

## REX BUTLER AND A.D.S. DONADLSON

### French, Floral and Female: A History of UnAustralian Art 1900-1930 (part 1)

#### ABSTRACT

In this essay, which is another instalment in the authors' ongoing project of writing a history of UnAustralian art of the 20th century, the period 1900 to 1930 is characterised in terms of the three adjectives “French”, “floral” and “feminine”. “French” because so much of Australian art history took place in France, or in relation to France, during the period. “Floral” because so much of this history can be understood in terms of flower painting, often included in still lifes and interiors, as opposed to the prevailing “gum tree” nationalism enshrined after the First World War. “Female” because, extending the existing accounts by women art historians, the entire period can be understood as feminine in character. This UnAustralian account breaks with the importance attributed both to Norah Simpson bringing back books on Cubism in 1913 and to Grace Cossington-Smith's *The Sock Knitter* (1915) as the first signs of modernism in Australia, and to the War as an event that dramatically changed the course of Australian art history, either by sending Australian artists for the first time overseas or by explaining the prominence of women in Australian art after the War. To think of Australian art 1900-1930 as 'French, floral and female' is to imagine a different account from the usual nationalist one; to re-conceive a history that has remained fundamentally unaltered since William Moore's *The Story of Australian Art* (1934).

#### Introduction

*Collins Street, Melbourne*, by Ambrose Patterson has true luminosity – but Patterson worked for years in Paris. Was it there that he learned the truth of vision that makes him more Australian than the Australians?

— Edith Fry, 1924<sup>1</sup>

‘French, Floral and Female: A History of UnAustralian Art 1900-1930’ is part of an alternative history of Australian art in the 20th century.<sup>2</sup> It is a history driven not by the desire to reveal art that embodies some inherent national character or the effects of climate, geography or distance on artistic models imported from elsewhere. It does not seek to distinguish some identifiable national art or to show how Australian art is different from that of other countries. Instead of writing a history of some kind of specifically Australian art and how this art might relate to that of other countries, we reverse the perspective and ask how Australian art is like that of other countries and what it might look like when seen from their point of view. We attempt to write an art history that is characterised not by distance and difference but by proximity and similarity. It is to think of a different relationship between Australia and its art and between Australia and the rest of the world. Of course, a series of obvious questions is raised at this point: in the absence of some identifiable “art of nation”, what could be the real subject of this history? What would be included and what would be excluded from this other, UnAustralian, history? Is this a history written for Australians in the present or for some people yet to come? We conceive of this history not as an attack on the existing Australianist accounts, nor even as a revision of them, but as an

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<sup>1</sup> Fry, 1924, p.2.

<sup>2</sup> See also Butler and Donaldson, 2007, pp. 107-22; and Butler and Donaldson, 2009, pp. 119-43.

*alternative* and *parallel* account of Australian art. It is, however, an account that we would claim is the true history of our present, the history that leads up to our contemporary condition. After all, very little work made by Australian artists today understands itself as an expression of our local culture or as coming out of the nationalist tradition of Australian art (which we would say runs in its strongest form from the 1920s until the 1960s). Indeed, we would argue that it is this non-national or UnAustralian possibility that is ultimately more long-running than the Australian one in Australian art; we must understand Australian art as arising as a response to the UnAustralian alternative running throughout its history. It is the translocal, the international and the global that are ultimately the story of Australian art, and not the local, national or provincial.

We divide our history up into eight overlapping chapters or sections, only one of which is presented here. They include '1920-1940: Stay, Go or Come', which deals with the period when the question of expatriation and immigration becomes central for artists practising in Australia; and '1960-1980: Post-Object, Post-Aboriginal', which takes up the two related tendencies of the dematerialisation of the art object and the rise of Indigenous art. Each of these sections refers not only to a particular time but also to a tendency; a tendency that, although at first seen to be arising at a particular moment, in fact runs all the way through the history of Australian art. We very much want to make the point – and try to demonstrate it through the density and accumulation of historical fact – that this UnAustralian tendency is an equally self-aware and self-conscious tradition and features a similar density of art, artists and art institutions, as the Australian. In this essay we offer an overview of the period 1900-1930, and begin by explaining how our characterisation of it as 'French, floral and female' might allow us to rethink our art otherwise than the usual nationalistic account. In introducing these perspectives to describe the first decade of the 20th century we will see that, just as these particular qualities run all the way through the 20th century, other later tendencies are also to be seen here at the beginning of Australian art. There is always, for example, our relationship to Asia, America and New Zealand. There are always questions of technology, which will reshape existing artistic forms and open up new ones (photography, film, sound recording). And the UnAustralian is always to be found in all aspects of our culture (film, dance, drama, music and literature) and not just the visual arts.

### **Why French?**

Our history reflects the real experience of artists in the 20th century, and it begins by taking into account the Australian artists living overseas. That is, from the beginning we will fundamentally *relocate* the story of Australian art. As we will show, not only were there a considerable number of artists from all over Australia living and working in other places at the turn of the last century, but they would remain there throughout the period in question and beyond. It is not for us *genius loci* that is compelling as an explanation of Australian art; but, invoking the Latin, our art is always *partes extra partes*. That is, Australian art can never be grasped whole, but is only made up of parts; and it is itself only a part amongst all the other parts that make up the art of the world. This relocation has many effects on the usual ways we have of understanding our national story. First, it goes against Bernard Smith's attempt to characterise the period in terms of a journeying outwards and then a retreat or withdrawal, a movement he describes in the chapters 'Exodus 1881-1919' and 'Leviticus 1913-32'

of *Australian Painting*.<sup>3</sup> Second, the presence of Australian artists in advanced artistic circles overseas offers an alternative account to the well-rehearsed anecdote concerning the origins of modernism in this country, in which art student Norah Simpson is said to have returned to Antonio Dattilo-Rubbo's atelier school in 1913 with books and reproductions of the paintings of Cézanne, Matisse and Picasso, whose work she had seen first-hand in Paris and London.<sup>4</sup> Third, our account de-emphasises the role of the First World War, either as an explanation of the presence of Australians overseas or of artistic developments in Australia in the late teens and early twenties. Indeed, we would want to move beyond even the general presence of Australians overseas and note the exact locations of these Australians, for the period witnesses a spreading out of Australian artists beyond the usual Empire locations to Paris, the north-west coast of France and America. (And we would even be tempted to make a distinction between Australian men, who could be said to be still largely drawn to London, and Australian women, who tended to strike out more to Paris and France.) Finally, we would want to note not only the presence of Australians in France but also of the French within Australia, with a whole series of influential French-trained and French-oriented artists and art teachers coming to Australia immediately prior to this period: Lucien Henry, Arthur Loureiro, Girolamo Nerli, Ugo Catani, Antonio Dattilo-Rubbo and Petrus van der Velden.

### Why floral?

During this period, it is generally considered that landscape painting was the genre predominantly practised by Australian artists. But beside this, and even against it, our women artists embraced interiors, still lives and floral painting. Intimate and familiar, their subjects were often sourced from their gardens, their own immediate world. This gave their work a limit, but also a freedom. Disinclined to rule-breaking and avant-garde gestures, their modernism developed *within* tradition. As opposed to the public, outward-looking pastoral vision of the male painters at this time, women reflected on their own real-life, private and individualised experiences. And it was not only women but homosexual men who felt the constraints of this patriarchal and masculinist order. Unwilling to submit their work to any wider nationalist agenda, these women and men were free to explore the world they knew, a world known perhaps only to themselves and to those who truly knew them. Painting not *en plein air* but *en intime*, their work moved towards an exploration both of a psychological space and the liberation of colour from nature. It is a line of development that we can perhaps trace from John Peter Russell's use of often unmixed colour in his paintings of the stormy seas off Belle-Île in France all the way through to such heterosexual artists willing to explore other facets of their identity as the one-time war artist George Lambert in his *Self-Portrait with Gladioli* (1922). (And we cannot but compare Lambert's painting with another heterosexual man wishing to take an ironic distance on the clichés of masculinity through flowers, Barry Humphries.) Indeed, this is a floral tradition that will continue on throughout the whole period of modernism, and it is particularly prevalent in the "feminine" arts and in the applied or industrial arts. We might think here, for example, of Bernice Edwell's miniatures, Kathleen O'Connor's fabrics, Charles Conder's and Thea Proctor's fans and the work of ceramicists Gladys Reynell, Margaret Preston, Anne Dangar, Theodora Cowan and

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<sup>3</sup> Smith, 2001, pp. 126-204.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of this see Williams, 1991, pp. 53-59. We will discuss this episode and its related historiography in more detail later in the text.

Maud Poynter. The floral is an artistic motif – or, better, a strategy – that continues up to the present day, connecting such diverse figures as the Central Desert painter Emily Kngwarreye and her Yam Dreamings, the Singaporean-born Simryn Gill and her post-colonial surrealism and the gay Indigenous photographer Christian Thompson, who combines Australian native flowers and self-portraiture to bring about a certain uncanny “UnAustralian” identity.

