

# NANCY BORLASE RETROSPECTIVE

Born 1914



NEWCASTLE REGION ART GALLERY  
TOURING EXHIBITION 1994-1995



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1986, Borlase at her home, with **Self Portrait**. 1947, now in the National Gallery of Australia Collection.  
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Exhibition Curator: Elinor Wrobel  
Newcastle Region Art Gallery Director: David Bradshaw  
Newcastle Region Art Gallery Exhibitions Officer: Alison Chapman

## ITINERARY:

Newcastle Region Art Gallery	15 April - 22 May 1994
Sale Regional Art Gallery	3 June - 26 June 1994
Mornington Peninsula Arts Centre	10 July - 14 August 1994
Ivan Dougherty Art Gallery	26 August - 27 September 1994
Stanthorpe Regional Art Gallery	29 October - 30 November 1994
Campbelltown City Art Gallery	9 December - 22 January 1995



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Sources: Artist's collection of catalogues, newspapers, lecture notes;  
Art Gallery of New South Wales Library collection of catalogues;  
Woolloomooloo Gallery collection of catalogues and press file.

Abbreviations:

AGNSW	Art Gallery of New South Wales
ANG	Australian National Gallery
CAS	Contemporary Art Society
NGA	National Gallery of Australia
NRAG	Newcastle Region Art Gallery
SMH	Sydney Morning Herald

## FOREWORD

The Newcastle Region Art Gallery has a fine collection of works by Nancy Borlase including oils, watercolours, drawings and sketch books. These works trace Nancy Borlase's development from the late 1930s. It therefore seems appropriate that the gallery should mount and tour this major Borlase Retrospective and it is indeed a privilege for us to do so.

I wish to thank Elinor Wrobel most sincerely for her tireless work and enthusiasm as Curator of this exhibition. Gil Docking, a former Director of the gallery must also be thanked for writing the catalogue essay and for acquiring the first Borlase work for the Newcastle Collection.

My sincere appreciation goes to Nancy Borlase for being so helpful and generous with her time and to Alison Chapman, Exhibitions Officer at the Newcastle Region Art Gallery for organising this exhibition.

Finally, I would like to endorse Elinor's introductory comments of appreciation to all those people and institutions who have so willingly assisted us in this project.

David Bradshaw  
Director



## INTRODUCTION

### Borlase - Painter - Writer - Art Critic.

A career which spans fifty years as an exhibiting painter, including nine years as an art critic. With the exception of the 1960 "15 Contemporary Australian Painters" at the New Visions Art Centre, London, it has been essentially a career contemporaneous with the development and history of Sydney art. Her biography reveals that the public press has continuously maintained a critical and favourable evaluation, from the once "enfant terrible" Robert Hughes, to Daniel Thomas, Wallace Thornton, Paul Haefliger, Dr. Elwyn Lynn, Terence Maloon and John McDonald. Yet, Borlase has been excluded from the voluminous output of glossy "boys own" art books proliferating the art market written by the "boys own" art academics. Paradoxically, Borlase is virtually ignored by the feminist art academics. Yet, she is hardly in the "black hole" hidden amid the lost generation of women artists, so diligently and astutely being re-assessed and recognised by Professor Joan Kerr. Borlase's good press for forty years cannot be totally disregarded nor the large number of her 1930s-50s oil paintings acquired by the directors of public galleries from her 1986 exhibition.

So, why in her 80th year has Borlase received no Government endowments or offers of retrospectives from major public galleries? The answer is more complex than gender. Borlase is as erudite politically as artistically. Uncompromisingly, she has astutely set herself apart from the male or female art factions. Uncompromisingly, her credo has always been "art for art's sake". Even in her long marriage to one of Australia's most controversial trade unionists, she has remained aloof from the political fray. Whilst Borlase resisted conversion to social realism, so too, the influence of the Sydney Charm School, some political osmosis is evident in her early works of the 1940s-50s. Just as Laurie Short, "Mr Borlase", late in his career became a trustee of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

To the Director, David Bradshaw, Newcastle Region Art Gallery, I extend my sincerest personal gratitude for accepting and facilitating this touring retrospective, and to the former Director, Gil Docking, for writing the catalogue essay. The first two abstract Borlase works were acquired for the Newcastle collection by Gil during his period as Director in the early 1960s. With fine discernment Bradshaw has acquired over recent years, early and recent oil paintings, watercolours, drawings and

sketchbooks to form the largest and most comprehensive Borlase Collection held in a public institution. May I also extend my personal thanks to Nick Waterlow, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, University of New South Wales, for accepting this exhibition, rather than proceeding with another to include Borlase's 1960s period work. My thanks to registrar Ljubo Marun and Librarian Susan Schmocker, Art Gallery of New South Wales. My special thanks to Exhibitions Officer, Alison Chapman, Newcastle Region Art Gallery. My thanks to the staff of the following institutions who have facilitated the loan of works: National Gallery of Australia, Art Gallery of New South Wales, National Gallery of Victoria, Australian War Memorial, New England Regional Art Museum, Manly Art Gallery and Museum, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales and the Transfield Collection, Labor Council of New South Wales, B.H.P. Collection, Mosman Council, and to the private collectors who have so generously loaned their paintings for such a long period, my thanks.

My sincerest thanks to Fred Wrobel, who has facilitated every aspect of this retrospective, and finally, to Borlase, who has been unstintingly generous in allowing me unrestricted access to paintings, catalogues, personal papers, critiques, lectures and memorabilia, and for her tireless research to my endless requests. My response in curating this exhibition is double edged. It will be a precursor to the Women's art exhibitions planned for the National Women's Art Project and the 20th Anniversary of International Women's Year in March 1995. Personally, it extends beyond my formal relationship as collector and her Gallery Director, to that of friend and confidant, with a desire for the public to share the work of the artist's life-time and to understand the living artist who created this enduring body of art.

Elinor Wrobel  
Curator

## NANCY BORLASE A.M.

The first half of this essay deals with the struggles of a girl to become an artist; the second half concerns the strivings of the artist to give shape and meaning to her art.

Nancy Wilmot Borlase was born in 1914 in the New Zealand township of Taihape, located in the lower central part of the North Island.

Her mother, Bessie Morecroft, had married into the New Zealand branch of a Cornish family whose long pedigree in the family book, Borlase of Borlase, traces their history back to William the Conqueror and early French origins.

Her great grandfather, Charles Bonython Borlase, who was born in India and educated as a solicitor in England, arrived in Wellington in 1848 where he practised law. He was prominent in public life as Mayor of Wellington and elected member of the House of Representatives.

Her father, Edward Norris Borlase, whose interests were pastoral, was manager of Raunui Station, near Mt. Ruapehu, when Nancy, the youngest of the three girls was born. When she was two years old he deserted his family.

To survive economically, Bessie Borlase took her children to Wanganui and then, later, she moved to Napier in Hawkes Bay where she had the support of her family.

The three girls were looked after by their grandmother on the Morecroft side while Bessie, a very modern woman of spirit and enterprise, opened the first Napier cabaret and Saturday afternoon Tea Dance.

But, with the onset of the Great Depression, Nancy left school at sixteen to learn shorthand and typing at business college. The cabaret closed and Bessie turned her hands to dressmaking and baking cakes. "Life was hard", recalled Nancy, and with a touch of irony added, "but we never went hungry".

On that fateful day of the 3rd February, 1931, Nancy was working in the backroom of a store when, without any warning at all, Napier was struck by an enormous earthquake. With a deafening roar the roof and walls of the store collapsed. Nancy was saved by the stacks of boxes which surrounded her working area. She was led out alive, only to see death and destruction everywhere.

(One of the remarkable results of this great 'quake was the raising of the seabed and

the disappearance of Napier's inner harbour. In its place were 3000 hectares of new land!)

Many houses in Napier were destroyed or damaged, including the house where Nancy's family lived. With their lives torn apart, they left Napier like refugees on the back of a cart. Nancy was sent to live with relatives in the South Island city of Christchurch.

This brief sojourn in Christchurch was fortuitous for her. During the week Nancy worked in her uncle's office, and one night per week she attended the Christchurch School of Art, "It pointed me in the direction I wanted to go", said Nancy, "what I wanted to do".

Late that year, she returned to a Napier, which was in the process of being rebuilt. All but two buildings, Dalgety's and the town theatre - icon of the 1920s era of musical comedies - had been destroyed. "It was", she recalls, "a fascinating time to be there: watching the rebirth of a new town".

In the following year, Rita Angus and Alfred Cook came to Napier and started a sketch club. Both were fine artists, especially Rita, who was destined to become one of New Zealand's greatest painters.

(Sketch clubs were a phenomena in New Zealand, many of them preceding the formation of art societies. In Napier, the Bishopdale Sketching Club was formed by Bishop Suter in 1889, to become the Suter Art Society which, in turn, became Napier's Bishop Suter Art Gallery).

With the family together again, Nancy was working in a shop established post-quake by an aunt. In between serving customers, she would slip into the Angus/Cook sketch class on a Saturday afternoon and draw from the model.

About that time she met Jessie Lloyd, who had a commission to paint a series of wall-murals in Napier. Nancy worked as Jessie's assistant by lugging buckets of plaster up to the scaffolding, and tracing cartoons onto the plaster.

Jessie worked professionally. Thus, by one means or other, Nancy was becoming convinced that painting was to be her life's calling. Then came her introduction to writing. The ever-enthusiastic and born-organiser Jessie, persuaded Nancy, along with another Napier girl Phyllis Oxford,



who had a keen interest in literature, to cooperate with the writing of a book.

Nancy recalls that, "For two years we met in a rented room, drafted a fictional story and worked on it". The story involved a coachload of tourists who had been holed-up in an alpine hut, and cut-off from the rest of the world by a massive landslide. The three writers each concentrated on selected characters. They titled their fiction *The Fifth Fly*, by Jonathon Penn, being a pseudonym based on their initials J.P.N.. The manuscript was sent to England, where it was submitted for publishing without success and subsequently was lost.

