THE MARTIN GALLERY: Images of an era

Memories of a genesis

It was a time when Flinders Street was still the main centre of activity for a much smaller Townsville; when buildings with curvy and sculpted facades lined the street, either side of a row of tall palms, standing in explosions of their own stripy shadows. There were department stores like McKimmins (which became David Jones), and Carroll's, and local drapers Inglis Smith's, a few cafes and one whole block taken up by the Municipal Buildings housing specialty shops, the Town Hall, a pub and the Theatre Royal. Its upper floor was embraced by a seemingly endless lacy veranda only interrupted by several stately arched entrances. Sadly, this was all demolished in the late 1970s to make way for the Holiday Inn and Northtown. The General Post Office was on the corner; it became The Brewery, while the real brewery, along Flinders Street West, became The Venue. The Courthouse indeed housed the Magistrate's Court. It was also a time when the Strand was only just a road between the beach and buildings, long before 100,000 trees were planted, with most of Townsville a dry and dusty place — but by no means a cultural desert.

As early as the 1870s Townsville had a strong cultural community in which the present has its roots. In terms of infrastructure, it had the combined School of Arts and Her Majesty's Theatre — now, with much alteration, the Anne Roberts Auditorium, the main venue for Dance North. Dame Nellie Melba and Anna Pavlova performed there, the latter inspiring Anne Roberts to a life dedicated to dance. Among others she started the NQ Ballet and Dance Company which morphed into Dance North, when Cheryl Stock was director; full circle, you could say!

The Theatre Royal and the Wintergarden were added in the early 1900s. The latter featured early cinema with live performances during reel changes. These two and earlier open-air theatres were demolished.

Townsville saw performances of diverse local groups from the 1870s onwards. There were dramatic societies, minstrels, and a philharmonics society. The showings ranged from grand opera, plays and variety shows to musical comedy. One local troupe toured the world. Visiting companies performed Shakespeare, classical concerts, even a Chinese opera. Closer to the present several earlier amateur companies combined to form the Townsville Little Theatre; the Matchbox Theatre became the Stage Door Theatre; the New Moon began in the 1980's. Jean Pierre Voos' Tropic Line merged with the University's Hard Sun to become Tropic Sun, which in turn became Full Throttle and inspired TheatreiNQ. There was great collaboration between the visual and performing arts; I remember designing catalogues and logos and painting sets with colleagues and students.

Townsville in the past was clearly well serviced with performing arts spaces, but not with permanent facilities for the visual arts, despite its being the first town in Queensland to start an Art Society (1886), its holding regular eisteddfods from the 1890s onwards, and its hosting of famous visitors such as Tom Roberts and Julian Ashton, who painted Castle Hill around 1885- now in the City of Townsville Art Tucker Collection. In the 1950s a group of artists welcomed Russel Drysdale. They had come together to have exhibitions which for lack of premises were held outside, under the 'Tree of Knowledge', which was "Quite Parisienne", Dr. Petherbridge commented at the time. The tree stood on the corner diagonally opposite where the Perc Tucker Regional Gallery is now. Another full circle!!

Indeed, there were no permanent facilities, despite urgings to the Townsville City Council: "...as Townsville increases in size and popularity... we find it regrettable that our city lacks an Art Gallery..." the secretary of the earlier Art Society wrote in 1956.

In the early 1960s, Townsville was going through a growth spurt. This influx was due to general economic expansion, growth in the mining industry and the building of Lavarack army base. Especially relevant to the field of culture was the establishment in 1961 of the Townsville University College, and in 1969 of the Townsville Teachers' College (which became the Townsville College of Advanced Education). In 1970, the University College became James Cook University of North Queensland. The University and the College of Advanced Education amalgamated in 1982.

People from all over the world came to Townsville, from the main centres of Australia, from the UK and various countries in Europe, to take up positions at these institutions. Accustomed to visual arts and galleries as part of daily life, and expecting as much, they contributed greatly to the development of a visual arts culture. Significant numbers of artists as well as prominent and influential figures in business and politics, joined the earlier Art Society to form the Townsville Art Society in 1962. This Society became the main lobbying body for visual arts infrastructure in Townsville.

I first met this remarkable group of people when I joined in 1962. I will name some among them who contributed most vitally to visual arts culture in Townsville. Barbara Douglas, originally from Adelaide, was a great natural painter, a fibre artist and a collector of art; Michael Dulics from Eastern Europe, who published a book of exquisite and quirky drawings of Townsville buildings; Eddie Mabo (yes 'the' Eddie Koiki Mabo) was a watercolourist and June Power was a painter. Bette Hays had trained at East Sydney Technical College; Paddy Marlton from Melbourne ran a studio in West End; Betty Pugh's husband, as manager of Walpamur paints, supplied us with pots of sample pigments (art materials came by mail order); Alison Annesley, who had lived in the US with her JCU lecturer husband, was a water colour enthusiast, organising 'clothes line' exhibitions outdoors. Anne Willis from the UK, staff member at the CAE, was a highly contemporary inspiration to us all; and Gay Woodworth was an energetic modernist painter. Cyril Beale, a more traditional painter, opened Townsville Art & Framing, making access to art supplies a lot easier; and Berris Morelli successfully lobbied for TAFE to have an art course.

