# PINACOTHECA
# 1967–1973

## Jonathan Sweet

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan Sweet completed an Arts degree at La Trobe University in 1986. His growing interest in art and ideas led him to return to study after some years of active involvement with contemporary art and antiques. Submitted as his Honours thesis this paper enabled him to develop his interest in Australian art of the 1960s and 1970s and to focus due attention on one of it's central characters: Pinacotheca. He completed a Post Graduate Diploma in Museum Studies at Victoria College in 1987 and is currently living, working and studying in London.

# CONTENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

The focus of this paper is Pinacotheca, a Melbourne gallery which has over the last nineteen years, under the directorship of Bruce Pollard, established a reputation as an important centre of contemporary art. A complete history of the gallery, is best undertaken on a larger scale, and therefore, this discussion is limited to the period 1967–1973. These are the first six years of the gallery's operation and as such the period may be seen as a formative one. It is significant that it also encompasses a change of location: From an impressive Victorian building at number One Fitzroy Street, St. Kilda, where the gallery opened in May 1967, it was moved to a renovated factory, at the end of a cobble stone lane in Richmond, in early 1970.

It is the aim of this work to address such questions as: How did Pollard, in the sixties, establish Pinacotheca as a vital art centre? What shaped his approach to art and his style as a gallery director, and how did these concerns develop or change? What made the artists responsive to this venture, and how did they view their relationship with Pollard, and with others in the business? Why did Pollard and the artists ultimately seek an alternative system of gallery operation, in the early seventies, and how successful was it?

The paper is divided into four parts. The first provides an indication of the gallery scene of the sixties, highlighting some theoretical and practical concerns, expressed by artists and commentators. The second focusses on the first three years and examines the influence on Pollard of contemporary criticism and the opinions of artists, and highlights his growing personal conviction. The last two parts focus on the early years at Richmond which are distinguishable by the investigation of 'post-object' art and a co-operative system of administration. Against this backdrop, the first of these parts examines Pollard's approach to art and the second his approach to running the gallery.

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# THE BACKGROUND CONTEXT:
# GALLERY PRACTICE OF THE SIXTIES

In the decade up to 1967 the growth of the Melbourne gallery scene had been vital. When Pinacotheca opened, it did so against a background of youthful temper; the attitudes, conflicts and complacency which characterized this period profoundly influenced the gallery's operation.

The stagnation of the art scene and the neglect of contemporary art in Melbourne during the early 1950s had led to the reformation of the Contemporary Art Society (C.A.S.). Its members, artists and non-artists alike, believed that one of the main difficulties facing contemporary artists was the problem of communication between artists and the community. Barbara Blackman lamented that Australia in 1954 was without art publications and devoid of comprehensive galleries as points of reference.[1] The *Broadsheet*, quickly established in 1954, was intended by its editor John Reed, to become an "integral part of the creative life of the artistic community,"[2] but the all important walls for the display of art remained non-existant until 1956, when the The Gallery of Contemporary Art was established. In the role which the C.A.S. defined for the Gallery, there was a coalescence with the concerns of Pinacotheca. Barbara Blackman attacked the financial bent of the commercial galleries,[3] writing that the Gallery of Contemporary Art differed in purpose. It was intended "to excite and nourish public interst in all and especially the most avant-garde aspects of contemporary art"[4] and furthermore she suggested:

> If the commercial galleries provide a market for artist and
> collector, then here we shall provide a forum for the created
> work and the curious observer as well. If we undertake to do
> what these other galleries cannot or will not do, then clearly
> we are taking on the most daring and most unprofitable tasks.[5]

Unfortunately the C.A.S. found the gallery to be a financial strain from the very beginning, and in practice, the ideals set down by Barbara Blackman were difficult to realise without the financial aid of its patrons John and Sunday Reed. The Museum of Modern Art which developed out of the Gallery of Contemporary Art also had a non-profit making charter and at least provided an alternative to the commercial galleries.

The growth of private commercial galleries was rapid after

the Australian Galleries had opened in 1956; Gallery A had opened in 1959, South Yarra Galleries in 1961, and Leveson Street in 1962. The Argus was underway by 1963 and remained an important rental gallery until the end of the sixties. An exhibition of young C.A.S. members, including Margaret Dredge and Robert Rooney was held at Eastside Galleries, also a rental space, in 1961.[6] Both artists, Rooney particularly, were later to become involved with Pinacotheca. The Toorak Art gallery opened in June 1964 and it offered to "possibly" host two C.A.S. exhibitions a year, and provide committee rooms for the Council, and for social gatherings of the Society. The welcoming response from the C.A.S.[7] highlights its floundering state. With no home of its own, the Council of 1963 had examined the possibility of holding its meetings in "various hotels, cafes and a ferry boat."[8] The situation was critical; to exhibit, artists were forced to seek out the patronage of commercial galleries or to hire space from one of the rental galleries. At least the offer from Toorak was an indication from the market place of a more positive attitude towards Australian contemporary art.

Unfortunately this growth in interest all too often seemed to lead to the promotion of mediocrity. Robert Hughes noted some two hundred and forty exhibitions Australia wide in 1962, as a precursory comment to his cynical but pointed description of the scene as "a wasteland of rubbish."[9] This comment is symptomatic of a growing concern amongst commentators over the lack of discrimination and education amongst the Australian art community. It was echoed in the newly established art periodical *Art and Australia* in August 1963 where the editor Mervyn Horton described the motivation for buying as more often for investment rather than for aesthetic reasons. "The time has come" he wrote "when Australians should know why they go to exhibitions, give prizes and buy paintings."[10] This concern is understandable in view of the emphasis placed on investment by the commercial galleries. Australian Galleries, for example, defined its role quite clearly in 1960. The gallery was designed, wrote the directors, to "supply the fine art requirements of the community—private, professional and industrial,"[11] with a targeted market of Australian companies and overseas associates.[12] The tone of this statement is cool and calculated: "the fine art requirement of the community" is implicitly perceived to be fiscally orientated. Ironically *Art and Australia* did much to fuel this growing financial orientation as it depended principally on advertising revenue gleaned from the mainstream galleries.

South Yarra Galleries announced in 1961 that it was "presenting the paintings in a well and expensively furnished gallery to give prospective purchasers confidence in the works."[13] For the Australian collector one suspects this assurance was required simply because he was all too often unable to confront the work on a one-to-one basis. While the work was lost within the sumptuous interior of the gallery, padded, sheltered and accessible, sales might have been improved but often one suspects at the expense of other qualities in art.

Robert Rooney approached South Yarra Galleries in 1963 and was given an exhibition; in the following year he signed a contract with the gallery. The contract system was already an accepted practice by this period (Fred Williams had signed with Australian Galleries in 1957). Rooney's contract specified that he would show exclusively at this gallery and that in return all the business would be taken care of.[14] In the event there were problems concerning his second show held there in 1966. During the intervening years Rooney had concentrated on exorcizing the figure from his work and his developing abstraction was greeted with distaste by the critics.[15] The shift is obvious in a comparison between *The Fall* of 1964 and *Kind-hearted Kitchen Garden 2* of 1967,[16] where the all over patterning of the latter had replaced the figure entirely. When Rooney left the gallery, he did so to make a complete break with the past, but only after "mockingly" listing all that had not been done. What upset him the most was the director's neglect to inform him that the space was to be shared with Robin Wallace-Crabbe. Also, he arrived with a series of drawings which he had assumed would be framed by the Gallery under the terms of the contract, but these were displayed uncaringly on a table in the storeroom.[17] Contracts were thus easily broken and not always to the advantage of the artist. John Perceval and others had also left and when Rooney did so:

> [The director] didn't do anything about it because she thought I was going to be promising, and I turned out not to be, because I didn't keep doing the Bacon style paintings which had sold. They seemed to be like a bit of agony in Toorak.[18]

While attempting to provide a sense of security for its artists' work the gallery was ultimately accountable more to its clients than to the artists. The contract system was unworkable in this particular instance because it failed to acknowledge the importance of the artist-dealer relationship. In Sydney the important and influential dealer, Rudy Komon, had by this period successfully established a "stable" of artists

in the European tradition, which was based on his genuine appreciation of the personalities of artists and his admirable sense of service. For artists like Rooney who were exploring new terrain this kind of support and commitment was extremely important. Patrick McCaughey reminded his readers when he reviewed Rooney's exhibition at Strines in 1968 that the artist "does not ask us to risk anything he's not risking himself."[19]

Openly expressed concern by artists at this time in Melbourne is rare. The C.A.S. contented itself with organising its yearly exhibitions but significantly it highlighted the controversial censorship debate at this time which surrounded Mike Brown's exhibiting of *Mary Lou as Miss Universe* at the New South Wales Art Gallery.[20] In the same year the artist and critic Elwyn Lynn (in 1964, President of the Contemporary Artists Society of Sydney,) had made an assault on the inherent traps in the commerical gallery system. Writing in the magazine *Quadrant*, Lynn questioned the integrity of dealers, suggesting that the responsibility had fallen upon artists to make them aware of professional principles "that they hardly suspected had existed."[21] Lynn added:

> the artist is in a dilemma; he would like to go away and paint, but at the same time he knows he must watch his dealer, who is probably beyond salvation.[22]

Problems between dealers and artists had become a fact of life. Rooney's experience was one of broken promises and these were not exclusive to South Yarra Galleries. He was disappointed when at Strines in 1968 one critic had to review the exhibition through the window, because the gallery had not been opened during its regular hours.[23] It is little wonder therefore that when Bruce Pollard approached Rooney to exhibit at Pinacotheca[24] he accepted, yet despite having become cynical about some other gallery operators.