Jessie Lloyd - who died too young of a thyroid disorder - and the return of Rita Angus to Napier, where her family owned a lime-quarry before the earthquake, were decisive factors in encouraging Borlase's determination to pursue a career in art. It was Jessie who lent Nancy her copy of R.H. Wilenski's book, *The Modern Movement in Art*. The doors were opened. There was a whole world of art out there to explore. Napier was becoming too confining.

At this stage, still without money to call her own, Nancy began making pleated paper lampshades treated with a solution dye and size, with holes punched by the local bootmaker. Fitted with cord and wooden pegs, she sent a batch of them to an interior decorator in Christchurch, with a letter saying that she planned to come to Christchurch to study art, would she be interested in buying these lampshades and giving her some future orders? A letter came accompanied by a cheque purchasing the lot, and requesting further supplies. That was her escape! Early in 1936, Borlase left Napier for Christchurch. It was fifteen years, and much water under the bridge, before she was able to return to Napier.

After finding accommodation with a fellow student on City Square, for a weekly rental of four shillings each, Nancy enrolled in classes at Canterbury College School of Art, where she had been a part-time student in 1931. "But the teaching of painting was still in the 19th century", she recalls, "so I joined Francis Shurrock's sculpture class. Shurrock was considered to be a teacher with advanced ideas". Also after a tussle with the director of the college, Richard Wallwork, she was allowed to draw from life one night a week, by-passing the obligatory drawing from antique plaster casts.

(Francis Shurrock was trained in sculpture at the Royal College of Art, London. In

1924, he was appointed to the Canterbury College of Art as part of a scheme to revitalise art teaching in New Zealand. As A.H. McLintock observed in *The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, from the 1860s to the 1940s, "The one abiding characteristic of our national art has been ... an amateurish culture".)

Borlase remembers Shurrock as being a born teacher and an important early influence. "He belonged to a school of modernist English sculptors concerned primarily with basic sculptural questions of mass, space, organic structure and the rhythm of forms".

To sustain herself, Nancy combined work with study. As the result of a student dare, she tried a stint at fortune-telling. Following a very quick reading of a book on the subject, she was installed by the manageress of the tea-rooms as "Madame Rosa" in a cubicle of her own. At four shillings a session, it was more profitable than making lampshades! But this source of income suddenly ended for her when the government made the craze of the reading of tea leaves in restaurants illegal.

Nancy then turned her experiences as "Madame Rosa" into an expose of fortune-telling, by writing a story on the subject for the Christchurch newspaper. It became her first published article. Once again, she had turned an adversity to her advantage!

Hearing fellow-students in Shurrock's class talking about East Sydney Technical College Art School aroused Borlase's determination to travel to that "Mecca of art in the Antipodes", but she despaired of raising the ten pounds needed for the boat-fare, as she didn't have "Madame Rosa" to support her. Then, suddenly, an unexpectedly large order for ten pounds worth of lampshades came from the interior decorator. She immediately booked her passage for Sydney, and went back to her rented room determined to live for six weeks on nothing until the ship set sail.

As a farewell to New Zealand, and as a possible means of living on very little until the ship departed, Nancy set out on a solo hike into the Alps west of Christchurch, through Lewis Pass, which was in the process of being constructed, then returning via the established Arthur's Pass.

What has this hike got to do with the art of Nancy Borlase? To begin with, the journey took on a dimension much larger than she expected, and had unforeseen long-term results.

Hitching lifts and stumbling along under a borrowed back-pack with blanket, rations and painting gear (half of which she soon dumped to lighten her load), after some days, she eventually arrived at the temporary construction camp for the roadworkers. Here, Nancy was given a hut of her own with a fire, and invited to dine in the men's messroom as a guest of the government. Keeping to her timetable, she was given directions to follow a ridge to the west side of the mountain range but, to her dismay, she found a multitude of ridges!

Lost, and with night falling, she decided to stay in the gully of a creek and do battle with the freezing night temperatures. Suddenly, gun-shots echoed in the darkness of the gully. Shouting, to her great relief a wild-pig shooting party had stumbled across her. The men led her down to a camp on the western side of the dividing range.

The journey then became bizarre and surreal as she tramped through ghost towns deserted by gold miners years previously. Early in the century, the west coast of the South Island was alive with quartz mining. Old mines, The Globe and The New World, where she camped, were derelict and strangely foreboding with their rusting machine parts, conveyor belts with their buckets of sludge rattling and swinging in the cold prevailing wind and rain.

Seeking shelter from the ceaseless deluge, a man directed Nancy to an empty cottage. Inside, she found a fully furnished house, including a pianola, but, to her alarm, everything she touched crumbled to dust. Further on, she sheltered with a coal miner and his family. Although the miner was participating in a national strike, the cottage was warm and friendly with plenty of conversation about the world and events. "It was here, for the first time," Nancy recalls, "I came into contact with someone who spoke to me in terms of radical politics".

Out of the valley, she thumbed a lift eastwards through Arthur's Pass back to Christchurch, to be in time to catch the ferry to Wellington and board the ship to Sydney.

The tramp through Lewis Pass was a uniquely symbolic journey full of rich meanings for the future painter and writer.

The voyage across the Tasman was notable for nothing but seasickness, and arriving in Sydney in the middle of a heat wave with two pounds in her pocket. She said, "I lived in a dream world in New

Zealand: Sydney in 1937 was a culture shock." But Borlase sought no option but to stay and battle through the difficulties.

She found a pink-painted room in a Kellett Street boarding house, and at Kings Cross tasted iced coffee for the first time. She got work scrubbing floors in residential and waitressing in a 3-course-meals-for-ninepence cafe, an experience that brought her face to face with the harsh realities of depression.

Borlase was eager to start at East Sydney Technical College Art School where she enrolled as a sculpture student. Here, for the first few years, Nancy was an in-and-out student, dashing in to a class, then out to a job. After a time, she realised in her own words: "The impracticability of practising sculpture in a bed-sit".

From Lyndon Dadswell's sculpture class she switched to painting classes under Frank Medworth. Borlase was able to seek out people who could be helpful. The first established artist she met in Sydney was the New Zealand-born Roland Wakelin, then the people associated with the Notanda Gallery in Rowe Street, and the Grovenor Gallery in George Street. Hearing of the drawing classes run by Rah Fizelle and Grace Crowley in Lower George Street, she attended sessions.

Borlase was beginning to feel her internal compass swinging in the right direction at last! Sculpture classes were useful, but now seemed to be a diversion from her main aim - to be a painter.

She responded enthusiastically, especially to Grace Crowley's lucid explanations of the principles of cubism and its aesthetics which, until then, had seemed an enigma to Nancy. Now, nearly 26 years of age, Borlase decided to absorb all she could on the subject of the modern approach to painting.

Because George Bell's fame as a teacher and leader of the modern art movement was widely known, Borlase hitch-hiked to Melbourne only to find that Bell had just retired from active teaching. Nevertheless, Bell gave time to discuss privately Nancy's paintings with her, and to put her in touch with a drawing class group in Melbourne.

During her Melbourne period, Borlase worked as a part-time waitress and as an artist's model. As the hourly rates for modelling and the conditions provided by the studios were pitiful, Nancy, with a co-worker, successfully organised a six-week strike of artists' models.



Mixing in Melbourne's bohemian life where intellectuals, revolutionaries, writers and artists gathered, Nancy met Laurie Short for the first time. She previously had listened to his fiery oratory in Sydney's Domain and Town Hall, and said that she admired his "clear-headed analysis of the issues and his commitment to social reform". They were married in Melbourne in May, 1941.

Nancy and Laurie returned to Sydney the following year, just a few days before the Japanese submarines attacked in the harbour. This crisis made it easy for them to rent one of the many rapidly vacated flats on the harbour-front at Balmain. Laurie got a job as a boiler-maker's assistant and billy-boy at the nearby Cockatoo Dockyards.

Living in Balmain from 1942-49, Nancy found that she not only had a settled home-base at last, but lived in surroundings which delighted her eye - the harbour, small parks, old terraces, boat-sheds and people - all becoming subjects for numerous drawings and paintings. In 1944, her daughter Susanna was born.

Despite the foreboding atmosphere of the war years and the fierce union and legal struggles which enmeshed her husband, Nancy found personal strength and enrichment in and through her paintings and her family. It is interesting to see, that these early drawings and paintings from Balmain and Gladesville years were stored at home, and not shown to the public until her exhibitions at Woolloomooloo Gallery some forty to fifty years later, in 1986 and 1990.

There is a reason for that hiatus: Borlase was caught up by the abstract movement, which overpowered her painting following her first visit to New York in 1956. Also, there is usually a tendency to regard one's early work as being immature.

Today, seeing the paintings of her Balmain and Gladesville period, one is struck by the solidity of the forms of a painter sensitive to volumes in space. Overall, there is a certain naivety of style of an artist not academically trained, but fully aware of Roger Fry's writings on the plasticity of forms, with the emphasis on design. Throughout all these paintings and drawings there is the actuality of the people and places, typical of the Balmain district of the 1940s.

However, as just indicated, a major stylistic change was around the corner for Borlase. In 1956, the artist accompanied her husband to America. Here, for the first

time she saw an exhibition of paintings by the New York school of abstract expressionists: Pollock, Albers, de Kooning, Rothko, Gorky, Kline and Guston. As Nancy Borlase told Hazel de Berg in a 1962 interview for the National Library Archives, "Seeing this exhibition in the Sidney Janis Gallery was a kind of experience which demanded a whole re-evaluation of one's preconceptions of art as picture making".

On returning to Sydney, Borlase proceeded to develop her painting strongly towards abstraction as her mode of expression. She wanted her abstractions to bear a personal imprint as well, "but in a broad international abstract style," she added.