Most importantly – there was Ron Kenny, an experimental painter, generous with his connections with the wider art world in Australia. The foundation lecturer, then head of Zoology at the university, Ron formed a vital link between the art community and the University, together with strong office bearers of the society, such as Helene Marsh (one of his former students) and Carol Kenchington, a JCU librarian. Ron's contributions to the development of art appreciation and infrastructure in Townsville cannot be overestimated. During his 11 years, on and off, as president of the Art Society he was instrumental in bringing more than a dozen major exhibitions to Townsville: loan exhibitions from Queensland University and Queensland Art Gallery; the Blake Prize and others of similar stature; Esso and Peter Stuyvesant collections, of which "*Art of the Space Age*" in 1969 amazed with newness of materials and forms, strips of metal, hitherto unexplored colour juxtapositions and imagery. There was no internet or quick glance at iPhones.

The Art Society successfully lobbied businesses, the Pacific Festival Committee and the Townsville City Council to offer major art prizes. Big name judges such as John Olsen, Laurie Thomas and Hall Missingham came up, some also gave talks and workshops. An art rental service was set up in 1970.

In consultation with Vice-Chancellor Ken Back, Ron Kenny initiated the University Art Collection, at the same time urging the University to invite prominent artists such as David Aspden and Ron Robertson Swann to be 'artists in residence'. The Townsville City Council was lobbied to provide a Visual Arts Director, funded partly by the Visual Arts Board. Influential board members flew up to assess the quality of the art scene. We must have passed muster, because the position was established for a couple of years. In 1963, The Townsville Art Society was given a semi-permanent

studio in a wonderful wartime wooden barracks at Camp Magnetic on Harbour Board land, roughly where Mariners North is now, instead of downstairs at Adult Education near the present ABC studios. A salty sea breeze would rattle the wooden louvres, which diffused the glaring daylight all around the studio. Because it was destined for demolition we could make as much mess as we liked. Still, a permanent, prestigious regional gallery was needed.

All the travelling exhibitions and displays by local artists had to be held in 'borrowed' spaces, from churches, furniture stores and business premises to the School of Arts or the refectory at the University's Pimlico campus. The Townsville Art Society began lobbying the Townsville City Council for a regional gallery in 1969, even engaging in fundraising, but it wasn't until more than a decade later that the Perc Tucker Regional Gallery opened.

It was clear there was an urgent need for a major regional gallery. But also, Townsville needed a private commercial gallery with a proper gallerist, a lover of art, in charge. This need was met in 1972, when pharmacist Ralph Martin opened the Martin Gallery, assisted by his wife Margaret and young daughters, Elizabeth and Hilary. Not that it was a calculated move on his part. It was more like a conspiracy between extraordinary circumstances — a bored chemist and a cyclone — that created one of the most exciting developments in visual art up to that time.

During his boarding school days Ralph had developed a keen interest in the visual arts. In the school library he feasted on art history publications with good large colour reproductions, not common at the time. So imagine the great impact this would have had on a young person. He learned copper enamelling and made a number of very beautiful matrixes of coloured rectangles. Practical considerations, though, steered him towards a course in pharmacy.

Established in one of a set of lovely old shops — which still exists today right opposite Umbrella Studio — Ralph became a well-respected pharmacist. But there was an unfulfilled part of him, which was noticed by one of the supply companies' representatives with whom he had more than the average banter during business calls. This person, Ralph tells me, remarked: "*You are really bored to tears in this shop, aren't you? Why don't you put something in the window... a picture or something so you can have something interesting to talk about?"* — advice he followed. It so happened that Cyclone Althea struck soon after... creating general havoc in Townsville on Christmas Day 1971, and damaging the back of the shops. Some tenants hastily moved out, and Ralph discovered that a storeroom in the shop next door was a lovely well-lit space with access from the front and back. He decided to move to that shop next door and start an art gallery in the back room while running the pharmacy in the front and — hey presto! — the Martin Gallery was born. And so it was that this tiny space behind a chemist shop became the kernel from which the Townsville art scene expanded.

Meanwhile, in the rest of the world quite a different battle went on in the arts: between abstraction and representation. In Australia this had been sparked by *Direction I,* an exhibition of abstract work influenced by European modernism at the Macquarie Galleries in Sydney in 1956. The *Sydney 9* formed in 1960 as defenders of abstraction. Similarly in Brisbane the Contemporary Art Society (CAS) was formed in 1961, with leadership from Roy Churcher and Mervyn Moriarty, among others. The Antipodeans in Melbourne sided with figuration/representation. Ron Kenny's network extended to members of these groups, to whom he introduced Ralph. Many exhibited here, came to judge art prizes or give workshops, creating pathways for the exchange of ideas. Contemporary art found perhaps more acceptance here, possibly due to Townsville's anti-establishment attitudes, and the cosmopolitan character of the art community. To deny any controversy would be wrong; a major debate raged in 1974 when Leon Paroissien chose a purely abstract and deceptively simple work titled *Cajun* by John Firth–Smith to win the Townsville Art Prize. It involved editorials and letters to

the editor in the Townville Daily Bulletin lasting for several weeks. It was a test of maturity, but also a testimony to the level of engagement of the whole community.