Although the more conservative galleries like Australian Galleries and South Yarra Galleries balked at supporting avant-garde art, there were others which were more sympathetic. Gallery A was a very important champion of abstraction through the middle sixties, boasting the direct input of the sculptor Clement Meadmore and the printmaker and painter Janet Dawson. Tolarno Galleries, established in 1967 by George Mora, was a particularly important supporter of the avant-garde. In unison with Pinacotheca, these advanced commercial galleries, as Rooney reminds us, "did all the ground work, all the experimental stuff, the unsaleable stuff, the performances and

installations."[25] If we recall the ideals laid down by Barbara Blackman in 1956, we can regard this as an admirable state of affairs, for indeed there was much enlightened patronage during the late sixties. However, Pinacotheca was to be different and this was because of the presence of Bruce Pollard. Peter Booth remembers his distinctive youthful energy and vigour,[26] and Dale Hickey his persuasive character.[27] "His personality" Hickey was sure, was "the total thing being offered." Furthermore Hickey believed that "people felt that here was someone quite different in the art world."[28]

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7. *Broadsheet*, C.A.S., Vic., June-July 1964, p. 1.
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12. *loc. cit.*
13. *Broadsheet*, C.A.S., Vic., March 1961, p. 10.
14. Interview with Robert Rooney, p. 3.
15. For more detail see Catalano, G., *The Years of Hope*, 1981, p.p. 147-149.
16. *ibid*, Plates on pages 148 and 153.
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18. *ibid*, p.p. 2-3.
19. Mc Caughey, P., *Age*, 24/4/1968, p. 6.
20. *Broadsheet*, C.A.S., Vic., February-March 1964, p.p. 1-8.
21. Lynn, E., "The Economics of Painting," *Quadrant*, Vol. 8, No. 29, 1964, p. 58.
22. *ibid*, p. 60.
23. Interview with Robert Rooney, p. 4.
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25. *ibid*, p. 4.
26. Interview with Peter Booth, p. 5.
27. Interview with Dale Hickey, p. 1.
28. *ibid*, p. 3.

# PINACOTHECA 1967–1969:
# THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Bruce Pollard had no formal art education either in theory or practice and as if to question the importance of this he proudly acknowledges the attitude with which he entered the art business:

> I blundered in. I like art, but I did not go into the art game knowing very much, or knowing many artists, or being very sophisticated. So I blundered into it. I opened the gallery with one show booked up.[1]

He had graduated with an Honours degree in Philosophy and English from Melbourne University and worked as a teacher. His girlfriend at the time was an artist and it was she who started him off looking at art works. Dissatisfied with teaching, he wanted, (at least in the beginning) to have a go at something he could do part time. He started the gallery because he wanted the building and he had to have an excuse to borrow the money from his father.[2] What Pollard lacked in erudition at this time was more than countered, however, by determination; his utility and effectiveness are evident from the very start.

Pollard describes the first year as very conservative. He knew one painter, David Gillison, and he had the first show. In the *Age* newspaper his paintings were labeled by Patrick McCaughey as "bland abstractions."[3] Other exhibitions of the year spanned a variety of mediums including pottery, silkscreen painting and cartoon collages by Bruce Petty. Margaret Dredge and Brian Kewly both exhibited paintings. McCaughey had particular difficulty with the sculptural aspirations of Judy Lorraine's pottery, writing that "one wants to see or imagine pottery being used, not just looked at."[4] He found, what he described as the feminist bias of Dredge's work: "best when she's not taking herself too seriously"[5] and Normana Wight's silkscreens as a good example of more recent printmaking.[6]

Margaret Dredge and Brian Kewly had long been associated with the C.A.S., and in 1967 the latter was the Artist Vice-President and a member of the publication committee of the *Broadsheet* of which Patrick McCaughey was the editor. When Dr Bernard Smith's rooms were no longer available as clubrooms to the Society, Pollard offered the new gallery.[7] It was a significant and pragmatic initiative which made it clear to the art world that Pollard was committed to the

support of contemporary art and it bought immediate respect from those involved. The *Broadsheet* issue for August-September reported on the first function, which had been held at Pinacotheca on 19 July. It referred to the location as "our new clubrooms" and commented that "members had enjoyed coffee in the gallery's attractive coffee bar afterwards. Thankyou Mr Pollard."[8] Of yet greater importance is the unique position which Pinacotheca attained on the Melbourne gallery scene by encouraging and supporting such a stimulating and intellectual environment. Over the following years Pollard continued to provide a venue for social gatherings of the C.A.S. which included a variety of seminars. "The Role of The Critic," was addressed by Alan McCullough and Patrick McCaughey (1 October 1967) and there was "a panel discussion on modern paint resins" (25 February 1968), a night of "French art films" (1 October 1968) and a talk by Roger Kemp (11 October 1968). Clive Murray-White remembers that the last of these erupted into a torrid debate between the younger and older generations of artists over aesthetic issues.[9] Pollard continued to support C.A.S. artists until the end of the decade. In November 1968, a group exhibition was held under the title of "The Essentialists," and included work by Anne Graham, June Stephenson, Ronald Greenaway and Michael Smither. The first three were all active in the Society. Brian Kewly had a second exhibition at Pinacotheca in March 1968 and George Johnson showed in September 1969.

In August 1967, three months after Pinacotheca had opened, Patrick McCaughey argued emphatically for the rejuvenation of the Melbourne art scene. As the encumbent editor of the *Broadsheet* he wrote in its pages, that although there were nearly twenty galleries in Melbourne a large percentage of what they were showing was amateurish, and that the role of the artist himself was being devalued in the process.[10] It was not only a question of quality but also of organization. Those "good exhibitions emanating from Melbourne artists" he wrote "have an unrelatedness which is quixotic."[11] To this he added:

> the really worrying aspect about the current Melbourne scene [is] that it has lost any sense that it once had of a corporate identity. This loss of identity, and lack of concern, that there is no clearly identifying characteristic, has bought with it a role for the Melbourne art scene by default. Melbourne galleries now have no idealogical base. They exist merely to retail works of art and to market them at suitable moments.[12]

This was a timely and important comment from an influential and respected writer who at this time was an enthusiastic wearer of two hats. As the *Age* newspaper's art critic he was a barometer of weekly events, a commentator of the art world, and in the pages of the C.A.S. *Broadsheet* he was an art theorist, with his ideas directed at the informed and the concerned. To separate the two is a matter of convenience only, for each bears the mark of the other and his significance was as a pivot between the two audiences. With his rallying cry to the art scene, McCaughey was indicating, to both the artists and gallery directors, what he perceived to be the values of the art public. In the suggestion that "Melbourne artists have an unrelatedness which is quixotic," he implied that these artists, by virtue of their independence, were misguided and in danger of losing more than they gained. He stressed that what was required was a commitment to a "clearly identifiable characteristic." In the machinations of the Melbourne art scene at this time, McCaughey's opinion was not to be taken lightly: "With Patrick McCaughey as critic," Pollard remembered, "people were prepared to believe in new talent." McCaughey "was discovering a genius every month, he was a great market critic."[13]

Indeed, in 1967 if McCaughey was not overly inspired by the work of Pinacotheca, he was enthusiastic about work elsewhere. Five artists who in the following years were to move to Pinacotheca, received encouraging comments; Kevin Mortensen[14] and Clive Murray-White[15] both with their first one man shows at the Argus, and Trevor Vickers'[16] and Mike Brown[17] at Sweeney Reed's Strines Gallery in Carlton. Back in St. Kilda at Tolarno Galleries, McCaughey found Dale Hickey's twelve paintings "restless and tough without bravado or swagger." The brutal honesty of the paintings, he wrote "cuts through (the) good manners of the new abstract" and this, he argued, signaled their importance for Australian painting.[18] We need here to recognise the connection between the appreciation of McCaughey and the action of Pollard, for in the history of Pinacotheca we must account for how and on what basis the latter collected and attracted his artists. We cannot discount the possible influence of the critic, but we must also remember that Pollard was a man who backed his own intuition, who reacted quickly on his feet.

