in each of the four core areas of dance, music, theatre and opera, in line with federal arts funding policy nationally. This desire to reflect excellence in performing arts in Canberra was concerned with the city as national capital space, and therefore as the face of national excellence in the arts. Arguably, this intention was flagged in 1965 when the first federal government-initiated performing arts centre in Australia, the Canberra Theatre Centre, was completed. By the 1980s, as Chapter 2 reveals, this disjunct between federal funding of Canberra arts in service to the national agenda and the increasing needs of local arts and cultural initiatives would reach an eruptive head.

Federal funding through the Australia Council for the Arts from 1968

Canberra's performance-based cultural organisations began to receive small amounts of funding from the Australian Council for the Arts' initial grants round in 1968. With a population of around 100,000, the city's performance venues then included Albert Hall and the new CTC.⁹⁰ The allocations were announced on 11 December 1968 and included \$3,200 to Canberra Rep, \$7,000 to Canberra's Spring Music Festival; and \$15,000 to the Canberra Theatre Trust to fund a visit from Sydney's flagship theatre company, the Old Tote Theatre. Canberra Rep's president, Ken Farnham, commented on the allocation to Canberra as 'welcome

89 In 1988, after an absence of two years, Sunday in the Park made a one-year return under the auspices of the Canberra Theatre Trust, funded with a grant from the Local Government Initiatives Grant Scheme as an Australian Bicentennial Authority project.

90 1966 population: 96,013.

only because it is more than Canberra has received previously'.⁹¹ From these small beginnings, funding amounts rose modestly over the next four years.⁹²

Funding also rose modestly immediately following the election of the Whitlam Labor in late 1972 when government announced allocations for 1973 that included \$20,000 to the Canberra Theatre Trust and \$6,000 to Canberra Rep. The press release announcing the grants is notable for Whitlam's inclusion of painting, craft work and sculpture as being among the 'diverse pleasures' that would ensure that 'the leisure time of all Australians will be enriched'. This intimated a changing federal focus from wholly performing arts-based funding to a broader, more holistic definition of arts and culture.⁹³

While the ACA's state divisions continued to receive grants from their state governments, the ACA's federal division, which was based in Canberra until 1971, was funded by the Australian Council for the Arts from 1970.⁹⁴ Over a four-year period, the division's funding rose from \$75,000 in 1970 to \$175,000 in 1973, following Whitlam's decision to 'give increased assistance to bodies like the Arts Councils which cater for the needs of country people'.⁹⁵ The increased funding supported costs associated with national administration, as well as the delivery of touring programs and regional arts programs into Canberra and throughout Australia, in line with the Whitlam government's desire to 'foster this general community interest [in the arts]'.⁹⁶

91 *Canberra Times*, 'Arts grants criticised', 13 December 1968, p 19.

92 Allocations for 1970 included \$15,000 to the Canberra Theatre Trust and \$3,500 to Canberra Rep, with the ACA's federal division, based in Canberra, receiving \$40,000 for administration and country touring programs and a further \$35,000 in reserve for future activities. In 1971, funding for the federal division increased to \$110,000, while funding for Canberra Theatre Trust remained at \$15,000 and Canberra Rep's funding increased to \$5,500. By 1972, the Canberra Theatre Trust was able to announce: 'During the year, there was a further increase in the trust's activities as an entrepreneur. Fourteen ventures were undertaken alone or in partnership with interstate managements compared with eight in the previous year. These were supported by the trust's cultural activities fund, replenished in January by the Australian Council for the Arts and the development fund' (*Canberra Times*, 'Theatre's runs could be longer', 28 November 1972, p 3).

93 *Canberra Times*, 'Major grants for the arts announced', 12 December 1972, p 3.

94 In 1969, the ACA was funded through the AETT, which was itself funded in that year by the new Australian Council for the Arts.

95 Gough Whitlam, 'Major grants for the arts', media release, 11 December 1972, pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-2740, accessed 14 February 2015.

96 Whitlam, 11 December 1972.

In his election policy speech of 13 November 1972, Whitlam flagged his intention to comprehensively overhaul the Australian Council for the Arts.⁹⁷ The renamed Australia Council for the Arts was set up as a new statutory body, 'to provide the direct and specialised administration which the arts require'.⁹⁸ It comprised seven boards, including, for the first time, the Visual Arts Board (VAB). These promising forward moves towards increased national and ACT federal arts funding were adversely affected from 1975 as the incoming Fraser Liberal government instituted cost-cutting measures across all sectors. One of these measures, however, provided new opportunities in the development of community arts.