During this period Australian culture was shaking off its British heritage, looked towards America, then finally started to assert its own identity. No better way to trace this quest than in the arts. The Sydney Opera House was built and the national anthem changed to *Advance Australia Fair*! Overseas influences in art such as Abstract Expressionism, Colour Field, Hard Edge, Post-painterly Abstraction were adapted to the Australian social and physical environment. The 1970s in Australia also saw a big counter-culture movement, a belief in self-sufficiency and alternative lifestyles, which led to an interest in crafts in general, with ceramic, printmaking and weaving studios springing up all over Australia.

Scrutinizing the exhibition program of the Martin Gallery over the years, it is clear that both wall work and crafts, especially pottery and printmaking, were well represented. Ralph gave a printmaking prize for some years as part of the Townsville Art Prize. In paintings and works on paper, a balance was struck between complete abstraction and representational painting; and many sat, as Ian Fairweather would say, on a tightrope between the two: what Pat Hoffie called 'figural expressionism'. To make these movements visible to those who were not necessarily subscribed to one of the few art magazines such as *Art and Australia*, the Martin Gallery was the perfect venue — the internet had not yet exploded into being everyone's encyclopaedia.

The Martin Gallery was by no means the only gallery in Townsville. Several short–lived galleries had been combined with other interests such as picture framing, fashion or theatre. But another major figure had a hand in nurturing cultural awareness: Paul Tonnoir. His main focus was antiquarian books and oriental rugs. Paul restored several heritage buildings — making their beauty visible at a time when people were knocking such buildings down. His restorations included his residence Kardinia, originally the first Japanese consulate in Australia, and helping with the National Trust houses in the Castling Street Heritage precinct. In 1979 *Magnetic House* in Flinders Street, freshly restored, became the venue for the antiquarian business which Paul operated with his wife June, a professional librarian. They ran a gallery above the main premises. It also housed the *Mary Who* bookshop, modelled on the very trendy Mary Martin bookshop in Adelaide; as well as a contemporary interior design shop, June Power's *Alkira Bazaar,* showing what was exciting in decor; *Inspired Fibres* run by Andi Cairns completed the set. Next door Christy Meyers operated a Gallery showing Aboriginal art and artefacts. It became another cultural hub, at the opposite end of Flinders Street to the Martin Gallery.

"You could walk from The Martin Gallery to Magnetic House…and feel the murmurings of the sophistication of a big city…" — Ainslie Vance, Innisfail

Jacqui and Bob Herring, the latter a lecturer in Indonesian, started a shop in that area too, importing rare and genuine batiks from Java and Bali; some of these unique pieces were shown at the Martin Gallery*;* the Herrings' daughters, then in their teens, served drinks at openings. This shows the mutual respect which in many ways has always characterised the Townsville art scene... an atmosphere of respect and collegiality, perhaps inherited from of the days of Ron Kenny and Barbara Douglas. This in my view gives it its strength and vitality.

When the Martin Gallery finally closed, Paul Tonnoir became instrumental in continuing its legacy. When he moved his antiquarian business to Solander House in Flinders Street West in 1989, he sponsored Anne Carter as director of a serious private gallery upstairs, named Flinders Gallery, where from 1991 onwards most of the Martin Gallery's stable of artists could continue to show their work for another sixteen years. That is another story begging to be told.

Dr Anneke Silver

I have elaborated on what went before, and the local context, because it shows that Townsville's cultural milieu developed over a long period of time, as a result of the contributions of many people.

The Martin Gallery opened on 19 July 1972. The small space, perhaps no more than 6 x 8 metres, was beautifully appointed. Good lighting from a suspended frame lit the old handmade brick walls painted a neutral white. There was wall-to-wall Honan matting (who in the 70s did not decorate with Honan matting!!?- it was super trendy). Heavy raw timber shelving, supported by concrete blocks, lined the wall below the paintings to display pottery and sculptural objects. That small space hidden behind the chemist shop had a special aura; it was a quiet, almost secret, space. The work was always carefully hung, never crowded. You could be there for ages looking, contemplating and sometimes Ralph would pop his head around the corner... and make just a few insightful comments.

Opening nights attracted large crowds. Invitations were simple, on folded A5 coloured card; artist's name or signature on the front, statements on the inside pages... and always the distinctive logo. People gathered around the back where drinks were served under a large fig tree. Under the twinkling lights hanging from the tree a very hip crowd could be seen. It was an era in which Australia had discovered red wine, Zen Buddhism and Modernism.

People delighted in being part of a scene that seemed to espouse the changing attitudes and values of the period, overlapping the Whitlam/Fraser/Hawke eras: social change, search for a national identity, questioning conventions, the latter especially embodied in the art on show. It was a time when males wore kaftans or long shirts and – not to forget—flared trouser legs, lamb chop whiskers and longish or very long hair...think Cat Stevens, Leonard Cohen, and James Taylor. Long loose skirts, Indian gear, ethnic prints and loads of beads typified female wear. There were Nana Mouskouri and Joan Baez lookalikes. The Martin Gallery became a scene where it was good to be, and to be seen: 'spectamur spectandi' as the old Romans would have it!

"It was the pulsing heart of art in Townsville. There was a fellowship, it brought us together made life worthwhile." — June Power.