From Pollard's immediate invitation to the C.A.S. we can conclude that he was pursuing a strategy of enquiry. We can also assume that he rubbed elbows with McCaughey and many artists in

the coffee bar at the gallery. He listened attentively to the debates and seminars which were taking place under his own roof, and he read with profit both the *Broadsheet* and the *Age*. Although Pollard knew, as he says, nothing of international art in 1967,[19] he was learning quickly:

> I still remember Leach-Jones arguing with me and hammering it into my head. He kept saying, If you're going to run a gallery you have to have a point of view, you've got to be extreme or be moderate, you can't just run another gallery.[20]

This comment had a profound effect on Pollard's evolving gallery operation. He defined it more precisely later, when he said: "he didn't just say you've got to have a point of view. It was more than that, he said, You've got to be avant-garde."[21] The ideal expressed is similar to that put by McCaughey in his derision concerning the Melbourne gallery scene as one lacking in ideological commitment, but it is closer still to Barbara Blackman's lamentation of 1956. So one begins to gain a sense of the ambience of thought in which Pollard immersed himself. He soaked up the conversation and argument that he enjoyed so much, he weighed up the viewpoints of critics, fellow-travellers and most importantly artists, and he looked intensely at art works.

In 1968 the avant-garde meant hard-edge abstraction.[22] For Alun Leach-Jones, Patrick McCaughey (and, implicitly, Bruce Pollard) it also meant a philosophical acknowledgement of the dominant status of New York, in the play of international art. Robert Rooney became an avid collector of international art magazines and exhibition catalogues in the late fifties,[23] and he describes how the work of Robert Motherwell and Morris Louis helped him to break away from the influence of the Englishman Francis Bacon.[24] Between 1964 and 1966, Leach-Jones had travelled extensively in Europe, where he had seen the work of the Americans Joseph Albers, Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis[25] and, in June 1967, reassurance was provided for the younger artists working in this style by the touring exhibition "Two Decades of American Painting," which was exhibited at the National Gallery of Victoria. Trevor Vickers, (himself to experiment with shaped canvas) found in the work of Frank Stella "an alarming reality." He described *Telluride* as a painting that is not at all ambiguous, a painting that has become a thing in itself."[26]

From McCaughey, one gains an acute sense of his bias in this direction, in his appraisal of Sydney Ball's victory in the Georges Invitation art prize of 1968:

> this year's exhibition demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt that the best current painting amongst younger Australian artists springs from the flat, integrated surfaces of the new abstractionists.[27]

Five months later he called Ball "the greatest of the sixties,"[28] and in 1970 he revealed how it was this artist's direct experience in New York which provided him with credibility.[29]

Active as he was within this atmosphere, it is little wonder that Pollard simultaneously became interested in the work of the abstract painters. They were, after all, young, serious and technically accomplished artists, but it was also the aesthetic of their work which Pollard found appealing. He made a trip up to the Central Street Gallery in Sydney and quickly became acquainted with the artists connected with it. He bought some of their work[30] and he started to show them in Melbourne. Dale Hickey remembers his first meeting with Pollard in 1967: "he came to my house one night, after I'd had the show at the original Tolarno Gallery and bought three or four paintings."[31] It was an impressive and crucial action; the dealer Hickey was with at the time had never bought any of his paintings[32] but for Pollard it was the most obvious and best way of supporting artists he believed in.[33] He also saw Robert Hunter's first exhibition at Tolarno, and as he says, he began to form "sympathetic relationships with these people."[34] "The Renting Collection Exhibition" held in May 1968, featured work by many young painters who were working with the new abstraction—Tony McGillick, a founder of the Central Street co-operative, Michael Johnson, Dick Watkins, Alun Leach-Jones, Dale Hickey and Robert Hunter, all contributed. Other painters from Sydney followed. Rollin Schlicht showed in early September. Alan Oldfield later in the month and Tony McGillick, individually, in October. It was a big year for this "avant-garde"; they received critical aclaim and in August they were installed in the newly opened National Gallery of Victoria, in "The Field" exhibition.

During these formative years at St.Kilda, Pollard's actions may reveal the influence of McCaughey's formalist criticism, but the relationship was not onesided. McCaughey was directly in touch with the current mood. Gary Catalano later recognized that Pollard found himself in conflict with the formalists' basic premise, and the then commonly held assumption of the sixties, "that art grew out of art." "To him," wrote Catalano in *Meanjin*, "the more obvious candidate was the individual personality of the artist."[35] What has not been

recognized to date is the influence of this more humanistic viewpoint on the writing of McCaughey himself at this time.

To understand how McCaughey accommodated the personality of the artist within his restrictive formalist approach, we need to read carefully a selection of his work from 1966 to 1968 in which we find this apparent contradiction. In March 1967, in the pages of the *Broadsheet* McCaughey asserted that "art draws on art and not events or experiences of universal angst."[36] The comment reveals an obvious distaste for the American critic Harold Rosenberg and by implication, disputes the significance of the artist's personal experience on the work. In May 1968, in the very month that Clement Greenberg had delivered the John Power Lecture at Sydney University, McCaughey, however, shifted from his rigid formalist line. He spoke confidently at the Unesco Seminar, during the following week, at Sydney University, about the need to focus art criticism on an investigation of the artist's imagination: "the way in which his mind shapes and forms his art" he said, was a pursuit in which "we will surely be on more interesting ground, than simply the accurate descriptions of style."[37] There is no doubt a recognition here by McCaughey of the importance of the artist's personality. In the stern presence of Greenberg, his mentor and a member of the audience, he attacked the restrictions of the prevailing concerns of art criticism:

> Art criticism, even at its best in the hands of astringent
> formalist American criticism, seems content with the correct
> analysis of style and not the style creating process of
> imagination.[38]

This may seem a paradoxical shift but it may perhaps be seen as both symptomatic of the frustration which artists felt at this time as a result of the limitations of the Greenberg doctrine, and a manoeuvre by McCaughey to stave off the charges of eclecticism which were being levelled at the new abstraction. Regarding the first of these, Terry Smith made the challenging point in *Quadrant* in 1969:

> a true characterization of the art of the sixties requires the
> recognition of Pop art, Happenings, Minimal sculpture,
> Kinetic art, assembled and ephemeral work.[39]

For Greenberg the "integrity of the picture plane" was the measure of progress; his focus was painting and his judgements were based in his own sensability and taste.[40] At Pinacotheca, Pollard and the artists had recognized the anomalies, and were gradually breaking through the established restrictions. They knew their art was eclectic

in as much as it was derivative, but it was at the same time profoundly rooted in their own suburban experience. It is not unreasonable to suggest that this growing recognition of the importance of artistic personality by a leading critic was perhaps engendered by the debates which took place at Pinacotheca where McCaughey came under the spell of those artists who frequented the gallery, if not Pollard himself.

Important contributors in the following years at Pinacotheca were Dale Hickey and Robert Hunter. The latter had studied under Hickey at the newly established Preston Institute, and both had shown at Tolarno Galleries. The move across the road to Pinacotheca was a convincing show of confidence in a system which depends ultimately on loyalty: "There are more galleries than there are artists," Pollard warns, and "major artists are the only thing that make running a gallery easy," because "they fund the whole thing; if you don't have one or two of those you're in awful trouble."[41] Dale Hickey suggested that Pollard should have a look at the work of Robert Rooney; the artists had been fellow students at Swinburne in the late fifties and had maintained a close association. He did so, and Rooney had his first show at Pinacotheca in July 1969. Hickey was an important influence and sounding board for Pollard; in the 1975 published discussion between themselves in *Arts Melbourne*[42], (a magazine in which Pollard had a formative role,) it is obvious that their relationship was close—Pollard remarks "we could talk without embarrassment, hence the intensity because there was no need for fencing."[43]

Simon Klose was another artist who was introduced to Pinacotheca by Dale Hickey, after moving to Preston Institute from the trouble stricken Prahran Technical College[44]:

> I failed my year in 1969, purposefully, and went to Preston
> Tech. which was just starting up a three year course . . . the
> facilities were abysmal, but I always seemed to have worked
> better with people when there was a close one to one, or one
> to a few contacts involved.[45]

Indeed, this says a lot about Hickey, but one must also be aware of the changes which had taken place in art schools during the sixties. During a period of liberalization, the schools underwent a freeing up; Rooney remembers the end of compulsory attendance, the introduction of a more liberal system of assessment, and the corresponding acceptance of a more experimental attitude.[46] When Simon Klose left Prahran, his work was becoming increasingly conceptually oriented, and he found Hickey to be encouraging and

interested.[47] One can glean from Klose's comments a feeling that Hickey was a teacher who worked closely with his students and that they also appreciated the personal attention.