## Why Female?

Our UnAustralian history recognises the primary and foundational contribution of women to Australian art during this period. We would even say that it is the work of women that was the most vital and emancipatory of the time. Their work is closer to them; it more directly reflects their daily lives, the real social and practical circumstances in which they lived. If their work was not actually avant-garde, and we do not say that it was, the same could not be said of their lives, in which they sought to break with centuries of social constraints and restrictions. And, in the end, they attempted in their art to reflect the new modern lives they were leading. We might think here, for example, of Agnes Goodsir’s “New Woman” portrait, *The Parisienne* (1924) (Fig. 3), or of Grace Crowley’s post-Cubist *Portrait of Lucy Beynis* (c. 1929).

In our treatment here we begin by acknowledging the immense work done by a generation of feminist art historians since the 1960s. It is they who were the first to contest Smith’s overtly sexist claim that the predominance of women in Australian art in the 1920s was the result of a ‘generation with its leaders’ lost in the War.<sup>5</sup> Caroline Ambrus for one refutes this in her *Ladies’ Picture Show* through a detailed study of the comparative enrolment of women and men in art schools during the time, an analysis which demonstrates that there is every reason why women should have dominated the art scene in Australia after the War. It is an argument that is taken up in another form by Humphrey McQueen, who positively revalues modernism and the role played by such women as Margaret Preston within it.<sup>6</sup> But for all of these critics’ arguments against Smith, they nevertheless remain indebted to his fundamental assumption that, via those females who may be credited with bringing it to Australia’s attention (Norah Simpson and Grace Cossington-Smith), modernism can still be understood as arriving in Australia late and from a distance. Modernism still remains a *national* story, a story of what happens *here*, even if it is predominantly a female one. And, as part of that retreat or withdrawal that Smith diagnoses as occurring some time later, those pioneering women associated with this modernism can ultimately be forgotten.

Our emphasis here is different. It begins with a desire to privilege not so much the role of women artists in Australia, but the presence of – especially female – Australian artists overseas. We seek to tell the story of the widespread and interconnected network of women artists in France and England, including women sometimes engaged in homosexual relationships. It is this taking into account of the continuous presence of Australian women overseas, at least since the turn of the last century, that not only challenges Smith’s argument that the predominance of women in Australian modernism is somehow to be explained because of the War, but, more

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, 2001, p. 199.

<sup>6</sup> Ambrus, 1984, pp. 10-19; McQueen, 1979, pp. 141-63.

importantly, his far more pervasive and influential idea that modernism came to Australia *late* and *from a distance*.

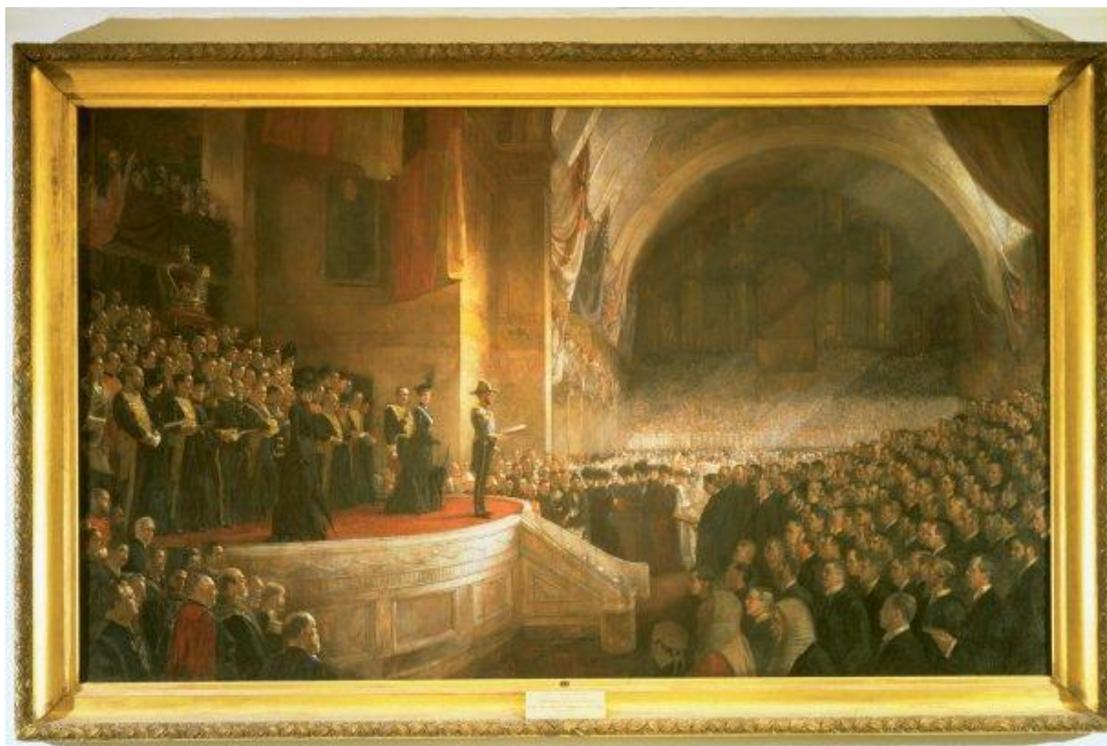


Fig. 1. Tom Roberts, *Opening of the First Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia by H.R.H. The Duke of Cornwall and York (Later King George V), May 9, 1901, 1903*. On permanent loan to the Parliament of Australia from the British Royal Collection. Courtesy of Parliament House Collection, Department of Parliamentary Services, Canberra, ACT.

## 1900-1910

Let us begin with two paintings completed around the time of Federation. The first is Tom Roberts' *The Opening of the First Federal Parliament* (1903) (Fig. 1), or the "Big Picture", as he called it. As well as marking the Federation of Australia as a peaceful and socially progressive democracy – it would extend the vote to women in 1901, only the second country in the world to do so – the work is also revealing as it indicates the ongoing canonisation of the Heidelberg School. Although that School, of which Roberts was a founding member, was originally French (Barbizon, Impressionism) and Japanese (the famous paper screen shown at the 9 x 5 show in 1889) in inspiration, as early as 1900 with Federation it was being seen as distinctively Australian in its means and motivation. Already Roberts, in the wake of the immediate break-up of the School and in the lead up to Federation, had begun looking for 'an atmosphere familiarly Australian'.<sup>7</sup> His travels to the Riverina in south-western New South Wales and Inverell in northern New South Wales produced such iconic works as *A break away!* (1891) and *The Golden Fleece* (1894). These works would receive immediate acclaim as 'most really and absolutely Australian',<sup>8</sup> and were purchased soon after by leading patrons and State Gallery collections. Hence we can see the reasoning behind Roberts receiving the commission to paint the

<sup>7</sup> Roberts, 1893, p. 14. Cited in McQueen, 1996, p. 371.

<sup>8</sup> The Argus, 1890, p. 9. Cited in Spate, 1978, p. 87.

giant “history painting” that is *The Opening of the First Federal Parliament*, with its echoes of Jacques-Louis David’s *Coronation of Napoleon* (1805-08). It was a canonisation of the Heidelberg School as our national artists, which was to reach a climax in the 1920s and 1930s and was contemporaneous with the first attempts to write a history of Australian art, such as William Moore’s *Story of Australian Art* (1932). In addition, a number of the original members of the Heidelberg School had returned by this time, after long periods spent overseas attempting to carve out careers, and in their twilight years were only too willing to go along with the retrospective nationalisation of their work and its attendant social and commercial success. It is notable, for example, that Arthur Streeton painted such Australianist works as *Land of the Golden Fleece* (1926) in the 1920s, even though he had only recently returned to the country after some thirty years away.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, for much of the period we are examining here, it was the Heidelberg School, dominated Society of Artists, formed by Roberts, Streeton, Sydney Long and others in 1895, that was the measure of all matters artistic and controlled the few existing opportunities for artistic patronage, both public and private, before the rise of the private art market between the wars. In other words, virtually the only way artists could make a living here was to be part of this nationalist and male-dominated Society, a breakaway association (from the Art Society of New South Wales) that has been likened to the New English Art Club, and that, initially at least, saw itself as progressive. The Society’s inaugural exhibition in 1895 was opened by Sir Henry Parkes at the Skating Rink in York Street, Sydney, and in 1898 many of the Society’s artists were included in the *Exhibition of Australian Art* at the Grafton Gallery in London. In 1901 the Society put on the touring *Federal Exhibition* to mark the constitutional founding of Australia. Male-dominated, oriented towards London and in love with landscape, this powerful institution was to set the pattern for Australian self-representation for decades to come.

On the “UnAustralian” side, by contrast, we might think of Rupert Bunny’s portrait *Madame Nellie Melba* of 1902 (Fig. 2). Bunny, we might say, is the “UnAustralian” counterpart to Roberts. Instead of the celebration of the beginning of nationhood, we have the marking of the *international*, for Melba was by this time known the world over for her light operatic singing. Indeed, it is said that Bunny was present at the famous dinner at the Savoy Hotel in London at which Escoffier debuted his famous dessert, *le Pêche Melba*, before its namesake. And Melba, for her part, was a great admirer of Bunny. Of the many portraits painted of her, it was Bunny’s that was her favourite, and for many years it was installed with her blessing at the top of the stairs of His Majesty’s theatre in Melbourne. Bunny had always been interested in music – it is a marker of the UnAustralian – and painted a number of portraits of singers and musicians: *Percy Grainger* in 1903 and *Mme Sada Yacco ‘Kesa’*, a full-length portrait of the famous Japanese actress Sada Yacco in the role of the suicidal Kesa, with her back towards the viewer, in 1900.