The opening exhibition combined large abstracted landscape interpretations by Ron Kenny in watercolour; stained canvas colour field paintings by Anne Willis; Jim Thomson's almost monochromatic traditional pieces; Mervyn Moriarty's mesmeric colour experiments on canvas and my gestural *Summer Grasses*. Ceramics by Arthur and Carol Rosser graced the shelves. It was a promise of things to come: contemporary experimental work, one traditional artist, artists from Townsville, a big name from elsewhere and a balance between male and female as well as craft items.

Regular reviews appeared in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* and other local papers, written by, among others, John Massey and Anna Bock; the latter two were serious critics who did not mince words. Ralph had connections that made sure the reviews would be published.

It was the beginning of a densely packed program of exhibitions, often less than a month apart, for the next sixteen years. A huge variety of styles, media and art forms was presented, from painting to photography, printmaking and drawing to ceramics, sculpture and wood carving, as well as ethnic fabrics, fibre arts, copper work, glass, weaving and handmade jewellery. The range of work that was shown clearly reflected the national trends of discovering modernism, and arts and crafts. International, national, local and Aboriginal art practices were showcased.

Ralph made regular forays further afield, following up introductions by Ron Kenny; it snowballed from there with referrals to other artists. Many artists became personal friends. His daughter Hilary recalls: 'When Dad had been on one of his trips it was so exciting to unpack what he had collected'. In my view it is this focused effort to bring to Townsville what was exciting and trend-setting that made the Martin Gallery different from others. Ralph himself said "*I wanted to bring something that had never been seen before in Townsville*". Indeed, often when installing a show people would pop in, impatient to see what might be happening next.

"Used to pop into the Gallery whenever I could. It was a breath of fresh air." — Rachel Matthews-Berker

Although the Gallery began in the small space behind the dispensary, in 1980 Ralph, encouraged by Margaret, did away with the chemist shop. In a mammoth effort, with help from family and friends, both spaces were combined into a continuous gallery, the slightly different levels connected through a step up under the elegant existing colonial arch. In the former pharmacy space, paintings hung above custom-made showcases with ceramics and art objects on top. A treasured antique desk looked perfectly in place. It meant solo shows could continue while there was a permanent mixed exhibition in the front. Part of the permanent display was handcrafted jewellery. It was an era when males started to wear jewellery, and Ralph often wore a magnificent pendant. Interestingly, one of Ralph's daughters became a silversmith, while the other is a leading figure in youth drama.

With around 150 artists and more than 200 exhibitions, it is clear that not everything can be shown in this project, but an overview is appended for the sake of completeness. A selection had to be made on the basis of frequency and impact, a selection that will demonstrate the wide variety of media, styles, concepts and subjects that emanated into Townsville's collective artistic consciousness.

To summarise, and elaborate later: the first four years were characterised by showcasing the best that Townsville itself had to offer combined with respected artists from further afield.

When the first year of a Certificate of Art course was established at TAFE in 1975, Townsville's art community was enlarged by a number of highly trained professionals and interested students, many of whom started to exhibit with Ralph. TAFE's location, where YWAM is now, just one block away from the Gallery, contributed greatly to the Gallery's being part of the College vibe, and vice versa. When the course grew to three years, some graduates had their first solos there, showing to a now quite informed public. Students grouped together or with staff members; end of year exhibitions became a regular feature. All the while Ralph continued to show Townsville artists as well as the spoils of his trips. The variety of media was very helpful to the various disciplines springing up at the college, an experience that was extended further when the Perc Tucker Regional Gallery opened in 1981.

"The Martin Gallery gives Townsville people the opportunity to experience the current work of quality artists... Such exhibitions are important, not only for those who like keeping in touch, but for art students of all ages..." — Adrienne Smith, Townsville Bulletin

Now for a more detailed look at what was shown and what was selected for this exhibition...

Abstraction made a big impact, with colour and form experimentations by Brisbane artists and Contemporary Art Society members Mary Norrie, Irene Kindness and Irene Amos, all either taught or influenced by Roy Churcher and Mervyn Moriarty. Their intuitive statements with colour evoked not merely the human figure or landscapes, but an experience of pictorial space. Closely associated with

them are Beverley Budgen and Pam Dolinska. All these artists have much in common, breaking the boundaries of convention with varying degrees of abstraction. References to recognisable subjects are more prominent in the work of the latter two; Budgen using bold colour juxtaposed with evocative muted tones, while Dolinska plays with the human form, taking clues from Cubism. The experiments in abstracted texture by CAS member Veda Arrowsmith resonate to this very day. The work in this exhibition won a Townsville Art Prize.

John Rigby, trained in Brisbane and Sydney, is one of Queensland's iconic painters. A true colourist, he was able to render quite recognisable subjects in pure colour, knowledgably structuring tone into colour in the manner of the French *Fauves*. He was represented in group and mixed exhibitions.

John Coburn, a national name — born in Ingham — showed carefully considered colour abstractions of natural forms on plain coloured fields, in paintings and screen prints. He had designed the *Curtain of the Sun* for the Sydney Opera House, installed in 1973 — all part of the groundswell in Australia to establish its own identity. John's imagery was part of this, and with this solo show we became connected with it, such a big name in our little gallery! Mind again no social media; few viewers would have experienced the vibrancy of John's colours firsthand. For many it may well have been their introduction to typical Australian abstraction: his stylised shapes referencing our own environment.