Pollard's visit to see Hickey after the Tolarno show has already been noted. Hickey was obviously impressed with the immediate purchase of his work, but he also found in Pollard other qualities which paralleled his own concerns—for example, he found Pollard's philosophical grasp of the vicissitudes of the art world "very convincing."[48] It was a strong foundation for a relationship built on friendship:

> we felt we had a friend in him. We had a friend that we could
> talk to without any of the art gossip and art politics and
> getting into the real issues of painting . . . I guess we were
> very idealistic but at the same time . . . well its just that his
> personality was different from the others. He was a more basic
> person in one sense but a far more intelligent one in another.[49]

And in Pollard's appealing character, Hickey found the substance for a working relationship:

> he was prepared to sit up in the gallery and drink a malted
> milk and eat a meat pie, act in a very, what should I say, stoic,
> almost mean at times, fashion, in the face of what was
> considered kind of opulent and tasteful in other galleries.[50]

From these comments emerges the portrait of a man who understood, and was sympathetic to, the concerns of these artists; a man who embodied austerity and doggedness and attracted people with a similar attitude.[51] For Hickey it was very refreshing: "here was a real person in the art world and he was going to do it his way and damn the conventions and the snobbery and the bullshit."[52]

These sentiments were echoed by Peter Booth, who was struggling to get a one man show in 1969. Despite an encouraging comment from McCaughey in his review of the National Gallery School exhibition in May 1967,[53] and his involvement in "The Field" exhibition in 1968, Booth remembers having "some pretty insulting things" said to him by gallery operators. This experience highlights the precarious professional status, which confronted artists at the completion of their courses. Despondent but persistent, Booth went to see Pollard at someone else's suggestion.[54] He was immediately encouraged by Pollard's interested attitude and his willingness to show him. It was this open commitment to younger artists, without the worry of money which Booth saw as an admirable and professional attitude.[55] Pollard

remarked that: "you give a show with hope; there are very few artists going to become major artists and that's what you're looking for."[56] Rooney remembers that sometimes Pollard would give an exhibition to an artist even if he was not that fond of the work, but believed that the artist showed potential for development.[57] Simon Klose, like Rooney, reminds us that while Pollard provided the opportunity for younger artists, he could also afford to be tougher.[58] Implicit in these comments is a recognition for the need to make the hard decisions, which took into account factors other than economic considerations.

In 1968 and 1969 there were many exhibitions introducing young artists. Bill Gregory who remained with Pinacotheca into the early seventies succeeded where Judy Lorrain had failed the year before. McCaughey wrote of his work:

> superbly installed in Pinacotheca's black chamber, the
> ceramics are splendidly hideous and marvelously useless,
> taking the mickey out of the arts and crafts pottery with one
> vicious swipe after another.[59]

With critical opinion securely onside, the black walls of St.Kilda did much to enhance a growing questioning spirit amongst artists. In 1969, following the Booth show, there was a string of new arrivals indicating Pollard's growing self-confidence. McCaughey felt Ron Bence to be over enthusiastic.[60] He praised Jeremy Barrett for the obvious thought with which he approached his canvas[61] and in Gary Foulkes he found the "bridge" into the seventies. The critic described his paintings with a romantic formalism, he wrote: "the mists and washes of color drift across ghostly grids and apertures" and hailed the exhibition as the best debut since Guy Stuart.[62]

The work at Pinacotheca in 1969 was also diverse. The sculptures by Peter Davidson were described by McCaughey as "large and realistic fibre-glass human toes" and "in a row of blue toes on a pedestal, you can't help noticing what well-cut, bourgeois toe-nails they all have."[63] His following comments are more significant, for in unison with the banality of image employed by Robert Rooney and Dale Hickey in their large paintings, he found in Davidson's work:

> a forthright and compelling criticism of the artiness and the
> pretensions of fashionable, contemporary art—a determined
> attempt on the artists part to cut the trash out of art.[64]

This is an important extrapolation of the animus directed at the machinatons of the art world which was festering at Pinacotheca. In 1970, close in spirit but ideologically distinct, Terry Smith suspected

that this growth of cynicism resulted from the apparent ease with which the new abstraction had been absorbed by the mainstream. Implicit in the organisation of "The Field" exhibition was the suggestion of a "new academy," and accordingly the artists sense of themselves as the avant-garde was shaken.[65] There is truth in this suggestion, but when Smith suggested that, in the post-"Field" months, individual styles were becoming more pronounced, he failed to recognize that this was a feature which had been consistently present. The classification of artists into a tightly unified movement was thus perceived by them as an artifical manipulation; a convenience which acknowledged the expectations of the art public, but paid little regard to the individuality and personality of the artists. It was, and was to remain, an important catalyst for the following years at Pinacotheca. Indeed Hickey's first one-man show at Pinancotheca, was the last exhibition at the St. Kilda gallery. It coincided with the preparations which Pollard was making to move to the more substantial space at Richmond, a largely practical response to a painting by the artist, which was twenty-two feet long.[66] From Rooney we learn that "he got a fence contractor to do different types of standard suburban fence in each room,"[67] and in the following year, Hickey's first one-man show at Richmond was *Ninty White Walls*. "He'd gone conceptual,"[68] exclaimed Pollard jokingly; he obviously enjoyed the paradox.

From the diversity of work, which characterizes the St. Kilda years, from the colour-form and hard edge to the figurative paintings, the prints, the pottery, and sculpture, the installations and the conceptual works, one gains the impression of Pollard as pursuing an interested, open-minded and energetic approach. It was a period of learning and experimentation, with the practice of running a gallery and becoming acquainted with art and artists. When Rooney first went to Pinacotheca, he regarded it "as just another gallery which happened to have a lot of the artists I liked"[69] and he is still there. Clive Murray-White felt that Pollard was, at the time, the traditional gallery director[70] and Dale Hickey saw it as "a smattering of artists."[71] Indeed Pollard himself admits that he "did most of the normal things." He sent out invitations and had openings, and he learnt that "in fact sales are not effected by that sort of promotional activity."[72] Most importantly, Pollard was developing his own ideals and learning to rely on his own intuition; he supported, encouraged and sympathised with the artists. From this comment from Dale Hickey one gains the impression that these years were important and fruitful:

it was about that period that he sensed that something was going on, and he began to get involved with those artists, and by the time he moved to Richmond, I think in fact he had just about eliminated all the people he didn't want, and he had a very solid core of people, who were what you'd call hard-core Pinacotheca type people.[73]

# ENDNOTES:

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3. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 28/6/1967, p. 6.
4. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 27/8/1967, p. 6.
5. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 27/9/1967, p. 6.
6. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 16/10/1967, p. 6.
7. *Broadsheet*, May-June, 1967, p. 4.
8. *Broadsheet*, August-September, 1967, p. 1.
9. Interview with Clive Murray-White, p. 2.
10. McCaughey, P., *Broadsheet*, August-September, 1967, p.9.
11. *ibid*, p. 10.
12. *ibid*, p. 11.
13. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 1, p. 12.
14. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 27/9/1967, p. 6.
15. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 8/11/1967, p. 6.
16. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 1/11/1967, p. 6.
17. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 13/12/1967, p. 6.
18. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 4/10/1967, p. 6.
19. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 1, p. 2.
20. *ibid*, p. 1.
21. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 2, p. 1.
22. *loc. cit.*
23. Interview with Robert Rooney, p. 16.
24. *ibid*, p. 1.
25. Catalogue, The Seventies; Collection of the National Australia Bank, p. 71.
26. Wallice-Crabbe, C., *Art and Australia*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1967, p. 426.
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33. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 1, p. 14.
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37. McCaughey, P., "New Literary and Old Criticism", in *Criticism in the Arts: Australian Unesco Seminar*, Sydney University, May, 1968, p. 92.
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39. Smith, T., "The 'Style of the Sixties'," *Quadrant*, Vol. 13, No. 58, 1969, p. 51.
40. *ibid*, p. 51-52.

41. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 1, p. 2.
42. Bruce Pollard, "An Interview with Dale Hickey," *Arts Melbourne*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 21.
43. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 2, p. 9.
44. Interview with Simon Klose, p. 1.
45. *loc. cit.*
46. Interview with Robert Rooney, p. 11.
47. Interview with Simon Klose, p. 2.
48. Interview with Dale Hickey, p. 1.
49. *ibid*, p. 4.
50. *ibid*, p. 3.
51. *ibid*, p. 11.
52. *ibid*, p. 11.
53. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 31/5/1967, p. 6.
54. Interview with Peter Booth, p. 1.
55. *ibid*, p. 5.
56. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 1, p. 4.
57. Interview with Robert Rooney, p. 10.
58. Interview with Simon Klose, p. 8.
59. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 23/10/1968, p. 6.
60. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 30/4/1969, p. 2.
61. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 7/5/1969, p. 2.
62. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 25/6/1969, p. 18.
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64. *loc. cit.*
65. Smith. T., "Color-Form Painting: Sydney 1965-1970", *Other Voices*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 15.
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67. Interview with Robert Rooney, p. 5.
68. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 1, p. 9.
69. Interview with Robert Rooney, p. 4.
70. Interview with C. Murray-White, p. 2.
71. Interview with Dale Hickey, p. 3.
72. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 2, p. 1.
73. Interview with Dale Hickey, p. 3.

# PINACOTHECA 1970–1973: POLLARD'S APPROACH TO ART

The gallery at Richmond was opened after renovations in May 1970[1] in what was a disused warehouse, and Pollard lived upstairs. If the artists arrived out of hours they could ring the bell and he would stick his head out of the window and throw down the key.[2] The gallery itself embodied his approach to the art business; a large concrete expanse broken by scrubbed wooden pillars lay beyond the forbidding metal door. It was austerity and doggedness in timber, bricks and mortar, the aesthetic was primitive and cool, the art work was stripped of anything reassuring, and if the lights were off the visitor was expected to turn them on.

It was a space and an aesthetic which suited the artists—the long white walls coped admirably with their work. Clive Murray-White described the aesthetic of the gallery as having the "air of New York: if you took a photograph of your work, it would look like a major international avant-garde show."[3] In the first eighteen months the exhibition program progressively became more removed from traditional object art. The growing interest in conceptual art was fueled by the influence of New York and the spacious gallery suggested installations and performance work; it was the largest unbroken space in Melbourne. The artist's excitement was shared by the critic Terry Smith, who provides a contempory reaction to the new space:

> The physical environment of the new gallery is a crucial
> context for most of the work exhibited there . . . All the
> works in this opening exhibition are large, all swamp space,
> commandeer the areas around them, and the properties of the
> whole room make this uniquely possible. This is the most
> exhilarating feeling to be got from the exhibition as a whole.[4]

The opening group exhibition held in June was fundamentally rooted in the work which the artists had been doing over the previous years. Mike Brown's contribution was a reworking on the *Marylou* theme and Ti Parks showed his *Banner* construction seen at the Mildura Sculpture Prize exhibition the previous year, Dale Hickey his illusionistic grid paintings, Robert Rooney his hard coloured pattern paintings, Trevor Vickers his shaped canvases and Peter Booth exhibited

his heavily impasto-ed minimal works. Other work in the exhibition was contributed by Bill Gregory, Kevin Mortenson, Rollin Schlict, Peter Davidson, and Robert Hunter; all these artists remained the nucleus of the gallery for the coming years. They were hailed by Smith as "a fortunate concentration of probably the best and most innovative artists" in Melbourne[5] and Ann Galbally branded them in the *Age* newspaper, as the "avant-garde" and referred to the gallery as their new "H.Q."[6] "The change in location," she wrote, "is indicative of the gallery's unfashionable and sometimes painful attitude of taking contemporary art seriously."[7]

During the first year at Richmond, Pollard began to float the idea of a group of artists running the gallery on a cooperative basis.[8] The precedent lay in the organisations of both the defunct Central Street Gallery and the contemporary Inhibodress Gallery, both in Sydney, and interest from within Pinacotheca came principally from Mike Brown and Trevor Vickers:[9] "It was in the air at the time," said Pollard, "I mean, that was the period of the cooperatives, people organizing themselves around cooperative lines."[10] For personal and emotional reasons, Pollard spent the year of 1972 absent from the gallery. He travelled overseas to have a complete break after four and a half years of operation. During this year the cooperative was in full swing, with approximately twenty artists involved, forming by no means a unified group. The cooperative provided a convienient and appropriate means of keeping Pinacotheca financially viable; there was no money to pay somebody to run it. Yet one suspects that beneath the practical and philosophical reasons Pollard gives for instigating the new structure lay a personal feeling of frustration resulting from pressure exerted by personalities within the gallery group. From his own experience Pollard had evolved a desire to resolve some significant misconceptions which he believed were held by some of the artists. Underlying his action of the early seventies is therefore a genuine belief that the experience would be beneficial to all concerned.

While Hickey had abandoned painting with the *Fence* installation at St. Kilda the previous December, the only evidence of any move away from mainstream painting at the opening exhibition came from Robert Hunter. This artist had abandoned the stretched canvas, which was in 1968 the medium for his white on white paintings at Tolarno Galleries, and was exhibiting "six pieces of paper, five foot square, attached by masking tape to the long wall."[11] Ann Galbally failed to mention the work while Terry Smith called it the best in the

exhibition; a discrepency of taste, to be expected in paintings easily dismissed as minimal. Terry Smith wrote how the 1970 works filled the room with "a grey light of great subtlty and beauty," and how they were far from the minimal works they first appeared to be.[12] From Smith's detailed description of the work, one gains a sense of Hunter's systemic approach. Each of the squares was in fact made up of a grid of smaller squares taped together so that a basic grid was formed:

> within this basic grid, Hunter slightly varied the thickness of paint on certain parts of the masking tape, allowing the tape's yellowness to influence our perception of color at those lines. Each piece varied only because of this: the first divided into six equal squares, the fourth had three crosses, the fifth two short verticals at the top and bottom and a line across the centre.[13]

To Pollard this was irrelevant. In May 1968, McCaughey had recommended a personal sustained response to Hunter's painting[14] and for Pollard, there is perhaps no more emblematic example of his personal approach to works of art than this. The viewer must approach seriously and be prepared to spend time with the work; Pollard seeks an intuitive, emotional response. While Robert Hunter had tried persistently over the years to get Pollard to have a look at the systematic way he made his paintings, the latter would cordially respond, "Robert I don't need to. I feel it and that's all I need."[15] He respects Hunter's paintings because he feels from them, not because of the systems Hunter himself valued as his means:

> It may be a bit primitive but that's were I think art has got its mystery and its value. It's the ultimate mystery of the icon, that a static object on a wall could engage you and reach areas of your mind and your feelings.[16]

It was not something new to the gallery owner. Dale Hickey felt that Pollard's attraction to his works from 1967 was based in a response to the mood of the pictures. "The mood and the state of mind that one felt in those pictures at the time was actually the subject matter"[17] and this he believes distinguished his art from the concerns of other artists, who were working with colour-field or responding to some kind of relational problem.[18] The minimal simplified forms in Hickey's early paintings, taken as they were from tiles and weatherboards, may have been mundane in their iconography and in their approach agrees Pollard, but they were

not mundane in their effect.[19] To Pollard these paintings exemplified a realistic response to life, they dealt with boredom and frustration and refused to allow the viewer to escape into a romantic or heroic world; from this experience, he believes the artists successfully created mysterious icons.[20] In September 1970 Hickey had exhibited *Ninty White Walls*, a photographic work which continued his investigation of mundane iconography. It consisted of ninety photographs of indistinguishable white walls (housed in a small box) with an accompanying text listing their locations. Pollard noted in conversation with Terry Smith in 1971 that it was "his way of talking about his problem of being in the world,"[21] a concern which he regarded as the "universal human problem; basically, we are alone people with a few moments of breaking this down—this is what the dialogue of art is about."[22] He reiterated:

> If you keep on the pyschological content of art, you can't get stuck in dogma. And if you speculate about how concepts are formed you eventually get back to the existential problem of me in the world. Which is what it is all about, finally.[23]