In fact, Bunny played and composed music all his life, with some suggesting that Melba once asked him to accompany her. And Melba, even at the height of her fame, continued to identify as Australian, and encouraged young Australians of all artistic persuasions to study overseas, discreetly helping a number of them out financially from time to time. By the time Bunny came to finish Melba’s portrait, then, he had

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<sup>9</sup> On the nationalism of Streeton in 1920s, see Smith, 1995, p. 161.



Fig 2. Rupert Bunny, *Madame Melba* (c. 1902). Oil on canvas, 245.5 x 153 cm, Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria. Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of Henry Krongold CBE and Dinah Krongold, Founder Benefactors, 1980.

been in Paris for some seventeen years, had spent time in mainstream artistic circles in France, had married a famously beautiful French model whom he frequently painted, was a friend of Rodin and knew everyone from Sarah Bernhardt to Colette, and was six years away from opening his own art school, the Atelier Blanche in Montparnasse, with his friend Émile Blanche. When Bunny painted Melba he was, in a sense, painting a self-portrait: here we have two exemplary “UnAustralians”, both of whom had spent considerable time abroad, had attained artistic authority, had tasted something of international success and were entirely at ease with their identities – as Bunny’s painting shows – as Australians living abroad.

What would the “UnAustralian” equivalent to the Society of Artists be, with its Heidelberg School founder and its immovable nationalist chairman Sydney Ure Smith, who reigned more or less until his death in 1949?<sup>10</sup> We would say that it was a line of European-trained and French-influenced artists who came towards the end of the 1800s, and who either had contact with the local art community or set up atelier-style teaching studio as an alternative to the National Gallery School in Melbourne and the English immigrant Julian Ashton’s Sydney Art School. The first in this sequence were the Italian artists Ugo Catani and Girolami Nerli, who had both trained at the Academy in Florence. Catani was content, once established in “marvellous” Melbourne, to earn a pretty penny turning out commissioned portraits and instructing privately, despite his reputation as ‘an impatient and intolerant teacher’.<sup>11</sup> Nerli relocated from Melbourne to Sydney in 1885, immediately influencing Charles Conder, before moving to New Zealand soon after, where he taught the great New Zealand expatriate Frances Hodgkins. Also from New Zealand came the Rotterdam-born Petrus van der Velden, who arrived in Sydney in 1898, having lived in New Zealand since 1890. Van der Velden had studied at academies in Rotterdam and Berlin, and had painted in France, by the time he came to the Hague in the mid-1870s. There he began to move amongst the well-known Dutch artists of the period; and in that milieu he became friendly with van Gogh in 1882, as his own work, initially realist in manner, tended more and more towards an expressive interest in the landscape. In Christchurch, where he settled, he ‘introduced the role of the professional artist’;<sup>12</sup> and from 1894 he began teaching, taking on, amongst others, Raymond McIntyre and Sydney Thompson. Seeking greener pastures, Van der Velden then moved to Sydney. Initially things went well. His work was bought by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and he began to exhibit regularly; but then his wife died, and he fell ill. Eventually, in 1904, he returned to New Zealand with his new partner Australia Wahlberg, and they married in Wellington in 1904. His 1909 *Self-Portrait* was purchased by Nellie Melba, with whom he was enamoured, and his new daughter was named Melba after the great soprano. Following Van der Velden’s death in 1913, Australia and Melba returned to Sydney. Also amongst these newcomers are Lucien Henry (arrived Sydney in 1880), Jacques Carabain (arrived Melbourne c. 1885), Giulio Anivitti (arrived Sydney c. 1875) and Pier Guisepppe Ferrarini (arrived Tasmania c. 1886), all of them confirming the earlier expatriatism of, for instance, the Russian Nicholas Chevalier (arrived Victoria c. 1855), the Swedish brothers Carl and Claus Friström (arrived Brisbane 1884), the French Berthe Mouchette (arrived Melbourne 1881), the Swiss Louis Buvelot (arrived Melbourne 1865), the German

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<sup>10</sup> Smith is the subject of an excellent biography by Nancy Underhill, whose title says it all: *Making Australian Art 1916-49: Sydney Ure Smith, Patron and Publisher* (Underhill, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Catani, 2007: [www.daao.org.au/main/read/1490](http://www.daao.org.au/main/read/1490) ; accessed 14th November, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Wilson, 2009: <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/biographies/2v1/1>; accessed 23 January, 2009.

John Lindt (arrived Melbourne 1862), the Italian Charles Rolando (arrived Melbourne 1885) and the Pole John Lhotsky (arrived Sydney 1832).

Two other arrivals perhaps deserve special attention. The first is the Oporto-born and Beaux-Arts-trained painter Arthur Loureiro, who arrived in Melbourne with his Tasmanian wife Marie in the mid-1880s. Following their arrival, she became the art critic for *The Age* for more than ten years, while he managed a successful career as a Symboliste (his *Study for 'Spirit of the New Moon'* (1888) at the Queensland Art Gallery is one of the great examples of the style in the history of Australian art) and a portrait painter as well as teaching privately. In fact, it was Loureiro who first suggested to the young Melburnian Harold Brodzky that he study art, and then encouraged him to train overseas. (We shall be following Brodzky's career in a moment.) Indeed, it is perhaps not too much of a jump to connect Loureiro's firm art nouveau line not only with Brodzky's later pioneering interest in linocuts, but more importantly with his single-line drawings, an approach that would later be taken up by Matisse and Picasso. Finally, and most importantly for our history, we have the Neopolitan Antonio Dattilo-Rubbo, the "Signor", who conducted an art school in Sydney for some forty-three years from 1897, having arrived in Sydney the previous year. In 1899 Nerli's painting of a bohemian-looking Dattilo-Rubbo received much acclaim, and Dattilo-Rubbo himself quickly established a reputation in the growing Sydney as the new century began. He taught, over his long career, many of the leading Australian modernists, including Norah Simpson, Grace Cossington-Smith, Tempe Manning, Donald Friend, Alice Danciger, Mary Webb, Frank Hinder, James Cant and Gerald and Margo Lewers. It is Dattilo-Rubbo – and this is not unconnected with our ongoing story about floral painting – who could be said to have introduced colour to Sydney art. Trained in Rome and Naples, he had studied with Domenico Morelli, a member of the Macchioli, a group familiar with the painting then being done in France. In 1906, Dattilo-Rubbo undertook research in Paris, London and Glasgow regarding 'methods of instruction and the best modes of teaching',<sup>13</sup> and advocated the founding of an independent state-supported art school. This advocacy eventually led, against his own self-interest, to the establishment of the East Sydney Technical School, the forerunner of today's National Art School. It was Dattilo-Rubbo who, in 1918, became the first in a long line of artists to call for Australia to participate in the Venice Biennale. It was, of course, something that would not happen in his lifetime. In 1914 Dattilo-Rubbo lectured at the Art Society on "Colour Harmony", and he published his article of the same name that year in the architect's magazine *Salon*, all of which reminds us of Cossington-Smith's recollection of the Signor's oft-repeated dictum, 'Get rid of the brown'.<sup>14</sup> Dattilo-Rubbo was also the teacher of Ronald Wakelin and Roy de Maistre, who together from 1917 conceived the ground-breaking show *Colour in Art* (the very title of which indicates Dattilo-Rubbo's influence). Dattilo-Rubbo, likely as part of his long-running pedagogical rivalry with Julian Ashton's school, favoured an internationalist outlook amongst his students. He encouraged them to travel, and a number of them did (Simpson, de Maistre, Friend and Cant to England; Danciger, Webb, Earl Backen and Wolfgang Cardamatis to Paris). Because of Dattilo-Rubbo's influence, his students were always likely to be more outward-looking than their Melbourne counterparts. Very few of the European painters who settled in Melbourne ended up staying. Sydney, on the other

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<sup>13</sup> Cited in 'Introduction' in Campbell, 1980, p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Campbell, 1980, p. 8.

hand, benefited from the pre-eminence of Dattilo-Rubbo, who as a teacher was concerned to promote colour, advocate the contemporary and keep up with the latest pedagogical developments. Further, he was militant in support of his students, once even challenging a conservative member of the Royal Art Society to a duel – pistols, swords or fisticuffs – in defence of Wakelin's work.