Other meaningful experiences with abstraction came with Desiderius Orban, born in Hungary and practising in Sydney. Of great age — he lived to be over 100 — he had physically rubbed shoulders with Picasso, Matisse, Braque, Gris and Gertrude Stein, and carried all that discourse with him to Australia in 1938. He won the Blake Prize for Religious Art in 1971. He defined the traditional versus the modern debate by saying that there are artists and painters: the latter are obsessed with realism, the former transform reality. His mention of Zen moments of enlightenment and his mystical works speak of a highly spiritual person.

Completely different, equally abstract and brimming with vigour and sensitivity, were prints and paintings shown by Bruno Leti, born in Rome, trained in Melbourne and widely travelled.

Vita Endelmanis was born in Latvia and trained in Tasmania. She has a great affinity with snow, rendering what could easily be a monochromatic field of white into a feast of subtle plays of light and shade. Her collage techniques included heat-treated acrylic sheets.

Photography in the early seventies came into its own as an art form. The close-up natural patterns of cracked mud and mangrove flats by Barry Woodworth, and of rusting iron by David Wilson, leaned towards abstraction, as did Dutch photographer Frank Heyden's darkroom-manipulated prints in colour.

Ceramics were always included and were very popular. Local ceramicists Arthur and Carol Rosser — JCU mathematician and geologist respectively — and Noela Davis, a young Townsville Art Society member, did much to bring ceramics into focus locally. The Rossers dug up clays and minerals, creating wares strongly related to the area. They inspired many of us to build small up-draft kilns in our back yards with some strange results. They persisted however, and during a sabbatical year in Japan enriched their knowledge of glazes. They eventually gave up academia for an alternative lifestyle as ceramicists in the mountains west of Mackay. Not only were the Rossers instrumental in the establishment of the North Queensland Potters Association, they also facilitated the start of the Townsville Cinema Group in 1962, one of the oldest in Australia.

Greg Daly and Catherin Bennet combined ceramics and painting, the latter doing brushwork decoration on Greg's ceramics. Gold leaf was suspended in some of his dark glazes to great effect.

Aboriginal potter Thancoupie showed her chunky vessels. She grew up around Weipa, living a traditional lifestyle. Ancestral stories, told by scratching themes in the sand, were powerfully echoed in her deeply incised markings. She went to East Sydney Technical College, studying with well-known potters. She gained international recognition and mentored artists from communities all over northern Australia.

Potters Russel French and Wendy Dowsett evoked the Cape York environment in their colourful glazing, which they showed together with Japanese screen printer Tetsuro Sawada, each enhancing the other. Ralph always managed to find the right combination of ceramics and paintings, such as Rick Wood's wood-fired stoneware and porcelain with local glazes resonating with the batik wall hangings and silk scarves by Jo Forster and Gladys Clooney, both from western properties.

"I developed a skill placing paintings to best advantage, usually knowing as they were unpacked the best place for each... for pottery Joan Ellard helped. There was a real buzz as people arrived." — Ralph Martin

Ivan Englund from Sydney is a founding member of the Potters' Society of Australia. His passion for exploring the bottle form is reflected beautifully in the chosen glazed stoneware piece. The colour of his hand-painted decoration leads me straight to another exhibitor: Connie Hoedt. Born in the Netherlands, residing in Townsville, Connie's evolution can be traced through her exhibitions at the Martin Gallery, starting with earth-coloured glazes, inspired by fossils and life forms such as seedpods, she progresses to the delightfully intimate *Microcosms*, allowing the viewer an inside look by pushing little cavity environments into smooth whole forms. Intrigued by ceramics in her Dutch heritage, she experimented with grey and blue glazes of 17th century Delft ware. This culminates in the unique Tropical Delft series, where traditional Dutch motifs are replaced with exuberant tropical vegetation in strong blues and whites. Her blue and white candelabra series, echoing the *menorah*, manifests her Jewish heritage. Her work was acquired for the National Gallery Craft Collection.

Unlike Connie, many potters in Australia were strongly influenced by Japanese ceramics. Carl McConnell, originally from the United States, was Head of Pottery at the Brisbane Technical College. He and his son Phillip became prominent potters. Carl worked in Japan with a student of Hamada, a living national treasure. The influence is evident in the vessel in this show. Potter Ian Currie hailed from Tinaroo at that time, and his layered glazes too are strongly influenced by his studies in Japan over several years. Like all potters, Len Cook from Paluma experimented with glazes and firing techniques, and now concentrates on the Japanese firing method of anagama.

In the field of printmaking, Basil Hadley studied at Ealing in the UK and Prahran in Melbourne. He explored different styles and techniques, but here he showed his tactile etchings of graffitied and crumbling walls.

Brian Hatch trained as a graphic designer, but became interested in printmaking and attended the Pratt Graphics Centre in New York, to become one of Queensland's leading printmakers. This collograph is printed with multiple plywood blocks, showing a satisfying juxtaposition of light and dark.

Exhibitions of large, sculpted weavings by Deanna Conti — trained at RMIT — connected us with alternative lifestyles as well as the wider Australian Art world. She and partner Bruce Arthur lived on tiny Timana Island, their looms strung between trees, with only a tiny hut to sleep in. Amazingly they

made woven interpretations of paintings by prominent artists such as John Olsen and Fred Williams. An earlier show at the Perc Tucker Regional Gallery titled *To the islands,* brought these artists into focus. Her large, brightly coloured tapestries beamed with colour on the white walls of the gallery. One was acquired by the James Cook Collection and another by the Perc Tucker Regional Gallery as well as private acquisitions.