Robert Rooney and Simon Klose also exhibited conceptual photographic works. An early photographic work by Rooney was an anthropological study of his own suburban rituals. He photographed the number of almonds he ate each night over a period of time, and mounted them together. Pollard bought a copy of the work describing it's effect as "quite haunting, I guess in the same way as Kafka."[24] In other works, they both focussed on the gallery space itself.[25] Underlying this type of work, is an assumption which runs through the work of all three artists. Simon Klose was interested in "paring down the involvement with certain subject matters, or specific subject matter," for him it was a realisation that "one thing was as good to make art out of another" and it seemed preferable that if he was going to make art out of anything, he should "allow the subject matter to determine as much as possible, the form which the art work took; structurally at any rate."[26] Klose's work focussed on the four corners of the gallery with photographs taken from all directions.[27] It was an elaboration of a form of cubism;[28] Rooney photographed from each of the posts and the corners, the images fanning out.[29] This focus on the gallery space is particularly interesting, and Rooney suggests that the reason for doing so was that it was such a "terrific space." It was "a complete space in itself and it suggested huge installations,"[30] but there is also implicit in the work a suggestion that the structure

of the gallery itself embodied an existential problem. Pollard said in 1971:

> There is a sense in here somewhere of the animosity of life—this is a Melbourne thing, which no Sydney artists could deal with. Sydney colour painting was lyrical with a sense that one could escape. In Melbourne, there is a feeling that one is locked in.[31]

Mike Brown, originally from Sydney, expressed a similar theme but in a different medium; he installed *The Maze of Meaningless Madness* (or, *Welcome to Planet X*) at Pinacotheca in April 1971. Ann Galbally described how the front gallery was transformed into:

> a sitting room with walls set at forty five degree angles containing a fireplace of broken bricks, a deck chair, a cracked mirror on the mantel, corrugated plastic roofing sheets and a paling fence.[32]

The title and description of the work suggest that Brown invited the viewer into his own apocalyptic dream of a crumbled suburbia. The vision subtly distinguishes it from the photographic works which observe and impose the banality but do not explicitly suggest the break down. Accompanying the installation was a "100 foot mural," painted directly onto the walls, which was described by Ann Galbally as a "tour de force, whose manic energy is heightened by the fact that it will be over painted and destroyed."[33]

It was with the work of Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden that Pollard had difficulty. They were respected by the Melbourne conceptual artists, due to their direct experience of the contemporary New York scene. Pollard had first come into contact with their conceptual work in 1969,[34] and Dale Hickey visited the pair in New York in 1971,[35] but by 1972, when they lectured at Preston Institute the Melbourne artists had become sceptical. In May 1971 Pollard hosted a retrospective exhibition of their work at Pinacotheca. The Gallery was empty except for several cane chairs, and a table on which lay some photostated documents. Ann Galbally suggested that a reading of the work could not be accomplished under two hours and without the help of a dictionary and a thesaurus[36] and Robert Rooney drolly compiled a five page list for the first edition of *Pinacotheca*[37] (the artists own magazine) of words and phrases in inverted commas, which appeared in their work. Pollard remembers taking the first page of the document upstairs and spending the day applying simple logic to the arguments. He concluded like the others that it was "just pseudo-philosophy, it

was jargon . . . it wasn't rigorous thinking. Given my academic background" he said "it made it worse for me . . . and it's not my instincts about art so I rejected it."[38]

In the same conversation with Terry Smith, Pollard distinguished the Melbourne artists from their counterparts in the United States, implicitly including the two expatriates, when he said: "the American conceptual artists seem satisfied with the systems as such, ignoring the intuitive content."[39] The implications of this disregard were, for Pollard, symptomatic of a reversal in the artist's perception of what art was about. Clearly Pollard's respect for the work of Hickey and Rooney lay with the successful expression of a psychological proposition through an object medium, but in the work of Burn and Ramsden Pollard found a subversive tendency:

> Instead of you becoming an artist by making art, you were then given the aspiration of being an artist. They reversed it; 'I'm an artist therefore whatever I say or do or utter is art' . . . I mean that's the final absurdity.[40]

He goes on to make his position clear:

> I profoundly disagree with that because I don't think anyone's entitled to call themselves an artist. They're only entitled to call themselves a sculptor or a painter or a photographer. The word 'artist' is given to someone by the community . . . he's not entitled to claim it for himself. Its an act of recognition . . . its an important word.[41]

Pollard's questioning of the conceptual art of this period, is symtomatic of the beginnings of the break down in the dominant status of New York. While during the sixties artists pursued the next logical step with a frantic commitment to progress in art, conceptual art presented them with a dead end. In 1972, Klose, Rooney and Hickey were working on the idea of documenting "the phenomena of a 'cup' from a lot of disciplinary standpoints, and hoping to fix just exactly what a cup is."[42] Simon Klose admits that it was "a nightmare,"[43] but of real importance is the change in attitude by Dale Hickey. He realised that he was a painter, and so he decided to address a cup as a painter would, believing that it was more enjoyable, and also that, "painting cups was no less a description of things than mere philosophy."[44] In fact, he was the only one of the three to carry the idea through to their combined show in July 1973. Pollard remembers the shock of what has come to be known as the "Cup Show": "People were just not used to looking at illusionist paintings in this gallery."[45]

For Pollard, the grip of New York finally broke with the exhibition of these paintings.[46] The change from 1968 to 1974 was very marked. It was a period during which Pollard tolerated and supported the artist's as they worked through their anxiety:

> I think there was a general feeling of bankruptcy in the very early seventies with the doctrinaire hard-edge abstraction, and maybe, conceptual art performed a function of finally reducing the formalistic approach to nonsense.[47]

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# ENDNOTES:

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7. *loc. cit.*
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10. *loc. cit.*
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13. *loc. cit.*
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17. Interview with Dale Hickey, p. 2.
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28. Interview with Simon Klose, p. 3.
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31. Smith, T., *Situation Now*, p. 7.
32. Galbally, A., *Age,* 28/4/1971, p. 2.
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37. Rooney, R., *Pinacotheca*, No. 1, p. 1.
38. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 2, p. 14.
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45. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 2, p. 12.
46. *ibid*, p. 11.
47. *ibid*, p. 13.

# PINACOTHECA 1970–1973:
## POLLARD'S APPROACH TO RUNNING
## THE GALLERY AND THE COOPERATIVE

In November 1971 Mike Brown wrote a favourable report in the second edition of *Pinacotheca* on the co-operative:

> as far as it's gone, the artist's co-op. idea that was instituted last year at Pinacotheca has worked very well—I don't think any of us would dream of returning to the old "artist—and—dealer" system. Previously we hardly met each other at all except when we happened to be in at the gallery lobbying our dealer for some personal gain or favour. Now at regular meetings we meet as equals with similar interests and problems, and we're at least *thinking* about things that could be of common benefit.[1]

Brown stresses the atmosphere of interaction, discussion and argument, with the sense of liberation which the artists felt at no longer having the demeaning feeling of being the member of a "stable". Implicitly, there is a tone in this comment, which celebrates the imput into the art gallery system of artists. Unfortunately, however, for the enterprise their idealism led them to suggestions which were beyond the practical realities of Pinacotheca, revealing a lack of understanding of the nature of the commercial gallery system in general. The move to Richmond meant that costs had to come down. Pollard had ceased teaching full-time, and with the predominance of conceptual and installation exhibitions, there was virtually no income from sales. Simon Klose remembers that it was not even worth thinking about pricing the work[2] so it was financially impossible for Pollard to provide glossy catalogues, even if this had been desired. He was after all providing a free building, free service and free lighting.[3]

Bernard Smith wrote, in his 1971 edition of *Australian Painting*, that "Pinacotheca is now run on a membership basis to alleviate the tyranny of sales"[4] but the rhetoric is misleading. Patrick McCaughey was more correct when he wrote in the only edition of Australian *Art Forum* of October 1972 that Pinacotheca had:

> formed itself into a loose co-operative gallery, providing shelter and showing space for artists who by inclination or the

nature of their work, don't fit into the procrustean demands of the normal commercial gallery.[5]

One must be careful not to misconstrue the reasons why the artists were responsive to the cooperative system. Dale Hickey agrees that one might suggest that the idea had socialistic overtones, but he believes that the connection is based on "circumstances rather than anything else."[6] It was an alternative at the time, he believes, because its was "anti-establishment": "you talk to other artists and dealers around the place and they're really into a very crass idea and involvement, seemingly with what art is all about."[7] When he was in New York in 1971, he spoke positively to Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden of how Pinacotheca provided some kind of model of people interacting.[8] But it was not that the artists wanted to avoid the sale of their work: "I would be surprised if underneath it all there was even one artist involved in Pinacotheca who didn't like selling work[9] . . . just like saying it was anti-capitalist, that's so far removed from the truth, that the place was anti-capitalist."[10]

Listed in Brown's article are some of the suggestions raised at the meetings and from these one gains an insight into what some of the group was thinking about: the consideration of whether Pinacotheca was in the right location and the possiblity of a city shop for the distribution of posters, multiples and publications; the installation of slide projectors and video machines for the display of an artist's entire work to reduce the storage area and allow room for a print workshop, photographic work and film cutting; experiments with group work and activities, happenings, environments and film making; a further 15% of sales to go to a fund for the purchase of "communication machinery"; real attempts to confront the general public, a painted tram or a float in the Moomba Parade, and murals and sculpture in public places; admission charges to exhibitions, which would vary according to costs.[11] Its a mixture of ideals, some more appropriate to an art college or institution, which is perhaps a reflection of the lack of facilities available at these places, and on open access. Other suggestions express an obvious desire for an increased public profile but none take into account the economic reality; they depended on Pollard and he simply did not have the capacity to provide the finance required, even if he had wished to do so.

