



Australian
National
University

Artworks at the Australian National University Humanities Research Centre Seminar

Monday 22 September 2014, 4.00 – 5.30pm
HRC Conference Room, A.D. Hope Building #14, ANU

Speaker

Emeritus Professor David Williams AM, Australian National University



The University House design and precinct, incorporating a site specific sculpture established a showpiece for Australia's new national university. By design, it was to be the 'Australian university in an Australian setting'. The commissioning of Gerald Lewers' 1953 sandstone Reclining Figure, set a benchmark for policy supporting the **commissioning of site specific artwork** in association with all ANU campus capital works. Lyndon Dadswell's copper-relief screens (1961) for the Menzies Library and Matcham Skipper's painted steel screens for the HC Coombs Building (1962) were other early ANU site specific commissions.

In 1952, consistent with this policy, Fred Ward was invited by ANU to establish a **Design Workshop** with Derek Wrigley to design and make the furniture for University House.

Sometime after this ANU initiative in 1958, the National Capital Development Commission (NCDC) was set up to develop Canberra and it also established a policy to 'provide works of Art as an integral part of its building and urban development programmes'. The NCDC policy was continued in the ACT with its Public Art policy and today. As a result,

Canberra now accommodates a most extensive collection of public artworks/sculpture by prominent Australian artists.

Although no specific provision for a University art collection was made in 1953, artworks were acquired by University House and the collection gradually grew with limited funds and considerable encouragement from a few dedicated individuals. Currently, **the ANU Art Collection** incorporates all the various University collections on campus and totals 000s of items including paintings, prints, drawings, ceramics and glassworks.

In 1964, the University Council established the **Creative Arts Fellowship** with ANU Chancellor Dr H.C. Coombs the prime mover for this initiative. The first Fellows to arrive in 1965 were John Percival and Sidney Nolan.

Nolan's nine-panel painting Riverbend 1964-65, is an ANU treasure on permanent display at the Drill Hall Gallery Nolan Room. In the late 1960s musicians George Dreyfus and Rodney Hall and writer Christina Stead, were followed by Arthur Boyd as the 1971 Fellow in residence.

In the ANU jubilee year 1996, the Fellowship was renamed the HC Coombs Creative Fellowship to recognise Coomb's significant contribution to the cultural life of the University community. Next year 2015 marks the Creative Arts Fellowship's 50th year in operation.

Sixty years on, the **University collection of sculpture and art works** is also cause for celebration. It has become one of the great university art collections in Australia with sculpture on public display around the campus and art exhibitions centred around the Drill Hall and School of Art Galleries.

This illustrated talk discusses these developments with a focus on ANU commissioned sculpture over the period 1953- 2013.

Presented by

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Enquiries

Colette.Gilmour@anu.edu.au

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