With Judy Cassab, born in Vienna and twice winner of the Archibald Prize, representation asserted itself, but with a difference. There were always underlying concepts — in the case of *Mother and Child*, a reference to Russian icons. The work in this exhibition was actually acquired from the Martin Gallery. It seemed extraordinary in 1980 that it was possible to purchase work by these prominent national reputations, here in Townsville, thousands of kilometres away from where it was all happening. But due to the presence of this Gallery it became clear that it was also actually happening here.

This was another special thing about Ralph, the presence of the Gallery and the quality of the work created a culture of art collecting. Ralph was never pushy about selling art, saying an art work should 'kick you in the guts', and that he was merely a bystander in this process. Collectors not only acquired famous names, but they also invested in local names and strengthened local practice, therefore making it an even more happening place.

"There is something special that distinguishes a gallery in the true sense from all other sort of shops. It is not only there to sell pictures but also to promote culture." — Anna Bock

It will become clear that the Townsville Arts community was equally adventurous and cosmopolitan. CAE lecturer Anne Willis trained in Manchester, and had lived in Canada. Well versed in abstraction, she showed her magnificent, stained canvases such as *Blue between*, and *Anxious milk*. Influenced by Morris Louis and Barnett Newman, American Color Field painters, she had no interest in representation, but wanted to create reality with just the painter's tools: paint and canvas. A reviewer commented: "*Anne Willis is a painter with guts. She differs from the wishy-washy so-called lyrical abstractionists and brings back something of the life and power of the great New York abstractionists"*.

Richard Lane, born in NSW, with tuition in the USA, has similar stylistic leanings, with dreamy veils of translucent colour, and his earlier mono-printed and stamped colour works evocative of coral reefs or small organisms.

Margaret Wilson, from Melbourne and trained at RMIT, already had an impressive exhibition record in prominent capital city galleries. Her work enchanted with its carefully tuned merge of screen-printed colour, intercepted by simple linear statements, evoking marine environments.

Fred Sulser, born in Switzerland, added a folksy — even fairytale — touch to his figure paintings, having worked in Sydney with Michael Kmit, who painted in a Neo-Byzantine style.

Seppo Hautaniemi, born in Finland and a member of the Townsville Art Society since its early days, contributed to the abstraction discourse with his *Post*. This vertical motif was often found in abstract paintings, as were circular forms; basic shapes to play with.

Valerie Crunden, born in UK, trained at RMIT and lived on Magnetic Island. Her evocative works of the Island's coast, seen from the sea, show a painterly freedom gained from abstraction transferred into interpretations of reality. This is often referred to as 'expressive figuration'. Her mastery of tone and colour combined with excellent draughtsmanship typify her style.

Peter Lawson was one of only a few traditional painters showing, and certainly the most frequent. His work is classical representation in the tradition of the early 1900s, perceptively adapted to North Queensland subjects, with a lovely sense of light. The work in this exhibition is of another disappeared Townsville landmark, the Bohle River meatworks. Peter recently had a retrospective in the Perc Tucker Regional Gallery.

Many architects are also splendid draftsmen, as is demonstrated in Ralph Power's pen drawings in which he lovingly renders North Queensland's rapidly disappearing vernacular architecture.

Brian Engris, both painter and sculptor, worked in lost wax cast bronze. If Michelangelo had made caricatures I imagine they would have looked like Brian's work. Wonderfully humorous, there was Ned Kelly in various stances, and luxuriating Bacchus-like figures such as the nude musician *Sea Shore Sousaphonist*. His wife Joan also made bronzes; I remember her putting finishing touches to a rhinoceros sculpture at the back of the gallery.

The Gallery also became a place where artists from isolated communities in North Queensland showed their work: five women painters from Babinda, including Jean Giarola and Eula Jensen, showed their accomplished and delightful watercolours of the wet tropical environment.

Two artists from Ingham showed their paintings too, with totally contrasting styles: David Rowe with surrealist leanings and Lorrain Abernathy with beautifully felt interiors. Both serious artists, they continue to have active art practices. Mark Sutherland captured Charters Towers gold rush architecture with lush paint and low-key colour. Lin Newman from Ayr launched her book *Stepping Stones to the Adventure of Reading* to considerable acclaim from the education community.

Ben Trupperbaumer, born in Germany, lived at Mission Beach in a house built (or should I say *sculpted*) by him from timber, merging with the natural environment. He studied at the German Bielefeld Academy, though his main influences are from working in West Africa, and tutoring at the University in Kathmandu. This is evidenced in his fluid manner of carving and the organic shapes inspired by tropical rainforest. In *Platter* he challenges its functionality. A similar one was acquired from Ralph for the National Gallery's craft collection.

Mackay-based artist Clem Forbes, in his many shows (eight in all) always captured a quintessential feeling of north Queensland. His development can be traced through his exhibitions here. His stylistic exploration ranges from early darkly glazed oil paintings with scraped out details — evocative of shady rainforests — to colourful pastels where deep greens foreground small visual events in the forest: a flash of brightly coloured parrots, details of a human figure or single palm. Prolific and inexhaustible in subject matter and techniques, he tackled not only rainforests but reef, the family, human figures, fish, bush scenes, still life and vernacular architecture. The selected piece, *Girl in backyard*, combines many of these aspects.