But the story of Australian art takes place just as much *overseas* as in Australia. Even by the end of the last century, there were any number of Australians living and working overseas, and in the first decade of the new century many more were to arrive. They went principally to the two art capitals of London and Paris, but what we also see throughout the period is the presence of Australians in a series of artist colonies throughout France. These, we will find, were preliminary to an even wider dispersion of Australians throughout the world, particularly to America, as the century progressed. Starting in London, we have Derwent Lees, who left Melbourne to enrol in the Slade in 1905 under Frederick Brown and Henry Tonks, and where he was soon regarded as the outstanding student of the time. Fifteen of Lee's nineteen drawings held in the Slade Collection won prizes in 1907, and in 1908 he received First Prize in Life Drawing and was immediately appointed to the staff as "drawing master". He remained at the Slade until 1918, during which time he taught an entire generation of English modernists: Roger Fry, Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, David Bomberg, Edward Wadsworth, Paul Nash, Stanley Spencer, Bernard Meninsky and Mark Gertler, many of whom themselves became teachers, thus keeping alive Lees' legacy. Lees was widely considered a progressive teacher; and Bomberg in particular held him in high regard, speaking of him as providing the most 'revolutionary instruction' he received at the Slade, which was itself the most advanced art school at the time in England.<sup>15</sup> Lees exhibited with the New English Art Club from 1911 to 1917 and Vanessa Bell's Friday Club from 1911 to 1916, where he hung beside many of his former students. In 1913 Lees was one of three Australian artists – the others were Conder and Frank McComas – to participate in the Armory Show, initially in New York and then in Chicago and Boston. His work was hung with the prominent English painters Augustus John and James Innes, the result of those works having been acquired by the influential patron and collector John Quinn, seventy-seven of whose works were in the show. It was, of course, Quinn's Duchamp, *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912), that was the star of the show, reproduced everywhere, including in Sydney's *Sun* newspaper, along with a report on the event.<sup>16</sup> When Brown retired from the Slade in 1918, he was replaced by Tonks and, despite his being sick and on leave of absence, Lees was appointed Tonks' second-in-charge. Before the year was out, however, Lees was committed to an asylum in Surrey, suffering from schizophrenia; and it was there he remained, artistically unproductive, until his death in 1931. Lees, if he is remembered at all today, is typically thought of as English (his work is hung at the Queensland Art Gallery with the Camden Town Group). The Australian curator and art advocate Alleyne Zander had attempted to reclaim Lees as an Australian while he was still alive when she helped organise his exhibition at Rex Nan Kivell's Redfern Gallery in London in 1930, and after his death with a retrospective at the same gallery in 1934. Zander also included Lees' work (once again, noting his true nationality) in her *Exhibition of British Contemporary Art*, which toured Australia in 1933, sparking the "Zandrian Wars", the public outcry that ensued following the

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<sup>15</sup> Lew, 1996, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> *The Sun*, 4 May, 1913, cited in Williams, 1995, p. 21.

show's introduction of English modernism to Australia. This exhibition is perhaps even more important, however, for the fact that, in reclaiming Lees, Zander was one of the first to be consciously thinking of an Australian art history that would not be confined merely to the art made in this country.

Over in France, but still just off the Continent, we have on the island of Belle-Île the Sydney painter John Peter Russell, one of our definitive "UnAustralian" artists. Russell left Australia for the last time in 1883, settled in Paris the following year and became firm friends with Monet in 1886 (the year Russell painted his *Portrait of Vincent Van Gogh*, the great self-portraitist's favourite image of himself) and with Rodin in 1888. Russell embraced Impressionism following contact with Monet at Belle-Île, where he built his so-called Chateau d'Anglais. State galleries around Australia now routinely include Russell's images of Belle-Île's storm-tossed seas and bays, waters whose *agité* is matched by Russell's own tempestuous brushwork, in their collections of Australian art.<sup>2</sup> However, for many years, Australian art history echoed the words of Bernard Smith, who wrote in his *Australian Painting* of Russell that, like Bunny and Emanuel Phillips Fox, 'his work lies outside of the development of Australian art'.<sup>17</sup> A contrasting view of Russell's importance is given by American art historian Hilary Spurling, who in her biography of Matisse writes that at a certain point in Matisse's career, when he was unable to go beyond the sombre palette of the Dutch and Chardin, it was the encounter with the free, autonomous and often unmixed colour of Russell's seascapes that pointed the way forward. Spurling notes that, Matisse was so grateful for this insight and inspiration that he named his two sons Jean and Pierre in his honour.<sup>18</sup> But was Smith right to exclude Russell from the history of Australian art on the basis that, whatever his connections and influence overseas, he was little known and had little impact back home? Here, again, we find that the facts do not bear out Smith's distinction. His decision as to what to include and what to exclude reveals itself to be mere prejudice. In fact, a footnote makes clear who was responsible for Russell being included at all in Smith's history. It acknowledges Russell's niece, the artist Thea Proctor, who at the time Smith was writing was campaigning to have her uncle recognised as part of the art of this country.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Russell, who finally returned to Australia in 1924 before dying in 1930, painted several views of Sydney Harbour, bringing together all that he had learnt in his years in France. Tom Roberts himself visited him from Melbourne not long before Russell's death. The two artists had travelled together throughout Spain in 1887, and the following year Russell and Roberts began their lifelong correspondence, in which Russell kept Roberts abreast of developments in European art.<sup>20</sup> And, as early as 1905, the young Melbourne artist Ambrose Hallen, knowing of Russell, had headed for France, where, like Roberts and Monet, he painted beside him *en plein air*.

As Russell continued to work at Belle-Île, other Australians helped establish a colony of artists further north on the coast of Picardy. By the end of the teens, there were

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<sup>2</sup> To our recollection, the Art Gallery of South Australia was the first to do so, in its section of the Australian collection featuring expatriates from the late 1980s.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, 2001, p. 165.

<sup>18</sup> Spurling, 1998, pp. 119-29.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, 2001, fn 21, p. 166

<sup>20</sup> See on this Ann Galbally's selection of correspondence between Russell and Roberts in Galbally, 1977, pp. 88-95.

some twenty Australians and New Zealanders living and working in Etaples, but even during the first decade of the 20th century there was a considerable Australian community there. We count as “*les figures marquantes*” the Rae sisters, Isobel (Iso) and Alison, from 1893; Rupert Bunny, from 1893, and again in 1895, 1902 and 1907; Marie Tuck, who spent the summers of 1907 and 1908 there, and then took a *séjour* every year from 1910 until 1914; Arthur Baker Clack, from 1910; Hilda Rix, every summer from 1910 until 1917; as well as such “*voyageurs*” as Conder, Philips Fox, Grace Joel, Eleanor Harrison, Alice Muskett and Winifred Honey. The whole phenomenon of Australian artists staying at Etaples is the subject of the book *Peintres Australiens à Etaples* (2000) by the French art historian Jean-Claude Lesage. In his book Lesage traces successive generations of Australian and New Zealand artists who stayed at Etaples for extended periods up to the Second World War. Lesage points out that, thanks to the diplomatic connection between the two countries, Etaples became a military base during the First World War, when the Australian war artists Will Dyson, Fred Leist and Streeton had their own Etaples experience. The French were extremely welcoming of Australians because from their point of view they had fought voluntarily in the Great War to defend France and not, as it were, out of any sense of “king and country”. As Lesage writes of the ensuing relationship between the citizens of Etaples and the artists who came to work there:

Etaples was known for its numerous artistic sights and its cheap shopping: a paradise for painters. The population ended up being habituated to their presence. They met them every day and were no longer surprised by the strange accents heard in the shops, the markets or at the port.<sup>21</sup>

*Peintres Australiens à Etaples* is an exemplary text for our new kind of Australian art history because it provides us with one of those rare instances where we see our art from the outside in, rather than from the usual inside out. And, following Lesage’s example, we would point to other artist colonies in France that also included extensive numbers of Australians, for example, Concarneau in Brittany, where in 1911 Bessie Gibson met the New Zealand expatriates Frances Hodgkins, Owen Merton and Sydney Thompson, and where the Perth-born Kathleen O’Connor befriended the Canadian expatriate Emily Carr. Here in the seas and ports of France, colour was being liberated in Australian art: not only in the stormy oils of Russell, but in the watercolours of Gibson and O’Connor. In Europe, Australian artists began to move beyond the prevailing dictates of the academic realism of the time and towards a more expressive and freely executed figuration.

Inland from the coast, in the Île-de-France, lies Paris. Of course, the famed *ville de lumière* had long been a capital of art, but it is nevertheless surprising just how many Australians were able to break their allegiances to empire and decide to study and work there instead of London. Paris was undoubtedly the more modern city – and not just artistically. We only have to compare the staid Edwardianism of London, whose entire look is buttoned-down and repressed, to the softness of the Belle Époque and the vibrancy of *fin-de-siècle* Paris. Paris was a more open and therefore more cosmopolitan city, whose art schools and private ateliers, which accepted women, were full of students from around the world. Australians, paradoxically, were less discriminated against, felt more at home and were part of a greater English-speaking

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<sup>21</sup> Lesage, 2000, p. 23 (Authors’ translation).

milieu in somewhere like Montparnasse, which was known as *le quartier anglais*, than in London, where they inevitably confronted colonialist prejudices and stereotypes.