Her first solo exhibition was held at the Macquarie Galleries in 1960. James Gleeson reviewing for *The Sun* wrote, "Nancy Borlase's paintings have been slow to mature . . . she has reached a point in her exploration of the abstract where a distinct artistic personality is beginning to emerge. Hooked sweeps of dark paint recur throughout the paintings like a signature."

In 1960, Borlase made her second visit to New York where she found the next generation of abstract expressionists were showing their vigorous works. But this time, the element which attracted her was their use of collage - of fragments of paper, photographs and typography seemingly pressed into the paint.

On Borlase's return to Sydney, collage elements and painted letters of the alphabet became components in her paintings, too. She frankly admits the source of inspiration for the use of collage. In defence, she said to Hazel de Berg, "I think that it's how one uses these things, and how one twists them to a personal outlook and the way of working, that is important."

Borlase saw the collage technique as a means of expressing the impact of industrial and commercial activities on nature itself, and of the intrusions of manufactured elements into the landscape; also, to introduce a visual disturbance component within the structure of picture.

A selection of paintings with collage appeared in Borlase's solo exhibition at Macquarie Galleries in 1972. Reviewers commented on this aspect: Elwyn Lynn, writing for *The Bulletin* observed that, ". . . delicately tinted and vividly coloured leaves thrust with diagonal intensity or sweep up numbers and letters in a whirlwind."

Many Australian artists have travelled abroad and proclaimed on their return that they have found the pot of gold that will give aesthetic value to their work. It has always been so, and was particularly evident, to much critical support, in the art world of Sydney in the 1960s.

Most artists are keen travellers, but few can match Borlase's extensive tours to so many countries and cities over the years: to the USA and Europe in 1956 and 1960, to the UK and Europe again in 1969, 1972, 1979 and 1980; to China with invited guest writers in 1976, and to Japan in 1981.

These visits provided some extraordinary experiences for her such as: seeing abstract expressionism and action painting in their early public showings in New York, spending time behind the scenes studying the holdings of some major galleries, meeting a number of pioneering American painters, working her passage aboard the *Castle Felice* by giving art lectures to disgruntled English migrants returning home, witnessing a presidential election convention in Atlantic City, getting through to East Berlin in '79 to see several stunning exhibitions, concentrating on various collections but always being surprised by the unexpected like seeing Etruscan sculpture for the first time, standing thrilled and speechless before a great Delacroix painting, or just letting a Monet wash over you or simply looking intently at a small Cezanne.

The multiplicity and diversity of these experiences provided Borlase with aesthetic foundations when she undertook the more mundane but responsible duties of being an art critic, for *The Bulletin* (1973-1975) and then the *Sydney Morning Herald* (1975-1981).

Throughout her journalistic years, Borlase kept some of her painting going but this aspect of her work waned. She later commented, "Although writing is a creative pursuit, my painting suffered. You had to be careful to distance yourself, to keep an objective view of the work of other artists and not to confuse it with your own interests."

Standing down after eight years working as an art critic, Borlase energetically returned to her first priority, that of painting and drawing.

In 1983, she held a survey exhibition at Barry Stern Gallery covering the period 1961-1983, of which more than half the paintings had been produced in the two years since ceasing her reviewing work. Terry Maloon, writing for the *Sydney*

*Morning Herald* said, "Nancy Borlase's interests have been remarkably consistent: the leaf shapes, the generally sober palette and the slowly swirling visual rhythms are present throughout 20 years of painting".

Robert Hughes, in 1962 for the *Daily Mirror*, remarked on the artist's ". . . grasp of obsessive rhythms in the interlocking forms". So frequently do observers of Nancy Borlase's paintings comment on this rhythmic surge in her typical oils, that it is tempting to trace the origin of this swinging measure to the inherent feeling for rhythm in the work of so many women painters. But, Nancy sees the cause in the linear and liting quality of the drawn line upon which her paintings are structured.

Also, more particularly, she pins it on the enduring lesson on rhythmic construction given by her first teacher, Francis Shurrock in Christchurch, fifty-seven years earlier. Shurrock posed the question to her: "What is the difference between a live object and a dead object?" He answered his rhetorical question by saying, "One moves: the other is still". Nancy Borlase has never forgotten it!

I would like to finish this essay on the life and work of Nancy Borlase with this aphorism by Francis Shurrock, feeling too, that very much more could fruitfully be said about the girl from Taihape, who pitted herself so resourcefully against all the odds, ultimately to become a valued and respected painter in Australia. Her achievements were recognised by the award of an A.M. in 1987 for services to the arts.

One notes, too, the valuable role played by Fred and Elinor Wrobel, founders of the Woolloomooloo Gallery, who had the wit and foresight to show Nancy's "hidden early works" of oils, watercolours and drawings, as well as recent works, in a series of telling exhibitions from 1986 to 1990.

**Gil Docking  
September 1993**

Director, Newcastle City Art Gallery  
1958 - 1965

Director, Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand, 1965 - 1972

Assistant Director, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1973 - 1983



## BIOGRAPHY

- 1914 Born Taihape, New Zealand.
- 1931 Napier earthquake, family uprooted and dispersed.
- 1932 Returned to Napier, joined Sketch Club of Artists, Rita Angus and Alfred Cook.
- 1933-34 Collaborated in writing unpublished psychological novel "The Fifth Fly".
- 1936 Left Napier to pursue career as an artist. Due to impecunious circumstances studied part-time life drawing and sculpture under Francis Shurrock and Archibald Nicol at Canterbury College School of Art, Christchurch. Earned living as a fortune teller, first written article published in The Press Christchurch, 20.6.36. Lone 6 weeks hike through uncompleted Lewis Pass, Southern Alps, N.Z.
- 1937 Arrived in Sydney, January
- 1937-40 Studied part-time at East Sydney Technical College, Life drawing, sculpture under J. Moorfield and Lyndon Dadswell. Joined sketch club run by Rah Fizelle and Grace Crowley.
- 1939 Joined newly formed NSW branch of the Contemporary Art Society.
- 1940 Hitch-hiked to Melbourne. Contact with George Bell and his students.
- 1941 Married Laurie Short in Melbourne.
- 1942 Returned to Sydney in July. Took advantage of exodus from foreshores after shelling by Japanese submarines. Moved into vacant flats at 100 Louisa Road, Balmain. Lived there until 1949. Moved to Gladesville.
- 1944 Daughter Susanna born.
- 1952-70 Active committee member Contemporary Art Society.
- 1956 Travelled to the United States, United Kingdom and Europe, the first of a number of study tours focussing on developments in contemporary art. United States (1960); Europe and UK (1969, 1972, 1979, 1980); Japan (1981).
- 1961 Moved to Mosman
- 1973-75 Art critic for The Bulletin.
- 1975-81 Art critic for The Sydney Morning Herald.
- 1976 Visited the Peoples Republic of China as one of three arts writers.
- 1987 Awarded A.M. for Services to the Arts.

## REPRESENTED

National Gallery of Australia  
Art Gallery of New South Wales  
National Gallery of Victoria  
Art Gallery of South Australia  
Queensland Art Gallery  
Australian War Memorial, A.C.T.  
Newcastle Region Art Gallery, N.S.W.  
New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, N.S.W.  
Wollongong City Art Gallery, N.S.W.  
Manly Art Gallery and Museum, N.S.W.  
Wagga Wagga Art Gallery, N.S.W.  
Dubbo Regional Art Gallery, N.S.W.  
Museum of Modern Art at Heide, VIC.  
College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney  
Commonwealth Bank, Sydney  
Transfield Collection, Sydney and Melbourne  
Labor Council of New South Wales, Sydney  
B.H.P. Collection, Melbourne  
Mosman Council Collection, Sydney

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1960,66
- 1972 Macquarie Galleries, Sydney
- 1962 Barry Stern Gallery, Sydney
- 1963 von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle
- 1983 Barry Stern Exhibiting Gallery, Sydney
- 1986 Woolloomooloo Gallery, Sydney
- 1986 Woolloomooloo Gallery, Sydney **Early Works, Oils 1930s-1950s.**
- 1987 Wollongong City Art Gallery, **The Artistic Experience: influences and directions**
- 1989 Woolloomooloo Gallery, Sydney, **Recent Works**
- 1990 Woolloomooloo Gallery, **Sydney Watercolours and drawings 1930s-1950s.**

## MIXED EXHIBITIONS

- 1940-70 Regular exhibitor Contemporary Art Society

## ART PRIZE EXHIBITIONS

- 1952-61 **Blake Prize for Religious Art**
- 1961, 64, 66, 72, 84, 85, 86,  
**Wynne Prize, A.G.N.S.W.**
- 1962 **Muswellbrook Art Prize**, 'Legend', Highly commended
- 1963 **Muswellbrook Art Prize**, 'Emblem', Highly commended
- 1972 **Goulburn Lilac Time Art Prize**, 'Valentine' Highly commended
- 1987 Art Purchase exhibition, University of New South Wales
- 1991,93 **Portia Geach Memorial Award.**

## AWARDS

- 1961 Mosman Art Prize
- 1967 Berrima Art Prize (equal first David Aspden)



## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1959 **Eight Australians**, Gallery A, Melbourne.  
1959 **Eight Women Painters**, Little Paris Gallery, Sydney.  
1959 First Annual Exhibition, **Women Artists**, Bissietta Gallery, Sydney.  
1960 **15 Contemporary Australian Painters**, New Visions Centre Gallery, London, selected and organised by Contemporary Art Society, N.S.W.  
1961 **Survey 1 - Sydney Avant-garde Painting**, Blaxland Gallery, Sydney.  
1961 **Sydney Contemporary Painters**, Arts Council of Australia, Queensland Division.  
1962 **New Influences**, N.R.A.G.  
1963 **Survey 3 - Sydney Avant-garde Painting**, Blaxland Gallery, Sydney.  
1965 **The Daily Mirror Art Award**, Special Invitation Section.  
1979 **50th Anniversary Blaxland Gallery**  
1986, 87  
89, 93 **Survey exhibition of drawings**, Woolloomooloo Gallery.  
1988-89 **Under a Southern Sun**, Australian National Gallery Bicentennial touring exhibition from A.N.G. collection touring to Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales.  
1988 **Sydney through the Artist's eye 1840s-1980s**, Bicentennial exhibition (N.F.S.) from a private collection courtesy of Woolloomooloo Gallery.  
1989 **60th Anniversary Blaxland Gallery**  
1989 **Farewell exhibition as Director**, A.N.G., selected by James Mollison.  
1989 **Gardens, Flower Studies and Still Life Paintings by Australian Artists 1890s-1980s**, Campbelltown City Art Gallery.  
1989 **Sumptuous Still Life and Glittering Glass**, Lake Macquarie City Gallery.  
1990-91 **Flower and Still Life Paintings by Australian Artists 1850s-1980s**, toured Lewers Bequest and Penrith Regional, Dubbo, Orange, Griffith, Tweed River, Grafton and Bathurst Regional Galleries in N.S.W. and Stanthorpe Art Gallery, Queensland.  
1990-91 **Nudes**, toured Campbelltown City Art Gallery, Tweed River Regional Art Gallery N.S.W. and Stanthorpe Art Gallery, Queensland.  
1991 **New Directions 1952-1962**, Lewers Bequest and Penrith Regional Gallery.  
1992 **A Private Collection**, S. H. Ervin Gallery, National Trust N.S.W., Sydney.  
1992-93 **Faces in the Crowd**, Stanthorpe Art Gallery, Queensland and Tweed River Regional Gallery, N.S.W.

## BORLASE : WRITER AND CRITIC

### SELECTED REVIEWS, ARTICLES AND ESSAYS BY BORLASE

- 1936, June 20 The Press, Christchurch, New Zealand: **Confessions of a Tea Cup Reader** (pseudonym 'Sibylla')  
1957, Jan. C.A.S. Broadsheet: **Impressions of Paintings and Painters in USA and Paris**  
1968, June Vol.6 No.1 Art and Australia: **Three Decades of the Contemporary Art Society**  
1974, May 4 The Bulletin: **The Art of Organising Crafts**  
Oct. 5 The Bulletin: **Art That Goes Everywhere** (Stamps)  
Nov. 30 The Bulletin: **Naive, and Proud of It**  
1975, Aug. 16 The Bulletin: **Art: The Young Hopefuls. It's a Rocky Road for Most**  
1977, Jan. 27 S.M.H.: **Precious Guardians of Chinese History**  
1979, Feb. 24 S.M.H.: **Paris Fights Back**  
Mar. 3 S.M.H.: **From Obscurity, the Art of the Outsiders**  
1980 June 21 S.M.H.: **The Conflict of Venice**  
1981 Jan. 10 S.M.H.: **Artist's Vision of Sydney over 50 years**  
1982 Mar. Quadrant: **The Archibald and its Challengers**  
June Quadrant: **Biennale of Sydney**  
1982 Australian Art Review: **A Time of Uncertainty. The Visual Arts in Sydney**. Editor: L. Paroissien. Publ: Warner Ass.  
1984 June Quadrant: **The Lost Antipodean** (Jon Molvig)

## CATALOGUE ESSAYS by Borlase

- 1987 Aug. 22 **A Tribute: John Dutrac**, Solo Exhibition, Ray Hughes Gallery.  
1988 **Harbour Paintings 1964-1987**, Kevin Connor, Manly Art Gallery and Museum

## BIBLIOGRAPHY: BORLASE, PAINTER AND CRITIC

- Art and Australia, Vol. 4, No. 3 Dec. 1966. Exhibition commentary. Ure Smith  
Art and Australia, Vol. 21, No. 4 Winter 1984. Exhibition commentary. Fine Art Press  
Australian Painting 1788-1960, Bernard Smith. Oxford University Press. 1962  
Artists and Galleries of Australia and New Zealand, Max Germaine, Lansdowne, Sydney, 1979. 1st ed.  
Art in Australia, Donald Richardson, Longman, UK, 1989  
Australia and New Zealand and the South Pacific Handbook, Charles Osborne, 1970  
BHP Journal. Autumn 1973, Bernard Smith and Art in BHP House  
Concise Dictionary of Australian Artists, Gwenda Robb and Elaine Smith, Melbourne University Press, 1993  
Debrett's Handbook, W. A. Australia, 1991  
Encyclopaedia of Australian Art, Alan McCulloch, Hutchinson, Australia, 1968  
Laurie Short: A Political Life, Susanna Short, Allen & Unwin, 1992  
Mosman Impressions, Text: Nancy Phelan, Mosman Municipal Council, 1993  
Newcastle Region Art Gallery Art Work of the Month. **Park bench**  
Nancy Borlase article by Michael Hedger, Education Officer, June, 1992  
New Painting 1952-1962 John Reed, Longman, Australia, 1963  
Texas Quarterly 1962, Elwyn Lynn: Australian Painting and Sculpture Today  
Who's Who of Australian Women 1982, Andrea Lofthouse, Methuen

## TAPED INTERVIEWS : BIOGRAPHICAL

- 1960 Hazel de Berg, Collection Australian National Library  
1982 James Mellan, State Library of Victoria  
1988 Caroline Craig, Producer, Radio ABC 'Helicon"  
2 programs, 'Artists in the 1930s' and 'Artists in the 1940s'

## LECTURER (selected)

- 1959-63 Lectured on the New York School, The Aftermath of Action Painting and Anti Art, to Contemporary Art Society, Newcastle Region Art Gallery and Illawarra Art Society  
1964-65 Guide Lecturer, Education Department, A.G.N.S.W.  
1987 Wollongong City Art Gallery. Lecture on the New York Art Scene, 1956-60 and her work in the project exhibition.



## NEWSPAPERS

(RE BORLASE EXHIBITING PAINTER)