Arts organisations that could demonstrate strong community engagement in Canberra benefited from successive federal government job creation initiatives from late 1976 onwards. These included, most importantly, the Community Youth Support Scheme (CYSS) created in 1976. The scheme was a critical factor in the development of contemporary arts practice in Canberra because it signalled the rise of the job creation enterprise Jobless Action.

Established in 1976, Jobless Action was a homegrown, highly effective, direct action provider of skills to disadvantaged and unemployed persons. Initially funded through the CYSS, the organisation was enabled through all iterations of federal community job creation programs to deliver short-term jobs, including art and craft programs, to the Canberra community.⁹⁹ Jobless Action quickly became a locus for passionate, creative, young social justice advocates, and a pivotal catalyst for the rapid growth of grassroots, youth-led music and collective arts enterprises from the late 1970s. Among its founding workers were Julian Webb, Annie Kavanagh and Jill Lang.

97 'We believe that the existing Commonwealth agencies should be brought within a single council set up by statute. The Council will be based on a number of autonomous boards with authority to deal with their own budget allocation and staff. The following boards would be established: Theatre arts (opera, ballet, drama); Music; Literary arts; Visual and plastic arts; Crafts; Film and television; Aboriginal arts. These boards would have substantial independence and authority to make decisions. Indeed, in their own field of responsibility they would be the major sources of initiative in policy and in communication with those involved in the Arts' (Gough Whitlam, 'It's time', Labor Party election policy speech, Blacktown Civic Centre, Sydney, 13 November 1972, whitlamdismissal.com/1972/11/13/whitlam-1972-election-policy-speech.html, accessed 24 May 2013).

98 Whitlam, 11 December 1972.

99 Successive programs were the Fraser government's Wage Pause Program (agreement made 7 December 1982) and the Bob Hawke's Labor government's Community Employment Program (CEP) (legislated 19 May 1983, with the program launched in August 1983). These two programs aimed to pause wage rises among the Australian public service.

Figure 4. One of many posters made at Megalo for Jobless Action. Artist unknown

Source. Megalo poster archives, reprinted with permission

The organisation's initiatives included employing young activist printmakers to produce socially motivated prints, posters and T-shirts advertising Jobless Action programs. Many of these printmakers were Jobless Action members and students of the first intake, in 1978, of the new CSA Printmaking Workshop. Jobless Action reflected a particular, identifiably Canberran do-it-yourself ethos in its needs-driven response to disadvantage that encouraged the growth of Canberra's unique, northern suburbs-based, homogenised subculture. This subculture went on to actively carve out, through a contemporary printmaking culture, a local identity among the principal rhetoric of federal government and national capital space. As described in Chapter 4, Jobless Action's significance was ongoing in the respective geneeses of Megalo and BRG in 1980 and 1981.

Lines of difference

In considering the broad factors that laid the groundwork for the growth of contemporary arts practice, one more crucial element was in play: the physical nature of Canberra. It was no coincidence that the new community-oriented arts/activists practices centred on the inner-north suburbs of Ainslie and Braddon.

The city's physical structure was set down in 1921, when WM Hughes' Nationalist Party government created the forerunner to the FCC, the Federal Capital Advisory Committee (FCAC). The FCAC's allocation of housing blocks led to the creation of artificial economic and social difference in the settlements to the north and south of the nominal city centre. Ainslie and Braddon, deemed workers' suburbs, were located to the north of the vast empty space that would, by 1963, contain the man-made Lake Burley Griffin. Building costs were set at £700 per quarter-acre (at that time the standard Australian house block) and an all-timber construction was allowed. In the suburb of Reid, still in the north but closer to the proposed Parliament House that hugged the inner southern perimeter, building costs for houses to accommodate skilled workers and mid-level public servants were set at the significantly higher rate of £1,000 and brick construction was mandated. Further to the south at Mugga Heights, where it was envisaged senior public servants would live, building sites increased to 3 acres with a rise in permissible building costs set at £3,500.¹⁰⁰ Manual labourers were housed under canvas in a number of small settlements south and north of the centre. Though these were conceived of as temporary structures, in reality they continued to house labourers and then a growing number of unemployed workers well into the 1950s.

The legacy of the initial land release may not have been deliberately intended but it was profound. By the late 1970s, the entrenched geographic, social and economic divide was inextricably linked to the growth of an homogenised subculture in the northern suburbs, and the consequent birth of a politicised, contemporary arts practice, foregrounded through poster and printmaking.

100 I am indebted to Nicholas Brown, who details these codes and costs on p 70 of his marvellous book *A history of Canberra* (2014).

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