We earlier left Rupert Bunny in Paris, where he had come from London in 1886 in order to study, initially with Jean-Paul Laurens and then with Benjamin Constant at the Académie Julian. Some twelve years later, Laurens would also be the first teacher for the latest arrival from Australia, Ambrose Patterson, in 1898. But Patterson would be perhaps Australia's most "promiscuous" art student. Besides Laurens and Constant, he studied at Whistler's Académie Carmen, at the École des Beaux-Arts and then, with the patronage of Melba, at the Académie Colarossi, the Académie Delécluse and finally with Lucien Simon, all by 1902. These two were joined by the young and prodigiously talented Hugh Ramsay, who had left Melbourne in 1900 on the *S.S. Persic* (on board he met George Lambert and the pair later became lasting friends). By 1901, Ramsay was in Paris, where he studied at Colarossi's and Delécluse's, and in the following year four of his works were hung on the line at the Old Salon. Through Patterson, Ramsay came to meet Melba, and she asked him to London to paint her portrait, but it was there that he contracted tuberculosis. Ramsay returned to Melbourne in 1902, where, though ill, he contributed to the Victorian Artists Society, before his untimely death in 1906, aged only twenty-eight. In Paris he had painted his most telling work for our purposes, *A Student of the Latin Quarter* (1901), a portrait of his friend and colleague Ambrose Patterson. We must also not forget in this context Ambrose Hallen, who, when he first arrived in France in 1905, aged nineteen, joined Russell at Belle-Île, where he quickly converted an old mill into a painting studio. Hallen, a student of Frances Hodgkins, lived in France for some thirty years, mostly in Paris. A member of the Independants, he also exhibited at the Old Salon; and on his return late in life to Australia, initially to Sydney, where he exhibited in 1936, and then to Melbourne, where he exhibited in 1938, he became friendly with Lina Bryans, whose *Portrait of Ambrose Hallen* (1937) was her first in the genre. In Melbourne he was associated with the artists William Frater, Danila Vassilieff and Adrian Lawlor, and had begun to teach, but was 'virtually unknown when he dropped dead on the Box Hill railway station in 1943'.<sup>22</sup>

The stories of these four male artists – Russell, Patterson, Ramsay and Hallen – were repeated in broadly similar terms by any number of female ones. The first we might consider is Bessie Davidson. Originally from Adelaide, she came with Margaret Preston from Munich in 1904, where both had studied briefly. In Paris she enrolled at La Grande Chaumière and showed at the Old Salon and with the Independants; but returned to Adelaide in 1906, where she exhibited with Preston the following year. Her sensual painting of fellow artist Gladys Reynell, *Portrait of Miss G.R.* (1906) (Fig. 3), was bought by the Art Gallery of South Australia in 1908; and in 1910 she returned to Paris, this time without Preston.

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<sup>22</sup> McCulloch, 1984, p. 543.



Fig 3. Bessie Davidson, *Portrait of Miss G.R.*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 125 x 88 cm, Adelaide, Art Gallery of South Australia, Elder Bequest Fund. Courtesy of Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide.

In 1914 she came back once again to Adelaide to see her family; but with the outbreak of war she immediately returned to Paris, where she joined the Red Cross, and worked throughout the war as a nurse, eventually running a hospital for cholera patients. In 1922 she was the first Australian woman to be elected as an Associate, and then a Member, of the New Salon. She exhibited with many such groups over the years, and in 1931 was appointed Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur for her services to Art and Humanity by the French Government. At the end of World War Two, she returned to Paris and her studio in Montparnasse (she had spent the war in Normandy and Grenoble), and returned only once more to Australia, in the 1950s. Otherwise, she lived and worked in France until her death, aged 85, in 1965.

Another Australian, Bessie Gibson, arrived in Paris in 1905 aged 32, and enrolled at Castelucho's, with the miniaturist Gabrielle Debillement-Chardin, and then at Colarossi's, where she was taught watercolours by Hodgkins. Her long-time friend Anne Alison Greene arrived in 1912 and, like Gibson, studied at Castelucho's. These two Brisbane women had each held studios in the Rue Campagne-Première in Montparnasse, and both had carved out a viable position in the Parisian art world between the wars. Greene returned to Brisbane in 1946 and Gibson in 1947, where they remained more or less unknown until their deaths. The same fate did not await Hilda Rix (now Rix Nicholas, having married since Etaples) when she returned in 1918 to Sydney, where she established herself as a leading Australian landscapist. She had gone to Paris in 1907, where she studied at the Academie Delécluse, at la Grande Chaumière and with Théophile Steinlein at Castelucho's. In 1910 she worked at Etaples in the last year of her formal studies. In 1911 she was hung on the line at the Old Salon, and in 1912 she made the first of two working trips to Morocco. In 1913 she exhibited for the first time with the *Société des peintres orientalistes français* in Paris; but, of course, she was not alone amongst antipodean artists in joining the current that ran through French modernism that sought the light and in particular the colour of North Africa. Ethel Carrick, Emanuel Philips Fox, George Lambert, Arthur Streeton and Frances Hodgkins all felt the impulse, in Théophile Gauthier's terms, 'to learn of the sun, to study light, to seek out unseen types, and manners and postures that are primitive and biblical'.<sup>23</sup> The war years had seen the deaths of Rix's mother and sister, and she tragically lost her husband on the Western Front in 1916, a little over a month after they married. It is little wonder that she returned to Australia almost immediately after the war – it had been some eleven years she had been away. Kathleen O'Connor had also arrived in Paris from Perth in 1906, and studied briefly with Bunny at Atelier Blanche, beginning a lifelong to-ing and fro-ing between the two countries that would only end when she returned to Australia at the age of 79, following an illness in 1955.

Finally, we have Margaret Preston, who had studied with Davidson, initially at the Künstlerinnen-Verein in Munich and then at la Grande Chaumière, as they spent two years together travelling through Europe. The two Adelaide-born artists ended up forming a trio when Preston, while travelling with Gladys Reynell on a subsequent trip, joined Davidson in Paris in 1912.

What is it that Paris offered these artists? Indeed, what is it that Paris offered women artists in particular, for it is true that from our perspective there is a preponderance of

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<sup>23</sup> Gauthier, 1861, p. 51. Cited in Benjamin, 1997, p. 14.

females studying in the city. Here we would need to go into the practices of the French academies. For the Australians, the most important were la Grande Chaumière, Colarossi's, Delécluse's, Castelucho's and Julian's – all the more so as they were open to women. Women were not allowed into the State's École des Beaux-Arts; but in Paris there was a whole range of private ateliers into which women were admitted, and even allowed to teach. It is notable, for instance, that the first woman to be appointed to one of the Académies was Frances Hodgkins, who began the watercolour class at Colarossi's in 1910. It is, in fact, at Colarossi's that she taught Hallen, Gibson and O'Connor. Later Hodgkins, as Bunny had, opened her own school, something that the Australian Ethel Carrick Fox was also to do, teaching the Queenslander Vida Lahey, amongst others. These women established an initial line of French-influenced pedagogy amongst antipodeans. This line would in turn be taken back to Australia by such artist-teachers as Mildred Lovett, Gladys Reynell, Anne Dangar, Dorrit Black and Grace Crowley, to name only a few. At the time these women originally left Australia, even if they were allowed to teach, they inevitably had to do so in the name of a better-known male artist. Crowley, for example, had worked as a head teacher before she left for overseas, but it was at Julian Ashton's school. Upon these women's return to Australia, however, things had changed. With the rise of private art galleries, women for the first time moved into positions of power (we might think, for example, of Lucy Swanton and Treania Smith at Macquarie Galleries). And, similarly, a number of the new French-trained generation of women artists opened up their own art schools (Anne Dangar in 1928; later, Dorrit Black and Grace Crowley, both in 1932), and it is from these positions as gallery directors and teachers that women began for the first time to compete for artistic influence with their male counterparts.

Commensurate with the more prominent role that women played as both students and teachers in the Parisian art world, women also received more opportunities for exhibiting. While women were excluded from official positions of authority there, they were nevertheless allowed to enter the official Salons. Thus a survey of Australian women showing in the Paris Salons in the first decade of the last century would include at least Curzona Allport, Alice Muskett, Agnes Goodsir, Dora Meeson, Ethel Carrick, Marie Tuck and Annie Alison Greene. (By 1913, the Annual Exhibition of the Salon des Artistes Français included as many as six Australian women artists.) And back in Australia women began to organise their own exhibitions. In 1905 Woombellana, later to become the Women's Art Club, held its inaugural show, and the first Australian Exhibition of Women's Art followed in 1907.

In 1909 the Melbourne Society of Women's Painters and Sculptors was founded, and a year later the Society of Women Painters NSW was established. Helen Topliss writes of this last organisation that 'the Society achieved a great deal in giving women their own professional base'.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, we would say that women not only identified with each other against the predominant masculinist nationalism in terms of their careers in Australia, but that they also identified with the phenomenon of expatriatism in general in terms of possible careers outside Australia. Expatriatism, we argue, was a *feminine* response to nationalism back in Australia. It is an artistic possibility that developed in particularly feminine circles. For example, the early connection established when Davidson put up fellow Adelaideans Reynell and Preston in Paris in

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<sup>24</sup> Topliss, 1996, p. 40.

1912 would be repeated some 15 years later when Dorrit Black joined Anne Dangar and Grace Crowley in that city. It is a matter of record that it was women who sought to record and preserve expatriatism as an artistic possibility for *all* Australians.



Fig. 4. Agnes Goodsir, *The Parisienne*, 1924. Oil on canvas, 61 x 50.1 cm, Canberra, National Gallery of Australia. Purchased 1993.