- 1952 18 Feb. Woman's Day and Home, Fighter Short - and his wife Nancy, Josephine O'Neill, Colour 2 pages photos magazine. Austerity Cake Recipe.
- 1952 March Labor News, Cartoon and article in response to Nancy Borlase's recipe for 'Austerity Cake' and feature story in Woman's Day Magazine.
- 1953 7 Jan. New Zealand freelance, Contemporary Australian Art - Public Interest and Encouragement. (photo artist and daughter, Susanna Short)
- 1953 (n.d.) Daily Telegraph, Woman as Art Manager, re Borlase C.A.S. appointment.
- 1953 30 Nov. Daily Mirror Art Critic, Contemporary Art Show More Genial
- 1953 29 Oct. Anon. Women's News Fashion. Woman Manages Modern Art Show, 15th Annual C.A.S. Borlase new manager.
- 1953 (n.d.) S.M.H., Contemporary Art Society Prepares For Exhibition, 15th Annual C.A.S. (photo Borlase and entries for exhibition)
- 1954 17 March, Daily Telegraph, Ross Campbell, Layman Looks At The Blake Prize Pictures, No Man's Land Where Religion And Art Meet.
- 1954 (n.d.) S.M.H., Paul Haefliger, Review of Blake Art Prize.
- 1954 (n.d.) S.M.H., Paul Haefliger, Art Society Displays New Vigor.
- 1956 (n.d.) S.M.H., art critic, Blake Prize for Religious Art Exhibition.
- 1958 (n.d.) S.M.H., Wallace Thornton, Terry Clune's Second Anniversary Exhibition.
- 1958 (n.d.) Anon. Politics Lose To Art, (photo Borlase and Laurie Short).
- 1958 (n.d.) S.M.H., Wallace Thornton, Art Society's Annual Show In Attractive Setting, C.A.S. 20th Annual Exhibition.
- 1959 (n.d.), Daily Telegraph, Alan Barnes, A Short Discourse on Art.
- 1959 (n.d.) Sun, Laurie Thomas, Women Artists. Only A Few Strong Works In Show, Women Painters at Bissietta Gallery.
- 1959 (n.d.) Anon. First Ever Abstract Group Show From Australia To Go Overseas. - At London's New Vision Centre 21st March Next Year.
- 1959 (n.d.) S.M.H., art critic, Three New Sydney Art Exhibitions, C.A.S., 21st Annual interstate, Sydney
- 1960 (n.d.) Daily Mirror, Robert Hughes, Art Prize Exhibition, (Blake).
- 1960 (n.d.) Sun, James Gleeson, Two Shows of Clever Paintings, solo, Macquarie Galleries.
- 1960 25 Oct. Sydney Sun, James Gleeson, Art Wins A Crusade. Coming Of Age. C.A.S., Annual interstate.
- 1960 (n.d.) Anon. Quality Paintings Shown in Adelaide Festival of Arts. Our art critic, Exhibition C.A.S.
- 1960 (n.d.), S.M.H., Wallace Thornton, A Positive One-Man Exhibition, solo, Macquarie Galleries.
- 1960 (n.d.) Anon., Art and the Union, solo, Macquarie Galleries.
- 1960 (n.d.) The Bulletin, Art Bursts - Nancy Borlase, solo, Macquarie Galleries.
- 1961 (n.d.) Anon., Art Prize to Wife of Union Secretary, Borlase awarded Mosman Art Prize
- 1961 (n.d.) Anon., Winning oil, photo Borlase and 'Drift', awarded Mosman Art Prize.
- 1961 Tues. Daily Telegraph, Her First Award - Woman Painter Wins Art Show, photo Borlase and 'Drift' awarded Mosman Art Prize
- 1961 (n.d.) S.M.H., Wallace Thornton, 'Avant Garde' in Impressive Show, (Survey 1 - Sydney Avant Garde Painting)
- 1961 (n.d.) Sun Herald, Women's section, staff correspondent, Do the Majority of Women Like Work for Work's Sake? Is It True That Women Love Men - But Men Love Work? - interview with Borlase on the subject.
- 1961 (n.d.) S.M.H., 1961, art critic, Painting Brings Prestige. In The Past Women Have Generally Been Denied A Role In Art But They Have. Over The Last 30 Years. Forced A Decided Emphasis On Painting and Sculpture.
- 1961 Nov., S.M.H., art critic, Contemporary Art Society. 22nd Annual Exhibition.
- 1962 (n.d.) Anon. Loophole. Quote: 'Borlase A Member of the Executive of the Contemporary Art Society Said. No Works Of Art Should Carry Duty.
- 1962 14 Nov. S.M.H., Wallace Thornton, Nancy Borlase, solo, Barry Stern Galleries.
- 1962 15 Nov. Anon. Art Show, solo, Barry Stern Galleries
- 1962 18 Nov. Sunday Telegraph, Daniel Thomas, Exhibitions, solo, Barry Stern Galleries.
- 1962 (n.d.) The Sun, James Gleeson, It's Good. But!, solo, Barry Stern Galleries.
- 1962 (n.d.) Daily Mirror, Robert Hughes, Paintings are on target, solo, Barry Stern Galleries.
- 1962 (n.d.) Anon. Newcastle Buys Painting, solo, Barry Stern Galleries.
- 1963 (n.d.) Anon. Painting Exhibition Opened, solo, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle, photo artist, family and works.
- 1963 (n.d.) Newcastle Morning Herald, 'P.S.' Pleasant And Abstract, solo, von Bertouch Galleries.
- 1963 (n.d.) Anon. Art Show Opening, von Bertouch Galleries, photo artist and Shay Docking,
- 1963 9 June, Sunday Telegraph, Daniel Thomas, 'Survey no. 3' Sydney Avant-Garde Paintings, Blaxland Gallery.
- 1964 (n.d.) The Australian, Elwyn Lynn, "I don't know much about art, but by Landseer I know what I like." The Ailing Archibald.
- 1965 June, Sunday Telegraph, Daniel Thomas, The Need for Mixed Shows, C.A.S. Dominion Galleries, Sydney
- 1966 15 Oct. The Bulletin, Elwyn Lynn, Nancy Borlase is not a Fashionable Painter, solo, Macquarie Galleries.
- 1966 (n.d.) Sunday Telegraph, Helen Sweeney, All the Fun of the Fair, solo, Macquarie Galleries.
- 1966 (n.d.) Anon. Art by John Henshaw, The Decline of Portraiture. (Wynne, Sulman and Archibald).
- 1966 (n.d.) Sun, James Gleeson, Nancy Borlase's Abstracts at the Macquarie Galleries.
- 1966 (n.d.) S.M.H., Wallace Thornton, Four Painters in Brief, solo, Macquarie Galleries.
- 1970 March, Wagga, art critic, Splendid Display of Art, Centenary Invitation Art Exhibition, Acquisition 'Number 10' by Borlase.
- 1972 20 May, The Bulletin, Elwyn Lynn, It's Not All In The Mind, solo, Macquarie Galleries.
- 1972 19 May, The Sydney Jewish News, Losing Sight Of What It Is, solo, Macquarie Galleries.
- 1972 4 May, S.M.H., Donald Brook, Something for Everyone, solo, Macquarie Galleries.
- 1972 (n.d.) S.M.H., Christopher Dawson, Macquarie Galleries - Twenty Paintings by Nancy Borlase
- 1983 22 Oct. S.M.H., Terence Maloon, Richer than Dollar Note Art, solo, 1961-83 Barry Stern Galleries.
- 1983 20 Oct. The Australian, Sandra McGrath, Nancy Borlase. Barry Stern Exhibiting Gallery
- 1986 12/13 July, Weekend Australian, Elwyn Lynn, Time Leaps That Cry Out For Dr. Who, Borlase 1930s-1950s oils, Woolloomooloo Gallery, photo 'The bath.' 1943
- 1986 12 July, S.M.H., Terence Maloon, High Sobriety Keeps the Blue Skies Away, Borlase, 1930s-1950s oils, Woolloomooloo Gallery, photo 'Keith Mitchell' 1948 (N.R.A.G.)



- 1986 2 July, S.M.H., Chris Ashton, A Working Union of Sense and Sensibility, Borlase 1930s-1950s oils, Woolloomooloo Gallery, photo Borlase and 'Self Portrait' 1947 (N.G.A.)
- 1986 30 May, Financial Review, Terry Ingram, The Shorting of the Market Gathers Pace in Australia, Borlase 1930s-1950s oils, Woolloomooloo Gallery, photo 'The bath.' 1943 (Laurie Short).
- 1986 29/30 Nov. Weekend Australian, Gay Richardson, Nancy Borlase: Recent Paintings Woolloomooloo Gallery.
- 1986 21 Nov. S.M.H., John McDonald, Recent Paintings by Nancy Borlase
- 1987 2 Feb. S.M.H., Bruce Adams, Galleries, Wynne Prize Art Gallery N.S.W.
- 1987 (n.d.) Weekend Australian, Elwyn Lynn, Brave Survey of the Landscape, (Wynne Prize A.G.N.S.W.)
- 1989 10 Nov. S.M.H., Christopher Allen, Woolloomooloo Gallery Recent Paintings by Nancy Borlase.
- 1989 11/12 Nov. Weekend Australian, Elwyn Lynn, Mood, Mass and Melancholy, Borlase, Woolloomooloo Gallery.
- 1989 27 Nov. S.M.H., Emily Gibson, Birthday at Blaxland, (60th)
- 1990 Aug. S.M.H., Christopher Allen, All Undressed and Nowhere to go. "Nudes", touring exhibition regional art galleries.
- 1990 14 Sept. S.M.H., Christopher Allen, Painting on the Trot, Borlase Drawings and Watercolours 1930s-1950s, Woolloomooloo Gallery.
- 1993 26 Jan. North Shore Times and The Express, Megan Paris, Unlikely Couple A Perfect Mix, photo Borlase in her studio.

## CATALOGUE

### Nancy Borlase - 1930s - 50s

*My interest in formalism arose from my reading of R H Wilenski and Roger Fry; my involvement in sculpture and looking at reproductions of Cezanne, Modigliani and Derain.*

My early Sydney days were not greatly productive. Faced with the impracticability of making sculpture after setting my sights in that direction, I produced the occasional painting and I drew. I attended life classes and I made quick sketches of animals at Taronga Park Zoo. Likewise Francis Lyburner with whom I compared notes. Lyburner's drawings were painterly and romantic, mine linear and structural. I drew skeletons at the Sydney Museum to understand structure better. Unable to undertake a full-time art course I invented my own.

After arriving in Sydney in 1937, my earliest work was a painting of Pymont Power House. Regrettably it is lost but some Pymont drawings survive. A grey sombre picture, stressing the verticality of volumetric forms, it depicted a group of workers dwarfed by the giantism of the Power House. As social comment it reflected my subjective reactions to Sydney at that time.

**Still Life** (c. 1939-40) shows a similar concern with volumetric form. But its austere palette of ochre, umber and terre verte, and its almost puritanical objectivity, relate not to Sydney but to my New Zealand background.

It was R H Wilenski in 1927 who brought the question of morality into art. He wrote: "The romantic movement assumes that the artist is more important than art . . . classical art assumes that art is greater than the artist."

Sali Herman saw Sydney through European eyes. I saw it through New Zealand eyes not attuned to its quality of light and space.

My first comprehensive body of works were the Balmain paintings. From 1942 to 1949 Balmain not only offered me some years of stability. With its picturesque mix of workers' cottages, terrace houses, waterfront activity and general look of dilapidation, it was a ready-made subject. Its insularity, and tradition of industrial militancy, gave it a character that singled it out from the rest of Sydney.

As a relative newcomer I felt at home in Balmain. In one respect, it reminded me of

parts of New Zealand; in another it was the scene of lively political activity. The human element was as important to me as the landscape.

I lived in Louisa Road, Birchgrove, now the most fashionable street in Balmain. I painted what I saw; my subjects were all around me, indoors as well as outside.

**The Bath 1** (1943) and **Bath 2** (1945) depict our bathroom as it was then with its tin bath, the gas copper or chip heater. We had no mod-cons in those days. Both works reveal a cubist concern with solidity of form, and allowing for some artistic licence in **Bath 2**, with truth to the subject. They are not about social comment although inevitably an element of that intrudes. **Bath 2** is often called "Laurie Short taking a Bath". I leave that to the viewer's imagination. The two figures in **Bath 1** are anonymous.

The Balmain portraits are of "people who inhabited that world, friends of long standing and others, like **Private Fred Usher** who drifted in and out of it". (Quote from 1986 exhibition statement, Woolloomooloo Gallery). **Nan Kernot**, painted in Melbourne 1941-42, stylistically belongs to that group.