For Pollard, despite his persistent stoicism, the demands which the artists were making on him during this period were wearing him down:

I used to get tired of the emotional demands; "did I get a good criticism? How are the sales going?" . . . I thought, well damn it all they should see what's going on, not just bring the work in, drop it, and then go away for three weeks and not know what the reality of the communication, or lack of communication was, because in many ways they were living in a cloud.[12]

It was from the romanticism of this cloud that Pollard wanted to snatch the artists.[13] He had, through experience, evolved the belief that many artists wanted to create a privileged club,[14] believing that only they could judge art.[15] He had had artists' wives saying to him "you wouldn't suffer in the same way, you're not an artist."[16] Clive Murray-White admits that their behaviour was "terribly cool": "there's a going fashion in the arts, which I suppose artists don't like to admit to, but I think we got pretty heavily sucked into it"[17]; and Dale Hickey is insistent that Pinacotheca was "always elitist, always—It wasn't pandering to any notion about community artists."[18] "The artists club," Pollard believes, "successfully disguises the fact that they've got a lot of middle class demands."[19]

In Pollard's case, therefore, part of the motivation for the greater involvement of the artists in running the gallery stemmed from this growing frustration. He was caught between the inaccessability to the public of the work that these artists were producing, and their need for reassurance:

They made these emotional demands on me in a way to make their ego feel good, that people liked their work. But I don't think they had any idea of how tough it was, and I thought, sitting at the desk, and also I hated doing it, perhaps they could have a taste of what running a gallery could be like.[20]

Sitting at the desk remained for Pollard the worst aspect of running the gallery, and it is interesting that a number of artists echoed this dislike. Simon Klose felt that Pollard would create situations which confronted the artists with various aspects of his role which he felt they were not aware of. Clive Murray-White remembers Pollard saying "the artist should see how everyone would react to their work" and he felt that the idea sounded fine, "but it actually meant sitting in the bloody gallery when your show was on, virtually non stop, and only two and a half people went anyway."[21]

The artists involvement in the running of the gallery was not simply a matter of manning their own shows. The cooperative was

structured on the basis of meetings, although no one was sure how regular they were, but they started in 1971.[22] The visit to Pinacotheca of Harald Szeeman of Kassel Documenta V in mid-1971 provides an interesting insight. The cooperative was underway, Bruce Pollard was present, and the incident was memorable to Murray-White, for the lack of communication which took place between the Pinacotheca artists and the visitor. All had gathered in Pollard's sparsely decorated and dimly lit upstairs flat:

There was at least the core of Pinacotheca artists plus girlfriends and a couple of hangers on. Like nobody was going to say "OK, what do you want?" and there was this really weird . . . [Szeeman] sort of wandered around feeling . . . it was actually going along to have a look at a German 'artocrate', rather than sell our wares to him.[23]

If Pollard was the traditional gallery director one would expect some action on his part, but according to Murray-White, in the days of the cooperative, "Bruce was a sort of equal partner in the whole thing, so he wasn't laying it on thick."[24] Pollard was clearly leaving it up to the artists. While their attitude may appear to have been appropriately cool it was also symptomatic of their inexperience in dealing with this kind of situation. Simon Klose felt that although the artists were not averse to selling their work, "it would have been very difficult to buy something at the time" because of the very "isolated sensibility; none of us were businessmen at all, hopeless really, no experience, absolutely none."[25]

Dale Hickey remembers that much of the discussion at the meetings, was taken up with whether or not a glass door should be put in at the front of the gallery, to replace the imposing, impregnable steel one.[26] "There's always been a thing" quoted Murray-White, "that's said, 'an art gallery has to have a glass door or people won't go in',"[27] and so "there were great discussions on how this would be built and one of the artists was an architect so he designed one."[28] According to Murray-White, Pollard has since "made the great art sacrifice" by putting in the enclosure and glass door.[29] Now, with the glass portico to provide protection from the weather, the steel door can be left ajar making the entrance more inviting. It was a debate that reflected the concern of some to moderate Pinacotheca and to provide a few more comforts to make the gallery more accessible to the public. This anecdote related by Robert Rooney is particularly telling:

Simon Klose was looking after the gallery when our joint
show was on. I was there and so were several other artists. A
woman walked in, and asked to see the monumental sculptures
Patrick McCaughey had praised in the *Age*. Simon told her
they were at the Warehouse Gallery in Waltham Street
[Pinacotheca is in Waltham Place]; she said she would have a
look at the show anyway. At that time we were charging an
entrance fee, (twenty cents I think,) and when she came out he
asked her for the money. She went mad, and said: "I'm not
paying to see a few rocks and photographs!" I said: "Well, get
out, and don't come back again!" She rushed out, abused the
children playing near her car and drove off. Later, I heard
from Peter Davidson that she arrived at Warehouse gallery
looking rather shaken, and said that she had been attacked by
louts at another gallery near by. She was helped to a chair and
given a cup of tea.[30]

Like the suggestions which evolved out of the meetings, this arrogant
action reveals something of the frustration, which the artists were
feeling from their seclusion and lack of attention.

Of course, to Pollard, the suggestions which arose out of the
meetings were an anathema. He describes Mike Brown, Trevor Vickers
and Kevin Mortensen as "popularists," due to their attention to staged
events and their concern "to go out and reach the people, whip the
people up and get them excited."[31] Kevin Mortensen's performance
of the *Sea Gull Salesman* took place at Pinacotheca in June 1971:

caged seagulls, lifesize papiermache human figures and bulbous
black totems set in sand [which] are watched by a still seated
figure, masked in the threatening bird's head. Reality and art
begin to be confused for the spectator as he circles the group.
Then the bird's head turns and looks directly at him, and he
realises that the figure inside is alive.[32]

One suspects that for Pollard, despite an appreciation of the artist's
creative aptitude, the theatrically involved was far removed from the
contemplative response to a work of art which he sought. In the
continuing discussion of how to get people into galleries, Pollard would
argue against these "sensational things like events"[33] preferring to "just
keep going, persisting and surviving" and to "wear people down by
the sheer quality of what you were doing."[34] It was not because they
were unsuccessful, for such events were popular during the period.
Indeed Clive Murray-White, pictured on the cover of *Art and Australia*

in Autumn 1976, staging one of his *Smoke Bomb* events from 1971,
remembers the extraordinary response to Patrick McCaughey's mention
of *The Opening Leg Show Bizarre* in his weekly review.[35] Mike Brown,
Russell Drever and Kevin Mortensen combined to stage the three hour
event which took place on 26 February 1972, and waiting to get in
was an excited queue which stretched all the way up the lane to
Church Street.[36]

Underlying Pollard's lack of interest in promotional activity,
was his stoicism and his interest to insure that the integrity of the
work was not compromised. The strategy was, he now noted: "a bit
purist I guess, just the art, nothing but the art, no flattery, no bullshit,
very basic, a bit pure."[37] Dale Hickey remembers how Bruce Pollard
would arrogantly say:

The community would come here. I refuse to send out
invitations, I refuse to put on dinner parties, I refuse to do any
of the run of the mill stuff of the art world because I expect
Melbourne to come to me.[38]

His idea, according to Rooney, was to build things up slowly, over
a long period of time: "he's often not been bothered about invitations,
and all the things artists demand, like colour plates in *Art and Australia*".[39]
Promotion and sales were obviously a crucial point of discussion amongst
some of the artists, but for Pollard the issue was quite simple. For
artists wanting to show at Pinacotheca, he was clear about what they
could expect, and for those that were already there and were becoming
dissatisfied with the approach then it was appropriate for them to
leave.[40] Pollard's attitude was crystallized some years later in this passing
comment made to Robert Rooney: "once somebody starts calling me
their dealer, it's time for them to go."[41] The comment reminds us
again that Pollard was never interested in mearly selling art works.