When in 1975 the TAFE College started the first year of a Certificate of Art, the Townsville art scene further grew in quality by the addition of staff members and passionate students. Robert Preston and Jim Cox had arrived in 1974 to start things off. James Brown, David Blackman, Phil Davis, Margaret Wilson and I followed. Many others joined when the course became a full-time Diploma: experts in an ever-expanding range of subjects, such as among others ceramicists Bruce Anderson, Hassan El Kerbotly, silversmith Kerry Stelling, printmakers Ron McBurnie, Anne Lord, and Judy Watson, sculptor Jane McBurnie (Hawkins). Most continued to maintain an art practice.

Jim Cox, a tutor in graphic design and illustration, did highly realistic renderings with refreshing concepts. Mimicking the still life genre with a wry sense of humour, he produced *460 mm x 330 mm of Lawn*, detailing every bit of grass and crumb of earth, and *Still life: roadside verge*, showing soft drink cans flattened by traffic. He often placed his objects on rectangles of flat colour, poking fun at the purist aesthetics of Color Field, while acknowledging it at the same time.

Robert Preston trained at Sussex University and Camberwell, London, where his tutors were amongst the most prominent and experimental of their time; he brought with him up-to-date knowledge of the newest approaches, which he generously shared with students and colleagues. One could argue that Robert Preston's greatest oeuvre is the totality of his sketchbooks, full of exquisite studies and thoughtful notes. When one day he introduced students to sketchbook practice, by scrutinising rare oriental rugs at the Martin Gallery, his own studies of chevron shapes found their way into borders of his hard-edged works. He had absorbed the influences of Post-painterly Abstraction into a highly individual style: broad areas of colour contrasted with intensely patterned edges. His work adapted to the tropics after a trip to Thailand, where he embraced the shapes of tropical vegetation and Buddhist architecture, which became filled with his beautifully tuned bands of colour against neutral dark tonal fields. After another study trip, this time to Mexico, he further developed a rich vocabulary of shapes which interact with each other to form visual narratives in the manner of temple friezes and illuminated manuscripts.

Jane Hawkins (McBurnie) is a graduate of QCA in sculpture, where she studied with the prominent sculptors Len and Kath Shillam. She took up a position in the sculpture department, in fact she 'became' the sculpture department. She taught a dazzling range of techniques including bronze and clay casting, welding, carving, timber construction. In her solo show *Fragments* she investigated how much — or how little — is needed for a face or torso to become recognisable. The life-size pieces were made from cast fired clay, such as the sculpture of her son in this exhibition.

Bruce Anderson, from Melbourne and trained at Prahran, joined as a ceramicist. He placed hexagonal Raku glazed collars — with their characteristic crazing — on unglazed low-fired black vessels; an enticing combination. His ceramics often incorporated other media such as bundles of wheat, red lacquer stamps or rough rope to bind a lidded pot — such as the one in this exhibition — thereby denying its functionality, rather like Ben's wood carved bowl, but different!

The printmaking department with Ron McBurnie and Anne Lord produced experimental print work in as many printmaking techniques as possible. With several Albion presses, lino and woodcuts bloomed; large etching presses produced magnificent prints from mezzotints to dry point. There were full facilities to produce multicolour screen print editions. A lithography press added further to the range of experiments. Several of Ron Mc Burnie's series of paintings and prints can be followed through his many shows at the Martin Gallery, each with its own distinctive flavour, from the *Cricketers* and *Bridge* series, paintings and prints, to *Mortal Coils* and *Man-tree Ferns* — large images of cycads unfurling the spiral of their new fronds — laden with metaphorical potential. A devoted dog owner, he created affectionate satires in *Professional Dogs* — caricatures of show dogs and their owners. His scenes from the suburbs are a mirror of our more quirky habits. He won the Freemantle Print Prize with the etching in this exhibition. *The Bridge, Night* refers to Indigenous people's stress in bridging the gap between traditional and Western culture. He deviated from printmaking, for which he had become increasingly well known, to show expressive shapes beautifully realised in bright pastels and paints based on the devastations of Cyclone Winifred.

Judy Watson, fresh from Tasmania, showed prints and collages with a feminist leaning, before she aligned her practice to acknowledge her Aboriginal ancestry. My development, too, can be traced in this way with more than eight shows, starting with drawings of my children, when I realised they

were the best subjects I'd ever have. After this there were aerial interpretations of dynamically growing cities along the North Queensland coast. Hard edge was in the air with the *Gardens*, based on designs for our new place on the Upper Ross River. Once settled there, undisturbed observation of the bush on the riverbank led me to several series based on that environment, such as the work in this exhibition. One similar was purchased by the Queensland Art Gallery. The golden colour of native grasses gave rise to the sculptural gold-leafed *Bush icon* series, where natural forms replace traditional religious imagery; ultimately an environmental statement.