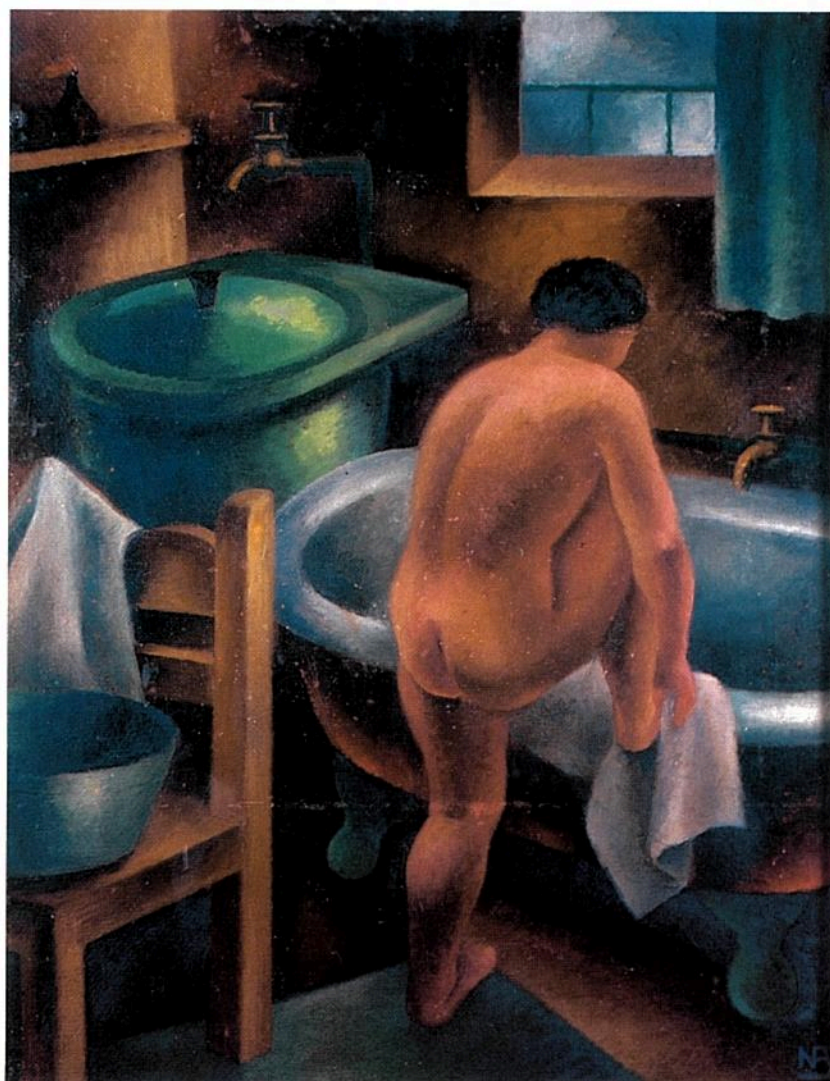
Moving from Balmain to the relatively featureless suburb of Gladesville, in 1949, released me from a subject that had captivated me for long enough.

Gladesville, socially mobile, expanding into the semi-rural landscape of Ryde, had no such hold. But it meant freedom to tackle new subjects, a more painterly approach leading to a better understanding of Cezanne, an awareness of light and space as in **Old Brickworks, Ryde** (1949) and of geometric form in **Tumut** (1954).

**Park Bench** (1953), based on sketch book drawings and my concern with giving a sense of actuality to figures in space, can be seen as a pivotal work between the regionalism of Balmain and a widening of my artistic experience.

It represents a new phase in my work as I moved from the small easel painting to the larger subject or genre picture.





**Bath.** (1945), catalogue no. 12

1. **Still life.** (c.1939-40)  
Oil on canvas  
36.0 x 30.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Collection: The artist.
2. **Portrait - Nan Kernot.** (c.1941-42)  
Oil on canvas on board  
53.2 x 41.0  
Inscribed: u.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1992-3 "Faces in the crowd". cat. 18, Stanthorpe Art Gallery, Queensland and Tweed River Regional Art Gallery  
Collection: Fred and Elinor Wrobel.
3. **Self portrait.** (1943)  
Oil on board  
40.0 x 43.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s" Woolloomooloo Gallery. cat. 34  
Illustrated: 1986 Exhibition invitations and catalogue cover.  
Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales.

4. **The bath.** (1943)  
Oil on cardboard  
33.7 x 42.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.' Verso: label inscribed by artist, 'Nancy Borlase. THE BATH.'  
Exhibited: 1943, CAS, 5th Annual Interstate, Sydney, cat. 28.  
1943, CAS, Melbourne. Velasquez Gallery, cat. 5.  
Provenance: Formerly the Collection of David and the late Millie Dickes, London.  
Collection: The artist.
5. **Soldier reading.** (1943)  
Oil on board  
44.0 x 34.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s". Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 24.  
1988-89, July-May Bicentennial exhibition from the Collection of the ANG "Under a Southern Sun", cat. 16, toured NT., SA., Qld and NSW.  
Collection: National Gallery of Australia.
6. **Private Fred Usher.** (1943)  
Oil on board  
57.0 x 39.0  
Inscribed: u.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1944, 26 June-14 July, CAS, 6th Annual, Sydney, cat. 10.; 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s". Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 14  
Collection: Art Gallery New South Wales.  
Donated by Mr Michael Gleeson-White, A O.
7. **Reclining Nudes.** (1943)  
Oil on board  
35.0 x 50.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1944, 26 June-14 July, CAS, 6th Annual, Sydney, cat. 12.; 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s", Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 20.  
1990-91, "Nudes" toured Campbelltown City Art Gallery, Tweed River Regional Art Gallery and Stanthorpe Art Gallery, Queensland, cat. 9.  
Illustrated: 1990-91 "Nudes" catalogue B/W, page 5.  
Collection: Fred and Elinor Wrobel.
8. **The Ferry, Balmain.** (1943)  
Oil on board  
60.0 x 44.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1943, 29 June-19 July, CAS, 5th Annual Interstate, Sydney, cat. 26.; 1943, 24 Aug-4 Sept, CAS, Velasquez Gallery, Melbourne, cat. 4.; 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s". Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 8.; 1987, "Nancy Borlase. The Artistic Experience: Influences and Directions", cat. 2, Wollongong City Art Gallery.  
Collection: Fred and Elinor Wrobel.
9. **Long Nose Point Wharf.** (1943)  
Oil on cardboard  
45.0 x 32.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s." Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 25; 1988, "Sydney Through The Artist's Eye 1840s-1980s" Bicentennial exhibition, Woolloomooloo Gallery. (NFS) cat. 9.  
Collection: Fred and Elinor Wrobel.



10. **Elkington Park, Balmain.** (1944)  
Oil on board  
27.0 x 31.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s". Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 44.  
Collection: Susanna Short.
11. **Nude in attic.** (1944)  
Oil on composition board  
51.0 x 38.5  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1944, 26 June-14 July, CAS, 6th annual, Sydney, cat. 13.; 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s". Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 19.  
Collection: Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
12. **Bath.** (1945)  
Oil on board  
55.0 x 45.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1945, CAS, Sydney, cat. 7.; 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s". Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 9.; 1987, "Nancy Borlase. The Artistic Experience: Influences and Directions", Wollongong City Gallery, cat. 1.; 1990-91, "Nudes" cat. 8. toured Campbelltown City Art Gallery, Tweed River Regional Art Gallery and Stanthorpe Art Gallery, Queensland.  
Illustrated: 1992, colour back cover "Laurie Short: A Political Life", Susanna Short, Allen and Unwin.  
Provenance: The artist's husband, trade unionist, Laurie Short.  
Collection: Fred and Elinor Wrobel.
13. **Boatsheds Balmain.** (1945)  
Oil on cardboard  
24.0 x 36.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1945, 26 April-11 May, CAS, Sydney, cat. 8.; 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s", Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 40.; 1987, "Nancy Borlase. The Artistic Experience: Influences and Directions". cat. 4, Wollongong City Art Gallery  
Collection: Fred and Elinor Wrobel.
14. **Portrait of James McClelland.** (1946)  
Oil on board  
48.0 x 35.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1946, May, CAS 2nd. State, Sydney, cat. 10.  
Illustrated: "Laurie Short: A Political Life", Susanna Short, Allen and Unwin, 1992, B/W page 44.  
Collection: Private.
15. **Waterfront. Balmain.** (1946)  
Oil on board  
41.0 x 36.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1946, 12-28 Nov. CAS, 8th Annual Interstate, Sydney, cat. 12.; 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s". Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 38.  
Collection: Private (Melbourne).

16. **Self portrait.** (1947)  
Oil on plywood  
55.0 x 39.0  
Inscribed: u.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1947, 8-26 Nov. CAS, 9th Annual Interstate, Sydney, cat. 5.; 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s", Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 12.; 1989, ANG, Selected by James Mollison in his farewell exhibition as Director.  
Collection: National Gallery of Australia.
17. **Portrait - Girl.** (1947)  
Oil on board  
51.2 x 33.2  
Inscribed: u.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1947, 18 April-7 May, CAS, 3rd State, Sydney, cat. 11.; 1986 "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s", Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 18;  
Illustrated: 1986, New England Regional Art Museum Annual Report, cover B/W.  
Collection: New England Regional Art Museum, Armidale, New South Wales.
18. **Portrait - Keith Mitchell.** (1948)  
Oil on cardboard  
57.0 x 35.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s". Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 15.  
Collection: Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
19. **Portrait - Helen Lempriere.** (1948)  
Oil on board  
45.0 x 32.0  
Inscribed: u.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1949, 15 Oct-2 Nov. CAS, 11th Annual Interstate, Sydney, cat. 193.  
Collection: Mr Tim Ritchie.
20. **Portrait - Wallaroo.** (1949)  
Oil on composition board  
42.0 x 30.0  
Inscribed: u.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1949, 15 Oct-2 Nov. CAS 11th Annual Interstate, Sydney, cat. 197.  
1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s". Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 33.  
Collection: Ms Andrea Wrobel.
21. **Still life with bottle brush.** (1949)  
Oil on board.  
42.0 x 35.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1949, 15 Oct-2 Nov. CAS. 11th Annual Interstate, Sydney, cat. 173.; 1986. "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s". Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 31.  
Collection: Private (Sydney).
22. **Nudes with skull.** (1949)  
Oil on board  
45.0 x 60.0  
Inscribed: u.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings. 1930s-1950s". Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 10.; 1987, "Nancy Borlase. The Artistic Experience: Influences and Directions". Wollongong City Art Gallery, cat. 6.; 1990-91, "Nudes" toured Campbelltown City Art Gallery, Tweed River Regional Art Gallery, Stanthorpe Art Gallery, Queensland, cat. 10.  
Collection: Fred and Elinor Wrobel.