Amongst the most significant of all artistic events that took place during the period – a precursor to the whole alternative of whether to stay, go or come that marked the period from 1920 to 1940 – was undoubtedly the series of articles and exhibitions written and organised by the little-known artist, art critic and writer Edith Fry. In her two articles headed ‘Australian Artists in Paris’ (1914 and 1922), Fry detailed for readers of the *Sydney Morning Herald* the pre- and post-war generations of Australian

artist expatriates in Paris, with regard to such shows as those of the “Orientalists” and such artists as Rix Nicholas, Tuck, Bunny, Goodsir and the Rae sisters (in the 1914 article); and, under the sub-heading ‘Our Women Artists’, Davidson, Goodsir, Gibson, Greene, Carrick and O’Connor (in the 1922 article).<sup>25</sup> These articles were followed up by Fry’s London exhibitions *Australian Artists in Europe*, held at the Faculty of Arts Gallery in 1924, and the *Australian Art Exhibition*, held at the Spring Gardens Gallery in 1925. These shows were mounted as correctives to Sydney Ure Smith’s earlier 1923 *Exhibition of Australian Art*, held at Burlington House, precisely to make the point that Australian art was not just to be found in Australia. Fry had earlier written in her report on Ure Smith’s show that:

[T]he fallacy that a native-born Australian art can develop independently of European influence, if it were ever seriously upheld in Australia, must have been exploded by the reception given to the recent exhibition at Burlington House. Criticism has spoken with no uncertain voice – Australian art as such cannot be said to exist.<sup>26</sup>

Fry was also the founder of the ‘Australian Artists in Europe’. This “hidden” artist group had formed around Fry’s exhibitions, and included the Australian and New Zealand expatriates Horace Brodzky and J.F. Scott, as well as Davidson, De Maistre, Carrick-Fox and Janet Cumbrae Stewart.<sup>27</sup> Fry, who moved in literary as well as artistic expatriate circles, was also a founder of the Panton Arts Club in 1924, which had as its aims (expressed in the statutes of the club) as ‘the encouragement of creative art and the co-operation between the arts’.<sup>28</sup> Fry was consistently critical of the Australian government policy that imposed excessive duty on pictures imported into the country, even by its own artists. The effect of this was twofold, Fry argued. First, was that the expatriates were discouraged from returning and exhibiting, thus disconnecting Australian artists from the latest work being done by their compatriots and in effect cutting them off from their own history. Second, it meant artists in Australia tended towards ‘self-complacency, to the easy acceptance of the faith that Australian art is already a finished product, and they have nothing further to learn from the outside.’ This would also be her criticism of Ure Smith and the whole “boys club” and their London exhibition.<sup>29</sup> In light of this we would insist that the UnAustralian is not an invention by us, but was already understood as a countervailing principle to the national at the time. It was claimed as feminine by females seeking to record the presence of women in Australian modernism before their efforts were lost to the emerging masculinist national tradition.

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<sup>25</sup> These articles were part of a series of articles written by Edith Fry between 1914 and 1927. They include ‘Australian Artists in Paris’ (Fry, 1914, p. 5) and ‘Australian Artists in Paris’ (Fry, 1922, p. 7); ‘Australians in Paris’, (Fry, 1917, p. 5); ‘Australasian Artists in Europe’, (Fry, 1921, pp. 46-48); ‘Exiles; The Australian Artists Abroad’, (Fry, 1924b, p. 20); ‘Retrospect: Twelve Years from Home’, (Fry, 1924d, p.11); and ‘Some New Arrivals in Art’, (Fry, 1925, pp. 32-34).

<sup>26</sup> ‘Exiles: The Australian Artists Abroad’ (Fry, 1924b), p. 20. This argument by Fry is a forerunner of Bernard Smith’s response to Robert Hughes’ argument regarding Australian art in his catalogue essay for the *Tate Gallery Exhibition of Australian Art* in London in 1963.

<sup>27</sup> See Fry’s letter from London dated 22 May 1926, published as ‘Miss Fry’s Picture: To the Editor of the Herald’ (Fry, 1926, p. 7).

<sup>28</sup> Fry, 1927, p.23. The club’s accompanying *The Panton Magazine* was launched a few years later in 1927.

<sup>29</sup> Fry, 1924c, p. 13.

## 1910-1920

What is the defining event in Australian art history in the period 1910-1920? It is undoubtedly the story of how modernism is said to have arrived in this country, which we would suggest is a story that is repeated in its general outlines across all of the arts in Australia (poetry, music, drama, literature). It is, of course, a well-known narrative, that runs as follows. Norah Simpson, an ex-student of Dattilo-Rubbo who was studying at the Westminster School in London, sees Roger Fry's 1912 exhibition of modern (mostly post-Impressionist) art and goes to France. Through Harold Gilman of the Camden Town Group she was introduced to gallerists and dealers and thus saw the work of Cézanne, van Gogh, Matisse and Picasso. Simpson brought back to Australia, in a suitcase, reproductions of these artists' works, which she showed to Dattilo Rubbo and the circle of students then studying with him: Grace Cossington-Smith, Roy de Maistre and Roland Wakelin, amongst others. Three years later, as though by cause and effect, Cossington-Smith paints *The Sock Knitter* (1915) – which does, indeed, look very much like Cézanne's famous portrait of his wife, *Madame Cézanne in a Red Armchair* (1877), with its green shadows and purple complements – and so modernism is said to be born in Australia. This narrative suggests that Simpson smuggled in a suitcase of contraband to shake a prelapsarian Australia out of its innocence, as though modernism arrived late and from far away. We begin here the whole notion of Australia as an import culture that runs all the way through to Paul Taylor and his exhibition *Popism* (1982). It is an incident that takes its general outlines as early as 1928 when Wakelin first related it in an article for *Art in Australia*, in which he wrote: 'The 'Modern Movement' in painting, as it was then called, made its first appearance in Australia with the return from abroad of Norah Simpson in 1913'.<sup>30</sup> It is then taken up almost immediately by William Moore in his *The Story of Australian Art* (1934), which, as Ian Burn has pointed out, was very much based on the recounting of artists' testimony. As Moore writes:

Just as Roberts brought Streeton and Conder in touch with Impressionism through the sketches, done in the then new manner, which he brought out from London, so Wakelin, Roy de Maistre and Grace Cossington Smith, all students at the time, began to understand something about modern art from Nora Simpson, who brought out some reproductions in 1913.<sup>31</sup>

This story is repeated almost thirty years later in Smith's *Australian Painting*, where it plays a crucial role in Smith's whole treatment of modernism in the chapters 'Exodus' and 'Leviticus', in which it is as though – for all of the undoubted sexism of Smith's account – Simpson is the "prodigal son" who returns to her original birth place with news from the outside. Smith's account of the incident implies that it is typical of the isolation and belatedness of Australia: "Norah Simpson possessed, by all accounts, a bright, independent and attractive personality; and, upon returning to Rubbo's classes in 1913, succeeded in influencing the work of her teacher and some of his pupils, notably Roland Wakelin, Grace Cossington Smith and Roy de Maistre".<sup>32</sup> It is an episode that is repeated again in nearly identical terms some ten years later by Robert Hughes in his *The Art of Australia*, where he writes: "[Simpson] brought back

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<sup>30</sup> Wakelin, 1928, np. Wakelin reruns nearly an identical version of his script nearly 40 years later when his 'Recollections of a Post-Impressionist' (Wakelin, 1967, pp. 290-1).

<sup>31</sup> Moore, 1980, p. 107.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, 2001, p. 171.

numerous post-impressionist colour prints, which the students eagerly pored over. Norah Simpson became established as the ‘star’ of Dattilo-Rubbo’s, and her firm grasp of Post-Impressionist principles influenced not only Wakelin but two other students – Roy de Maistre and Grace Cossington Smith”.<sup>33</sup>

All of this, however, is convincing only if – like nearly all previous accounts – we take Australian art to be only art that happens in Australia. The narrative has significance only insofar as Australia is understood to be excluded from modernism at the time it takes place. But, as we have seen, Australians were from the beginning involved with modernism (exactly the kind of modernism that Simpson is said to introduce) overseas. This is not a mere assertion by us, it has already been pointed out by Edith Fry. But beyond this – and even more directly to go against what the episode is said to stand for – modernism was already *in Australia* at the time Simpson brought back her reproductions.

Let us outline here no fewer than ten instances of modernism in Australia just after the end of the first decade of the previous century. First, there are the art schools run by the artistic immigrants: Dattilo-Rubbo, for instance, opened his first art school at Rowe Street in Sydney in 1898 and was concerned by 1906 to return to Europe to examine art education in Paris and London and on his return argued that a public art school be established. Second, the New Zealand expatriate Frances Hodgkins returns from Paris, where we had earlier seen her beside Kate O’Connor and teaching artists such as Ambrose Hallen and Bessie Gibson, in order to show her “Modern French Art” in Sydney and Melbourne in 1912 and 1913.<sup>34</sup> In 1913 another important New Zealand expatriate, artist and educator John Weeks (he is perhaps the New Zealand equivalent to Grace Crowley) comes to study in Sydney. Weeks will return to New Zealand in 1915 before finding his way to Paris, where he studies with André Lhote from 1926 until 1929, and in 1930 begins a long and influential career teaching at Elam Art School for the next 24 years. Along the same lines, 1913 was also the year the Australian expatriate artist Ethel Carrick would show her paintings of “vibrating” light and colour<sup>35</sup> at Guildhall in Melbourne. On the synaesthetic underpinnings of much of our early modernism, we might recall A.B. Hector’s once-famous Colour Organ, its display of colours dependant on which notes were struck, which was presented in several public performances in Palings’ Concert Room in Sydney in 1912. And the disgraced Catholic bishop Charles Leadbetter, in Sydney from 1914, helped raise Theosophy to the point where Sydney was, in the 1920s, a major centre of Theosophy in the world. Carrick Fox was a theosophist, as were many Australian artists, including Lahey, Lange, O’Connor, and later Godfrey Clive Miller and Roger Kemp. Much recent scholarship has revealed that it is as much this spiritual-theosophical background that explains de Maistre and Wakelin’s *Colour in Art* show in 1919 – again, often said to be the first exhibition of modern art in Australia – as any direct artistic influence.<sup>36</sup> Australians were kept in touch with developments overseas through constant reports in the newspapers here of Australians showing in the French Salons and at the Royal Academy. Fry’s aforementioned accounts were

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<sup>33</sup> Hughes, 1970, p. 114.