James Brown and I had three exhibitions together. We were both intensely involved with landscape. James reduced the landscape to flat sensuous soft-edged planes of beautifully tuned colour with one or two intrusions. In his later work this lead to the development of personal codes and ciphers; calligraphic brush marks, a patch of colour or a whisper of a line — on the edge of abstraction. Finding a balance between structure and the casual mark for him was always played out almost as a game... in a landscape format. After a college study trip to Egypt, we showed our Egyptian work at Peter Lane Gallery in Sydney. There was always a good relationship between us (Ron, Bob, James and I — to this very day) leading to an exhibition curated by the Perc Tucker Regional Gallery: *Drawings x 4* which travelled nationally in 1984-1985.

The Diploma course at TAFE started to deliver brilliant graduates, Garry Andrews being one who soaked up every influence. A naturally talented student with a feeling for the medium, a sense of space and ability to capture a moment, a model's stance or a facial expression. He tackled painting and printmaking in his *Rat* paintings, such as the *Members of the Anti-vivisection association*. His abstract paintings showed a mature sense of form. Garry did a Master of Visual Arts at Griffith University. Able to handle large-scale work, he became involved in the *Greentrain* project (decorating the outside of the Sunlander) where his mural became the focus of an ABC documentary. He was the founder and first chairman of Kick Arts in Cairns and was included in the groundbreaking exhibition *The Fish That John West Regrets*. He had three solo exhibitions at the Martin Gallery. Represented in the National Gallery he maintains an active art practice.

Glen Skien, now established in Brisbane and a nationally acknowledged printmaker, runs his own press, *The Silent Parrot*. He first showed his witty assemblages and etchings at the Martin Gallery in his final year. Glen feels that we are defined by objects, always associated with memory and nostalgia. Realised in fine etchings and found objects, his exquisite assemblages, artist books, wrapped objects and little boxed collections always trigger a deeply felt response. His exhibition *MYTHO-POETIC* recently toured to 16 venues all over Australia.

Anne Lord captures the glaring light of the grassland of "Kilterry", a property north of Nelia where she grew up. With very light transparent calligraphic marks on large canvasses and no particular focus, she explores the character of the endless expanses of the western planes. Similarly, in her screen prints she uses multiple layers of very high tone and closely related colour, further evoking the shadowless dry grassy plains near Hughenden. She also exhibited together with Sylvia Ditchburn and Jo Forster, the latter a student of Mervyn Moriarty's Flying Art School. Jo lived on Trivalore and was passionate about the inland: With her meandering rivers in *Carpentaria*, she also made the inland landscape she loved visible to viewers on the coast, working from her studio on the property — once a coach changing station. Sylvia — born on the Darling Downs — shows boulders and rock formations from the dry hinterland in characteristic high colour. Her *Fan* series found inspiration in ancient Egypt, where fans were linked to female imagery. Fanning out from a small point and expanding, Sylvia saw them as a metaphor for life. She now promotes her art through her own gallery. As part of her PhD in Creative Arts she curated an exhibition titled *Plenty*, of work by female Townville artists, which toured regional galleries.

Maggie Thomson and Denise Piva banded together, both fine and talented students. Denise, a keen observer of the human form, and Maggie with her paintings of feet in all sorts of positions and attire. Printmaking students especially grouped together with many exhibits over the years. The final exhibition before the gallery closed was that of the final year Printmakers of 1988.

In the 1980s Townsville had become considerably better endowed with art infrastructure. In 1979 Paul Tonnoir too had opened his gallery above the antique books and Persian rug business. The Perc Tucker Regional Gallery was well and truly established with Ross Searle as director. It connected with the wider Australian circuit of travelling exhibitions and created opportunities for established artists to show large scale work in curated exhibitions. In 1986 Umbrella Studio was started by emerging artists and students as an artist-run initiative. With a shift in focus in the arts generally towards concept, performance and installation, the rattling tin sheds just one block up from the Martin Gallery became another hub for a new generation of adventurous artists.

The Martin Gallery closed on Christmas Eve in 1988, but its legacy goes on far beyond the closing date. Those sixteen years of intense exhibiting created a following for the visual arts in Townsville. It created a culture of gallery viewing, meeting others with similar interests, discussing art — subject matter, ideas and techniques. Many people discovered the joys and love of collecting, owning original pieces or following artists' development.

"It was always a delight to buy from Ralph". Mary Gallagher

For those who came from places where this was already part of life, it meant that Townsville was a 'real' place where one could enjoy the finer things in life. Thanks to this general cultural push, the need for a Regional Gallery had become obvious enough for the Perc Tucker Regional Gallery to become a reality.

Early on the Martin Gallery created an appetite for visual culture, and an opportunity for art to be shown properly, not just intermittently in ad-hoc premises organised by members of the Townsville Art Society. The opportunity to exhibit in a proper gallery greatly facilitates the development of art practice. I asked many artists during the course of this writing where they would have been without Ralph's gallery and the answers all pointed in the same direction: without the prospect of exhibiting in a professional gallery that encouraged honest experimentation and did not push commercial success as a criterion, they would not have developed as artists with established practices and reputations. Having gained confidence from exhibiting in the same gallery as the big names, many of us developed connections with art scenes in capital cities, exhibited elsewhere, applied for residencies and won art prizes. But many of us also realize that there is nothing quite so satisfying as exhibiting in one's own community, especially when the work is related to that community.

Without an outlet such practices would not have flourished or been seen by appreciative eyes. The Townsville art world owes a lot to the pioneering spirit of the Ralph Martin Gallery.
We thank you Ralph!

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