23. **Old Brickworks, Ryde. No.1.** (1949)  
Oil on board  
40.0 x 54.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s". Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 13.  
Collection: National Gallery of Australia.
24. **Still life.** (c.1949)  
Oil on composition board  
50.0 x 37.5  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Provenance: A gift from the artist c.1949 to Mrs Annie Westbrook, by descent to her granddaughter, Thelma Hosking.  
Collection: Thelma Hosking.

## Nancy Borlase - Blake Prize for Religious Art

With the aim of raising the standard of religious art in 1949, a Blake Prize committee was formed and the first annual Blake Prize exhibition opened in Sydney in 1951.

The challenge was taken up as artists of all or no religious persuasion participated. The response was comparable only to the New Images of Man movement which surfaced in the United States at the same time.

My Blake paintings (1951-60) represent a productive ten years of stylistic change as I moved from the figurative through to the abstract. With content, in each individual painting dictating style, these works illustrate a steady progression towards the elimination of the figure.

**Last Supper** (1952), a narrative picture, was my first ambitious attempt at large-scale figure composition. In this rather naive if painterly work, my main concern was to avoid a conventional 'Pellegrini style' rendering of the story and to break up the composition in a way that would capture the drama of the occasion, as expressed in the reaction of each disciple.

No subject is more loaded with feeling than Descent from the Cross. Not even the non-believer is immune to its potency. I looked with awe at reproductions of Giotto and especially Masaccio. I read Bernard Berenson on the tactility of form. It was several years before I would see the originals but in my next Blake work, **Descent from the Cross** (1953), the influences were apparent.

In this context, **Ascension** (1961), continued my exploration into expressive form. In 1953, the travelling exhibition, "French Painting Today", opened in Sydney. This was the first time many of us were able to see a survey of contemporary painting from the Ecole de Paris. (I had only a vague memory of the 1939 Sir Keith Murdoch exhibition of French and British Modern Art - indeed I sometimes wonder if I saw it).

"French Painting Today" was an enormously influential exhibition. It was a synthetic cubist painting by Jacques Villon that particularly held my attention. His work was more accessible to me than a Braque or a Picasso.

Villon provided the key to understanding cubism, evident in my 1954 Blake painting, **Christ and Apostles**. I understood with greater clarity the questions and answers raised by my early mentors, Grace Crowley and Rah Fizelle.

Whatever its merits, **Christ and Apostles** is a transitional work which marked a turning point in my direction. It culminated in **The Fifth Day of Creation (Genesis 1.20)** which moved past the synthetic cubism of **Christ and Apostles** into metaphysical abstraction. This was as far as I would go in the abstract idiom.





**Descent from the cross.** (1953), catalogue no. 26

25. **Last Supper.** (1952)  
Oil on board  
101.5 x 72.5  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1952, selected Blake Prize, Mark Foy's, Sydney, cat. 7.  
Collection: The artist.
26. **Descent from the Cross.** (1953)  
Oil on composition board  
110.0 x 72.0  
Inscribed: u.l. 'N.B.' verso: inscribed by artist  
Exhibited: 1953, Selected Blake Prize, Mark Foy's, Sydney, cat. 5.; 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s". Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 1.  
Provenance: Ex-Collection of Christopher Davies.  
Collection: Mr Peter Kennewell.
27. **Christ and Apostles.** (1954)  
Oil on board  
76.5 x 133.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.' Verso: inscribed by artist  
Exhibited: 1954, selected Blake Prize, Mark Foy's, Sydney, cat. 7.  
Collection: The artist.

28. **The Fifth Day of Creation. (Genesis 1:20)** (1960)  
Oil on composition board  
100.5 x 47.5  
Inscribed: l.c. 'N.B.' Verso: Blake entry label inscribed by artist.  
Exhibited: 1960, selected Blake Prize, Mark Foy's, Sydney, cat. 5.  
Collection: The artist.
29. **Ascension.** (1961)  
Oil on composition board  
71.0 x 100.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.' Verso: artist's label  
Exhibited: 1961, selected Blake Prize, Mark Foy's Sydney, cat. 2.; 1987, Wollongong City Art Gallery, "Nancy Borlase. The Artistic Experience: Influences and Directions", cat. 12.  
Collection: Fred and Elinor Wrobel.



## Nancy Borlase - 1950s-1960s

My first trip to the United States and Europe in 1956 came at a time when I was finding my own style, while working my way through English and European derived influences. An article I wrote for the Contemporary Art Society broadsheet (Jan. 1957) conveyed some of my impressions of the scene in New York and Paris, and my reactions to it.

1956 was an exhilarating time to be in New York. Then at its peak the abstract expressionist movement offered a new freedom which broke through the clichés of non-objectivism of the 'thirties and early 'forties. But for me Paris was still the international centre. I had a lot of catching up to do.

My second visit to New York, 1960, was an enriching experience. I made extensive notes on established and emerging New York schools. Doors were opened to me: Hans Hofmann at Samuel Kootz; Ad Reinhardt and twenty-five years of abstract art at Betty Parsons; Jasper Johns at Costelli; George McNeil at Howard Wise; Kenneth Nolan and Frankenthaler at Andre Emmerich; de Kooning, Motherwell, Pollock, Gottlieb, Kline, at the Metropolitan; New Spanish Painting at the Guggenheim and the New Forms - New Media exhibition at Martha Jackson.

It is a truism that nothing remains static in New York. In 1960 Harold Rosenberg was defending the premise of action painting as "the last serious moment in life ... in that it dared to be subjective, to affirm the artist as an active self." All art movements, he claimed, "were movements towards mediocrity for those content to ride them."

In the combine paintings of Rauschenberg, the new literalism of Jim Dine, art was no longer seen as a metaphor for formal order. Formalism was out and junk culture drawn from the debris and obsolescence of city life was taking over.

*In each new work, the painter must seek to rephrase the shapes, enlarge their scope and re-invent them in a new context. (Extract from my notebook).*

The collage element in **City Song** (1961) is an implicit acknowledgement of the New York influence. But there were other influences at that time. In early 1961 with my family I moved from Gladesville to Mosman where our windows look over

Mosman Bay to the city skyline. The city is ever present.

The city and its encroachment on nature was the central theme of my mixed-media works in the early to mid-sixties. **City Song** (1961) is a key work in that it broke new ground. **Hub** (1962) is another. **Sun in the City** (1960) could be included. Although it predated my use of collage it comes out of abstract expressionism. The special quality of light, best described as an inner glow, apparent in this work and other paintings of that vintage, such as **Ceremonial** (1959) and **Fall** (1960), was achieved by my use of a gum tempera-under-oil medium, from Ralph Mayer's Handbook of Materials and Technique.

*It is the disturbing relentlessness of change that I seek to express in my work. The image is not static but in a continual state of flux, of varying tempo. It emerges from the organic vitality of the visual elements, it is germane to the act of painting and it moves towards inevitable destruction. (Quote from John Reed: New Painting 1952-62).*

Painted on masonite, carrying traces of newspaper, torn snippets of words or numbers, my mixed-media works of the sixties bear little relationship to the metaphorical abstraction of **The Fifth Day of Creation**, the last of my Blake paintings.

For over five hundred years painting had been the servant of the idea, but action painting and the primacy of gesture reversed the process. Something gained was something lost. Having eliminated the figure I substituted it by the use of collage. But I did not use collage like a Kurt Schwitters or Robert Motherwell, although Motherwell's black paintings were an influence.

For me collage was part of the painting process. It was lost and found in the shearing, twisting rhythms of **Summer Song** (1966), swept aside in the rhythmic sweep of **Off Shore** (1966), and all but obliterated in the darker sonorities of **Cradle** - a work far removed from the declamatory style of **City Song**. "With its unassertive, close range of dull wine reds **Cradle** has the comfortable grandeur of baroque architecture." So wrote Daniel Thomas in a review of the CAS show (Sunday Telegraph, June 1965).



**Game of chance.** (c.1963), catalogue no. 44

30. **Girl (in the blue beany) or Susanna.** (1951)  
Oil on composition board  
45.5 x 38.0  
Inscribed: u.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1954, 6-23 April, "Sydney Paintings", A panel of work from CAS Sydney, Tye's Gallery, 100 Bourke Street, Melbourne, cat. 163.; 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s", Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 27.; 1987, Wollongong City Gallery, "Nancy Borlase. The Artistic Experience: Influences and Directions", cat. 8.  
Collection: The artist.
31. **Woman (self portrait).** (1952)  
Oil on canvas laid down on board  
55.0 x 43.0  
Inscribed: u.l. 'N.B.'  
Collection: National Gallery of Victoria.