<sup>34</sup> This is the heading for the advertisement taken out by Anthony Horderns’ Fine Art Gallery. Cited in McCormick, 1981, p. 76.

<sup>35</sup> Rich, 1979, np. (Carrick will later in the 1920s journey to Asia and the north of Africa, occupied by a kind of interwar Orientalism, as was Weeks in the late 1920s).

<sup>36</sup> See McFarlane, 2008, pp. 23-5 and Hutchison, 2008, pp. 26-29.

only two of many detailing the activities of Australian artists overseas. For example, on the 3 September 1913 the *The Sydney Mail* (an afternoon tabloid) reproduced the whole of Marinetti's 'Futurist Manifesto'.<sup>37</sup> Just eight days later a story relating to the Futurists was even published in Darwin.<sup>38</sup> Finally, in terms of artistic immigrants coming to Australia, there was an entirely new tendency that became visible in the early years of the decade with the arrival from America in 1914 of the great Frank Lloyd Wright-influenced architect and his architect wife, Walter Burley and Marion Griffin, with a vision for Canberra in their pockets.

In terms of Australians overseas, the decade 1910-1920 is marked by the first movement of Australian artists beyond the old worlds of England and France to America, the New World where modernism would find such a warm home later in the century. There are, however, two precursors to this emerging line of migration that we should speak of here. The first is the artist Miles Evergood, who was born in Melbourne in 1871 and studied at the National Gallery School in 1891. In his class were Max Meldrum, Margaret Preston, George Bell and George Coates, and it is during this time that he changed his name from the original Meyer Blashki. He left for America in 1898, eventually settling in New York in 1902. Eight years later he moved to England, where he further established his career. He became friendly there with Jacob Epstein and Augustus John, and subsequently exhibited with the New English Art Club at the invitation of Wilson Steer.<sup>39</sup> In 1914 he showed at the Paris Salon, and during the First World War he served with other Australians in the British Medical Corps. After the war, he continued to shuttle between New York and London, before eventually settling in New York. In 1931, shortly before the end of his life, he returned to Australia where he held a series of shows, the first of which was in Brisbane, where he then lived. Later moving to Melbourne, he was welcomed by old friends such as Bell and Bunny; and he held two exhibitions at the Athenaeum Club, the first in 1935 and the second in 1937. It was this second exhibition that he shared with his son Philip Evergood, who by this time had already made a reputation for himself in America, but who could properly be considered to be part of an Australian diaspora, in the same way as we speak, for instance, of Greek-Australians.

The second early figure of note in this American line is the etcher and printmaker Martin Lewis, who was born in Castlemaine, Victoria, in 1881. He left Australia at the turn of the century and went first to San Francisco, then Chicago and then on to New York. An apparently self-taught printmaker, who supported himself through his commercial work, he became friends with Edward Hopper in New York and taught him etching in 1915, which many critics consider the basis for Hopper's eventual breakthrough as a painter. (Is it possible that Lewis is a kind of Russell to Hopper's Matisse? Hopper himself consistently underplayed the influence of Lewis on his work, even on occasions post-dating the occasion of their first meeting; but here we prefer to follow Alfred H. Barr who, in the catalogue for Hopper's first retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in 1933, recorded that 'Hopper's first etchings were made under the direction of Martin Lewis'.<sup>40</sup>) In the 1920s, disillusioned with the commercial art world, Lewis went to Japan to study *ukiyo-e* printmaking firsthand and to paint. Eventually, he was able to support himself by selling his own work, and he

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<sup>37</sup> The Sydney Mail, 1913, p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 1913, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> Hutton, 1937, p. 26.

<sup>40</sup> Levin, 1995, p. 293.

became a long-time teacher at the Art Students League of New York. Lewis donated works during his lifetime to the Castlemaine Museum and Art Gallery, and today his prints – especially those representing urban scenes of New York City in the 20s and 30s – remain popular with public and art professionals alike.

These two artists may have led the way but in 1913, the supposed first year of Australia's contact with modernism, not only Derwent Lees but also Charles Conder (four years after his death, with the catalogue calling him British) and the Tasmanian-born Frank McComas were shown in the famous Armory Show of that year. The Australian Richard Hayley Lever had already arrived in America the year before. Born in Adelaide in 1876, Lever studied and exhibited there before leaving in 1899 to work at St Ives on the Cornish coast, where he first developed his own lushly painted seascapes and where he befriended the New Zealand expatriate artist Owen Merton.

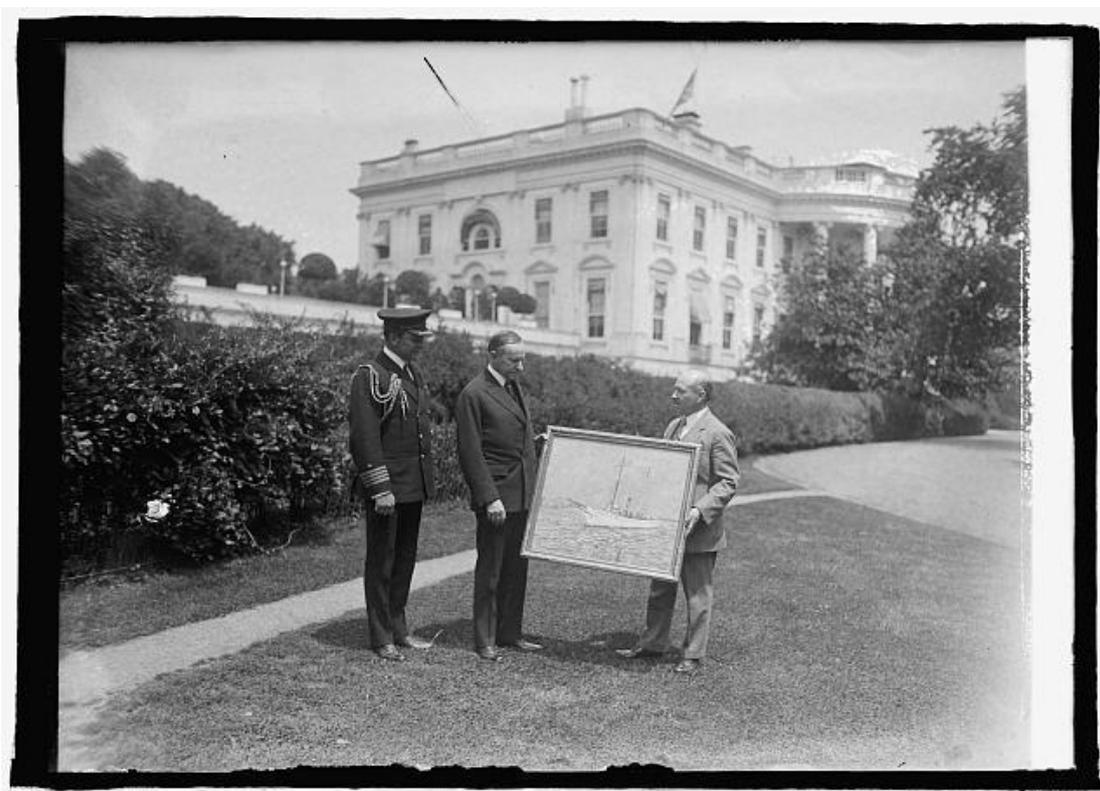


Fig. 5. Richard Hayley Lever presents his painting of the Presidential yacht to Calvin Coolidge at the White House in 1925. Image courtesy of the Smithsonian Archive of American Art.

He returned to Adelaide and showed his work there in 1904; but then in 1906 returned to England, where subsequently his friend the American painter Ernest Lawson convinced him to move to New York. On his arrival in New York, he took that city as his subject and was accepted into Lawson's circle, which included members of The Eight, the American 'twentieth-century's first band of rebel realists'.<sup>41</sup> In 1920 the prominent art critic Catherine Beach Ely wrote an important and still frequently cited essay on the "modern tendency" in American art, in which the work of Lever was compared to that of such members of The Eight as William Glackens and Ernest

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<sup>41</sup> Hunter, 1973, p. 23.