In this respect the notion of the hard-core Pinacotheca artist
is very important, as it really is the source and expression of this
director's approach to running the gallery. It was Pollard's concern
to ensure that the artists with whom he associated, and to whom
he gave his support were serious, with a firm commitment to art
making. In this aspect of Pollard we find the teacher emerging—to
see the potential was only the first step, to help develop it was most
important:

It's a complex relationship, and the younger ones seem to seek
that out more. They enjoy the criticism, the challenge I might
offer . . . sometimes when they get into their late thirties and

forties they tend to resent it. So maybe I'll end up as a gallery that never manages to hold it's artists— I'll always be showing younger and developing artists.[42]

It's a realistic approach. Success in the art world is restricted. It is a tough road, which requires "a kind of obsessional sort of personality."[43] In this respect, Simon Klose distinguishes himself from Peter Booth and Robert Rooney, suggesting that his artmaking is not as cathartic as perhaps Booth's might be, nor as important to his everyday life as it is for Rooney.[44] The point being made by Pollard, and recognized by Klose, is simply that very few artists are going to become major figures. When an artist brings his work into the gallery for the first time, Pollard is as much aware of the person as he is of the art. Simon Klose suggests that he wants to be convinced that the artist and the art work are similar.[45] A test which he sometimes applies to a visiting artist, is to ask which work of their own they like best. If they find it hard to distinguish, or they like them all universally, including just their notes, the narcissism worries him. He feels there is not enough toughness. This idea is echoed by Dale Hickey, who in comparing Bruce Pollard to Rudy Komon emphasised the former's stoic attitude.[46] Sydney was considered to be outgoing and involved in pleasure and the pleasure principle, and whilst Rudy Komon would invite his artists to mingle with important people, and would behave in a manner which raised art to a very high level in the social system, Bruce Pollard did just the reverse. His concern was to ensure that the ego of artists and non-artists remained in its correct place.

In 1972 when Pollard departed for overseas the artists were left to their own devices to run every aspect of the gallery operation, but in practice their decision making responsibilities were limited to the selection of artists for the exhibition program.[47] The chairman was elected at every meeting and while some artists would turn up regularly others would not.[48] Rooney cynically recalls how aesthetical and philosophical arguments would take place over the work of young artists, before a vote was taken by the group as to whether they should be allowed to exhibit: "then the poor unfortunate artist would be told to call back later and nobody could remember whether they were voted in or not."[49] The tension between memers of the cooperative was increased when Rooney, Hickey and a few of the others decided that a bit of organisation was needed, and announced at a meeting that minutes should be kept: "the ones that took the 'hippyish' approach, that sort of anything goes approach, Mike Brown, all those who were

there, started mumbling "fascists," because a bit of order was needed."[50] Robert Rooney "played the devil's advocate"[51] and "he would turn on Trevor Vickers and say 'thats straight out of the Whole Earth catalogue' or something equally cutting."[52] The debates were disorganised, and arriving at a final decision was tough but there was also a problem with the time that it all demanded. Most of the artists had some form of paid part-time employment and, as well, they tried to get their own art work done. After the initial viewing of slides and the following debate, a group of the Pinacotheca artists would go out and see the actual work, where-ever it was. Murray-White spoke regretfully of this administrative role as: "playing God with other artists."[53]

It was becoming obvious that their suggestions and discussions would amount to nothing; they knew they were only there for a finite time, but, as well, there was a growing realisation amongst many of the artists that the system they sought to change, despite its anomalies, was a more rational and workable one. At one point, the artists almost voted to close.[54] They were disenchanted with having to go through the motions of running the gallery.[55] Simon Klose makes the point that "although it seemed like an interesting exercise for Bruce it wasn't sort of for real, in the long term,"[56] but he qualifies this by suggesting that the experience "would have been, in Bruce's own mind, for the benefit of the artists, not for the benefit of Bruce, and in a way it worked."[57] Dale Hickey suggested that:

> He may have preversely decided that it would be really good
> for us all, to have to undertake this monthly meeting or
> whatever it was, to make us realise how boring we all were
> and difficult it was for him.[58]

Clive Murray-White sums up the result of the artist's experience:

> One of the things about a good gallery is the bias and the
> elitism, and the forcefulness of the director, because
> ultimately, it's his or her choice. Where as most artists at the
> time were thinking that it should be different, the artists
> should have the say—and so once we got it we didn't know
> what to do with it.[59]

In 1973 when Pollard returned from overseas, he felt detatched enough to ask the artists whether they wanted the gallery to continue. If they answered, "no," he was quite prepared to close, but needless to say, they said they wanted the gallery to survive.

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# ENDNOTES:

1. Brown, M., "I'd Rather Go To A B Grade Movie", *Pinacotheca*, No. 2, p.p. 4-5.
2. Interview with Simon Klose, p. 6.
3. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 2, p. 2.
4. Smith, B., *Australian Painting: 1788-1970*, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 343.
5. McCaughey, P., *Art Forum*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 65.
6. Interview with Dale Hickey, p. 6.
7. *ibid*, p. 4.
8. *ibid*, p. 7.
9. *ibid*, p. 3.
10. *ibid*, p. 6.
11. Brown, M., *op cit.*, p. 8.
12. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 1, p. 5.
13. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 2, p. 5.
14. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 1, p. 5.
15. *ibid*, p. 6.
16. *ibid*, p. 6.
17. Interview with C. Murray-White, p. 11.
18. Interview with Dale Hickey, p. 8.
19. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 1, p. 13.
20. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 2. p. 4.
21. Interview with C. Murray-White, p. 9.
22. Interview with Robert Rooney, p. 6.
23. Interview with C. Murray-White, p. 8.
24. *loc. cit.*
25. Interview with Simon Klose, p. 4.
26. Interview with Dale Hickey, p. 5.
27. Interview with C. Murray-White, p. 9.
28. Interview with Robert Rooney, p. 6.
29. Interview with C. Murray-White, p. 9.
30. Interview with Robert Rooney, p. 18.
31. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 2, p. 5.
32. Galbally, A., "Sculpture makes you stop and think," *Age*, 30/6/1971, p. 2.
33. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 2, p. 9.
34. *ibid*, p. 5.
35. McCaughey, P., *Age*, 23/2/1972, p. 2.
36. Interview with C. Murray-White, p. 12.
37. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 2, p. 2.
38. Interview with Dale Hickey, p. 8.
39. Interview with Robert Rooney, p. 8.
40. Interview with Dale Hickey, p. 9.
41. Interview with Robert Rooney, p. 8.
42. Interview with Bruce Pollard, No. 1, p. 6.
43. *ibid*, p. 4.
44. Interview with Simon Klose, p. 9.
45. *ibid*, p. 7.
46. Interview with Dale Hickey, p. 11.
47. *ibid*, p. 5.
48. Interview with Simon Klose, p. 4.
49. Interview with Robert Rooney, p. 7.
50. *ibid*, p. 7.
51. Interview with Simon Klose, p. 4.
52. Interview with Dale Hickey, p. 5.
53. Interview with C. Murray-White, p. 10.
54. Interview with Simon Klose, p. 4.
55. *ibid*, p. 4.
56. *ibid*, p. 5.
57. *loc. cit.*
58. Interview with Dale Hickey, p. 6.
59. Interview with C. Murray-White, p. 10.

# CONCLUSION

This period, as a whole, was an important one for Bruce Pollard. It is particularly notable for the close association he developed with major artists. In his doggedness the artists recognized a commitment to the integrity of the work of art, and they respected this. The relationship which he sought with artists is the essence of his style as a gallery director and it developed, from its roots in friendship, discussion and argument in the early years, against the apparently sterile background of formalism. Pollard worked through a period of growing self-confidence to the point where he was ready to provide imput of his own. In this respect it was appropriate for him to instigate and support a cooperative system of gallery operation. His lengthy patronage of the artists involved with Pinacotheca cannot be underestimated, and during this period of questioning and experimentation his support of the artists, despite some personal reservations, is particularly admirable. If Pollard found himself, ultimately, in conflict with the ideals expressed by some of the artists, he is to be acknowledged for his willingness to provide continuing financial and personal support.

To date his approach in running the gallery has not changed dramatically. He is still committed patiently and consistently to presenting work with little or no promotion, resolute in his belief that people would in time respond to quality. In this respect the gallery has been very successful, and the fact that it is still operating in 1986, reveals something of the effectiveness of this stragety, and his own persistance—and that perhaps, to a degree, Melbourne has come to Pollard, at least often enough for Pinacotheca to survive.

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