Lawson.<sup>42</sup> From 1919 to 1931, Lever taught painting at the Art Students League of New York, overlapping with Lewis, and in 1925 he became an Associate and in 1933 a full Academician of the American equivalent of the Royal Academy, the American Academy of the Arts and Sciences. In 1924 Lever was commissioned to paint a picture of the Presidential yacht, which he subsequently presented to Calvin Coolidge in a ceremony at the White House the following year (Fig. 5). He painted maritime scenes and landscapes throughout America and Canada, and travelled throughout the Caribbean while continuing to visit Europe. Lever died in 1958; today his work is held in the collections of the White House, the Hirshhorn Museum, the Detroit Institute of Arts Museum, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, amongst many others. Lever has some claim to be the most represented Australian artist in American museums, and is recognised as one of the early leaders of American modernism.<sup>43</sup>

Then there is the even more significant career of Ambrose Patterson in America. We had previously left him in Paris, as the friend of Bunny and as a student of the Latin Quarter as painted by Hugh Ramsay. To say a little again about how he got there: following studies at the National Gallery School in Melbourne, almost immediately upon arrival in Paris he befriended Bunny, Ramsay and Lambert, forming a close circle of Australian men in Montparnasse (comparable to the many more Australian women who would later arrive). In 1903 he exhibited with Bunny in the inaugural Salon d'Automne, and in 1906 both artists were elected *Sociétaires*, and thus able to enter the Salon unjuried. The Salon d'Automne was the first major breakaway organisation from the Academic Salons, and quickly established itself as the focus of attention for advanced art in Paris, and in 1909 Patterson himself served on the jury. In 1905, he had no fewer than five works in the famous Salon d'Automne that marked Matisse and the Fauve artists' breakthrough, and that same year he held a joint exhibition with the idiosyncratic English painter Frank Brangwyn in London.

At this stage of his career, Patterson's work was informed, as was all his work at the Salon d'Automne, by the Impressionists Monet and Pissarro, as seen in his *Boulevard Waterloo, Brussels* (c.1906). His by-now slightly academic manner would normally have been the start of a long and successful career in Europe. Indeed, in 1906 he had a successful one-person show in Brussels, and even moved there for a while in 1908. But, surprisingly, in 1909 Patterson leaves Europe and holds a one-person show in Melbourne in 1911 – of course, another instance of modernism already present in Australia before that apparently magical year of 1913 – and then, even more unexpectedly, in 1916 Patterson sets out for Hawai'i, where it is said he dined with both Somerset Maugham and Jack London and caught up again with Nellie Melba, and not long after that set off for Seattle via San Francisco. It was in Seattle that Patterson finally put down roots. In 1919 he was invited to establish the School of Painting and Design at the University of Washington, and he subsequently taught there for twenty-eight years, before retiring in 1947 as Emeritus Professor of the Washington State School of Art. By this time Patterson was an artist of considerable repute and had exhibited widely throughout America, including in exhibitions at the Chicago Art Institute, the Toledo Museum, the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim. A retrospective of his work was held at the Seattle Museum in 1961, when he was aged 70. Perhaps Patterson's most important achievement, however, was

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<sup>42</sup> Beach Ely, 1921.

<sup>43</sup> St Petersburg Times, 1961, p. 12A.

to foster a climate in which modernism could flourish in the American north-west. It was Patterson's circle that the painter Mark Tobey, later to become a giant of post-war American painting, joined after he arrived in Seattle in 1927. As the American arts commentator Mathew Kangas put it in a recent re-evaluation of mid-century Seattle art: 'The first modern artist to arrive in Seattle was not Mark Tobey, who came in 1927, but Ambrose Patterson, who arrived by boat in 1919 from San Francisco via his native Australia, and Paris, where he exhibited with Monet'.<sup>44</sup> If we look at the work of the two artists together, we can see an almost direct link between the brisk and energetic strokes of Patterson's *Wave* (c.1953) and the calligraphic surfaces of Tobey's abstracts.

There is therefore an irony that when the 'North-West Painting' show toured Australia in 1959, making such an impression on Australian artists, it was ultimately the influence of an *Australian* that artists were seeing there. It was just as much the work of Patterson as that of the artists included in the 1953 touring exhibition *French Painting Today* that lay behind the work of many of our abstract painters of the 1960s. It is even more ironic that a few years later such American-derived shows were held up as examples of Australia's "provincialism": its distance and lack of agency with regard to artistic developments overseas, its historical exclusion from the centres of artistic power and prestige. Again, to quote Kangas: 'From his position at the Washington State School of Art, Patterson put in motion not only a teaching system that still flourishes today, but he continued to make oils of incomparable light and colour until his death at the age of 86 in 1966'.<sup>45</sup> But perhaps the real question to be asked here is why is it that a series of Australian artists decided to head to America, instead of the more established France and England? (Although it is undoubtedly true that the road to America often went through Paris.) It is difficult to speak of Evergood's intentions, but it possible that he had family connections because of his father's jewellery business. Martin Lewis was as much a seaman as an artist at the time of his leaving, and it was only in America that he taught himself the etching and printmaking that were to become his artistic *métier*. But Lever and Patterson were well-informed and well-established artists when they left for America, already intimately connected to a whole circle of fellow artists in Paris. This suggests that both of these artists made informed decisions about where their future artistic opportunities lay and that they were aware of the option of expatriatism. It points not only to an increasingly globalised, or at least internationalised art scene, but also to the fact that Australians themselves were already part of this scene and its networks of exchange and information.

To show that the passage of Australian artists to America did not always go through Paris, but that knowledge of America existed in Australia, let us take the example of Horace Brodzky. Melbourne-born Brodzky, encouraged, as we have seen, by family friend Arthur Loureiro, first trained at the National Gallery School from 1901 until 1904. Almost immediately upon finishing he left first for San Francisco in 1904, and then for New York, where in 1906 he studied at the National Academy of Design. Again, the question must be asked, what is it that allowed him to think he could do this? Then in 1908 Brodzky packed up again, this time for London, where it could truly be said that his story begins. In 1911, he enrolled briefly at the City and Guilds Art School and held his first one-person show in his own studio in Chelsea. From this

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<sup>44</sup> Kangas, 2000.

<sup>45</sup> Kangas, 2000.



Fig. 6. Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, *Bust of Horace Brodzky*, c. 1913. Plaster, 71.2 x 53.34 x 26.67 cm, Harvard Art Museums, Fogg Art Museum, Alpaeus Hyatt Purchasing Fund, inv. No. 1964.36. (Photo: Imaging Department. Copyright President and Fellows of Harvard College.)

exhibition P.G. Konody, later to be the London buyer for the National Gallery of Victoria's Felton Bequest, selected his painting *Girgenti – The Pine Tree* (1911) for the 1912 Venice Biennale, where he was identified, of course, as British, although, from an UnAustralian point of view he was the first Australian artist to exhibit at this important international spectacle. The following year, he became close to the early modernist sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (also at this time a friend of the New Zealand expatriate author Katherine Mansfield), and more importantly became 'both the first Australian artist and the first artist in Great Britain to do a linocut'.<sup>46</sup> This linocut technique leads in two directions, one back to Australia and the other right to the heart of European modernism. On the one hand, it is a technique taken up by the English artist Claude Flight, who was to go on to have a lengthy and celebrated

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<sup>46</sup> Lew, 1987, p. 3, 'Chronology'.

teaching career at the Grosvenor School, where he taught, amongst other Australians, Dorrit Black, Eveline Syme and Ethel Spowers. These artists then took the technique back to Australia, where it was frequently seen as a contemporary expression of English modernism; but, again, the real point to be made is that it was in many ways an Australian innovation. On the other hand, the linocut's immediacy and inability to be taken back led to the single-line drawing that Brodzky and Gaudier-Brzeska then went on to develop. As Brodzky biographer Henry Lew remarks of these line drawings, they 'anticipated the linear stylings of Picasso and Matisse', who both took up the technique several years later (as they would also take up the linocut) in the late teens and early 1920s.<sup>47</sup>

It is in 1913 that Brodzky sat for Gaudier-Brzeska as he executed what would become one of the early signature works of British modernism, *Bust of Horace Brodzky* (1913) (Fig. 16). Later writing of this work, Brodzky said that 'the bust, to use his [Gaudier-Brzeska's] own words, was "cubic"',<sup>48</sup> and Gaudier-Brzeska was quickly drawn into the circle of Wyndham Lewis' Vorticists. A year later in 1914, signalling his own entry into the inner circle of advanced British art, Brodzky became a member of the newly established London Group. But, interestingly, a year later again, he is back in New York, where he befriends Jules Pascin, the Bulgarian-born French Expressionist painter, and in 1917 he brings together both his British and American contacts in his role as manager, or clerk of works, for the Vorticist Exhibition held at the Penguin Club in New York. Brodzky continues to work in New York as a book designer, and is responsible for the design of the endpapers to the very popular 'Modern Library' series of books and the dustjackets for both Ezra Pound's *Instigations* (1920) and Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* (1922). He then moves back to London in 1923, where in 1928 he exhibits in the London Group retrospective, and in 1929 in the first *Exhibition of British Linocuts* at Rex Nan Kivell's Redfern Gallery. He also writes two monographs, one of Gaudier-Brzeska in 1933 and another of Pascin in 1946. In the 1960s Brodzky was the subject of retrospective exhibitions on both sides of the Atlantic, in London and New York. He dies in 1969 at the age of 84, an Australian artist who had lived between England and America for some sixty-five years, and who by the time of his death was widely recognised as a pioneering linocut artist and modernist designer, whose work had impacted on both art and commercial design and illustration.

*This is the first instalment of an ongoing project by the authors on UnAustralian art.*

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<sup>47</sup> Lew, 1987, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> Horace Brodzky, cited at Tate Online in relation to Gaudier-Brzeska's sculpture *Horace Brodzky* (1913) from their collection.

(<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ViewWork?cgroupid=999999961&workid=5004&searchid=9780>)

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