32. **Still life with poinsettias.** (1953)  
Oil on board  
65.0 x 41.0  
Inscribed: u.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1953, Nov. CAS. 15th Annual Interstate, Sydney, cat. 34.; 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s", Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 6.; 1987, Wollongong City Art Gallery, "Nancy Borlase, The Artistic Experience: Influences and Directions", cat. 10.; 1989, "Gardens, Flower Studies and Still Life paintings by Australian Artists, 1890s-1980s", Campbelltown City Art Gallery; 1989, "Sumptuous Still Life and Glittering Glass" Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, cat. 7.; 1990-91, "Flower and Still Life Paintings by Australian Artists 1850s-1980s", cat. 12, toured Penrith Region and Lewers Bequest, Dubbo, Orange, Griffith, Tweed River, Grafton, Bathurst Regional Galleries in NSW, Stanthorpe Art Gallery, Queensland.  
Illustrated: 1989, Campbelltown City Art Gallery catalogue, B/W page 3.  
Collection: Fred and Elinor Wrobel.
33. **Park bench.** (1953)  
Oil on composition board  
58.8 x 74.3  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1953, Nov. CAS, 15th Annual interstate Sydney, cat. 44.; 1986, "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s", Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat.3.  
Illustrated: 1992, June, 'Artwork of the Month', 'Park bench' Nancy Borlase, B/W, NRAG  
Collection: Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
34. **Coastline.** (1954)  
Oil on board  
42.0 x 61.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'; verso: artist's label and 'Artmet' label  
Exhibited: 1954, May, CAS, cat. 12.; 1986 "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s", Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 11.  
Collection: Private (Sydney).
35. **Newcastle waterfront.** (1955)  
Oil on composition board  
30.5 x 37.5  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1955, April, CAS, state, David Jones, Sydney, section 2, Abstract, cat. 2.; 1986 "Nancy Borlase Oil Paintings 1930s-1950s". Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 50.  
Collection: Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
36. **Ceremonial.** (1959)  
Oil and tempera on board  
62.5 x 77.5  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1960 "15 Contemporary Australian Painters", New Visions Centre Gallery, London, 21 March - 9 April, cat. 2. Selected and organised by the CAS, N.S.W. branch.  
Collection: Fred and Elinor Wrobel.
37. **Blue centre.** (1960)  
Oil and mixed media on canvas laid down  
91.0 x 56.0  
Exhibited: 1960, solo, Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, cat. 1.  
Collection: Fred and Elinor Wrobel.
38. **Fall.** (1960)  
Oil, sand, collage, gum tempera on canvas  
91.5 x 79.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1960, solo, Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, cat. 13; 1991 "New Directions 1952-1962", Lewers Bequest and Penrith Regional Art Gallery, cat. 76.  
Collection: Peter Boehm.
39. **City Song.** (1961)  
Oil and mixed media on hardboard  
64.0 x 92.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1961, "Survey 1: Sydney Avant Garde Paintings", Blaxland Gallery, Sydney, cat.2.; 1983 "Borlase Paintings 1961-1983", Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney, (not for sale).  
Illustrated: "John Reed: New Painting 1952-62", Publisher Longmans 1963, page 15.  
Collection: Gift of the artist to Museum of Modern Art, Heide, Victoria.
40. **Drift.** (1961)  
Oil on composition board  
74.0 x 93.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1961, awarded the Mosman Art Prize; 1983, solo "Paintings 1961-1983", Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney, cat.31, on loan from Mosman Council Collection  
Collection: Mosman Council.
41. **Sydney Harbour (Blue Baroque).** (1961)  
Oil on collage on canvas laid down  
91.5 x 127.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'; verso: inscribed by artist 'Blue Baroque'  
Exhibited: 1983, solo, "Paintings 1961-1983", Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney (not for sale), on loan from the Transfield Collection.  
Collection: Transfield.
42. **Hub.** (1961-62)  
Oil and collage on canvas on hardboard  
87.6 x 61.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1962, solo, Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney, cat. 1.  
Collection: Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
43. **Edge of peril.** (1962)  
Oil and mixed media on board  
72.0 x 92.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1963, solo, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle, cat. 4; 1962, solo, Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney, cat. 4.  
Collection: Private.
44. **Game of chance.** (1963)  
Mixed media, collage, oil on board  
49.5 x 35.2  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1963, solo, von Bertouch Galleries, Newcastle  
Collection: Newcastle Region Art Gallery.
45. **Engulfed.** (c.1963)  
Oil, mixed media, collage on board  
89.5 x 43.6  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Collection: Private (Sydney).



46. **Westward.** (1964)  
Oil and collage on board  
96.5 x 117.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1964, 14-17 Oct., CAS, 26th Annual, Blaxland Gallery, Sydney, cat. 1.; 1964 selected Wynne, AGNSW; 1983, solo, "Paintings 1961-1983", Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney, cat. 33.  
Collection: The artist.
47. **Inturning.** (1965)  
Oil on board  
97.0 x 117.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1966, solo, Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, cat. 1.; 1983, solo, "Paintings 1961-1983", Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney, cat. 35.  
Collection: College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney.
48. **Cradle.** (1965)  
Oil and mixed media on canvas on board  
122.0 x 117.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'; verso: label Maitland Prize, Jan. 1966, Invitation section.  
Exhibited: 1965, 22 June - 2 July, CAS, Dominions Art Galleries, Sydney, cat. 3.; 1966, selected Maitland Art Prize; 1983, solo "Paintings 1961-1983", Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney, cat. 34; 1987, Wollongong City Art Gallery, "Nancy Borlase, The Artistic Experience: Influences and Directions", cat. 15.  
Collection: The artist.
49. **Summer song.** (1966)  
Oil, collage and mixed media on board  
116.5 x 96.5  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1966, solo, Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, cat. 9.; 1983, solo, "Paintings 1961-1983", Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney, cat. 38.  
Collection: The artist.
50. **Change of season.** (1966)  
Oil and mixed media on board  
122.0 x 92.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1966, solo, Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, cat. 2.; 1983, solo, "Paintings 1961-1983", Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney, cat. 40.  
Collection: The artist.
51. **Off shore.** (1966)  
Oil on canvas on board  
91.5 x 122.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1966, solo, Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, cat. 8.; 1966, selected Wynne, AGNSW; 1983, solo, "Paintings 1961-1983", Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney, cat. 39.; 1987, Wollongong City Art Gallery, "Nancy Borlase, The Artistic Experience: Influences and Directions", cat. 16.  
Collection: The artist.
52. **Tide up.** (1966)  
Oil and collage on composition board  
91.5 x 116.5  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1966, solo, Macquarie Galleries, Sydney, cat. 2.; 1983, solo, "Paintings 1961-1983", Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney, uncatalogued, on loan from the Transfield Collection.  
Collection: Transfield.

53. **Over.** (1967)  
Oil and mixed media on canvas on composition board  
44.0 x 34.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1967, Royal Easter Show, Contemporary Section  
Provenance: Purchased by Douglas Pratt for the Commonwealth Arts Advisory Board Collection from 1967 exhibition R.A.S.; 1990, May, purchased from it by ANG  
Collection: National Gallery of Australia.
54. **Ode.** (1967)  
Oil on board  
122.0 x 92.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1967, 11-21 Oct., CAS, 29th Annual Interstate, Sydney, cat. 4.  
Collection: The artist.
55. **Turning.** (1968)  
Oil on composition board  
113.5 x 82.5  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1968, Manly Invitation Acquisitive Exhibition, acquired for the collection.  
Collection: Manly Art Gallery and Museum.
56. **Up and over.** (c.1967-68)  
Oil, mixed media and collage on canvas laid down  
118.0 x 91.5  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Collection: Private.







61. **Intensive cultivation.** 1972  
Oil on canvas stretcher  
100.0 x 89.5  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B. 72'  
Exhibited: 1987, "Nancy Borlase. The Artistic Experience: Influences and Directions." Wollongong City Art Gallery, cat. 18.  
Collection: The artist.
62. **Urban encroachment.** (1972)  
Oil on canvas stretcher  
121.5 x 102.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1972, solo, Macquarie Galleries, Sydney. cat.4.;  
1983, solo, "Paintings 1961-1983", Barry Stern Galleries, Sydney, cat. 25.;  
1987, Wollongong City Art Gallery, "Nancy Borlase. The Artistic Experience: Influences and Directions". cat.17.  
Collection: The artist.

## Nancy Borlase - 1980s-1990s

During the years I worked as art critic, first for The Bulletin (1973-75) and then for the Sydney Morning Herald (1975-81), my painting lapsed - though not entirely. I still kept my hand in but did not exhibit.

In 1983 I announced my return to full-time painting in a survey of my mid-period (1961-72) and then current (1982-83) work, at Barry Stern's Mary Place Gallery. The exhibition covered overlapping themes - the City, the Bay and a continuing Nature in Abstraction series as illustrated in **First Light** (1986) and **New Growth** (1993).

In 1960 it was Jasper Johns, a splendid painter, who said "First I paint what I see, then I see what I paint." In my abstract expressionist period I distanced myself from John's pithy comment. For me, the painting was the subject matter, the mood it evoked grew with it, and I did very little preliminary drawing. I worked out the idea as I painted. Instead of painting what I saw, I painted what I perceived.

Crunch time came in 1986 with the discovery of my early figurative works, closeted away for 25 years and exhibited at the Woolloomooloo Gallery.

*"Out of sight, out of mind, they were forgotten works, consigned to some obscure past. Now hauled out of storage, the dust of years brushed away, they can be seen to reflect something of the look of Sydney art at that time, or simply period oddities of a painter exploring her personal vision while working outside academic traditionalism." (Quote from artist's statement 1986 catalogue).*

There is little doubt that the discovery of these early works has been an important influence in my return to representational art. Also, it came at a time when I needed to enlarge my vocabulary, escape from the generalities of place and confront the subject face on.

I looked closely at the structure and form of rocks, renewed my interest in life drawing and made paintings of people. In 1987 I joined a group of fellow painters in a painting trip to the Bungle Bungles, in the Kimberley. I found this extraordinary landscape engulfing and intimidating. Those unresolved works still haunt me. This time it was a case of the subject dominating the painter.

People interest me, as they did early in my career. But now I am no longer interested in painting the archetypal head which becomes purely a formal exercise, but rather in revealing the characteristic difference in each individual which distinguishes him (or her) from the next person. I am not a portrait painter but that, I believe is what portraiture is all about.

My return to the figure is not to be construed as a rejection of abstract painting. I don't subscribe to the view that the two polarities are irreconcilable.

In 1986 I wrote: "Whether involved in the generality of abstraction or engaged in a direct dialogue with the subject, the process of painting is paramount. It is time the distinction between realism and abstraction was blurred."





**Laurie.** (1988), catalogue no. 67

63. **Bush sanctuary.** (1985-86)  
Oil on canvas stretcher  
121.5 x 91.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1986, solo, Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat.4.;  
1986, selected Wynne, AGNSW.; 1987, Wollongong City Art Gallery, "Nancy Borlase. The Artistic Experience: Influences and Directions", cat. 19.  
Collection: The artist.
64. **First light.** (1986)  
Oil on canvas stretcher  
136.0 x 106.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1986, solo, Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 1.  
Collection: Labor Council of NSW.
65. **Liquid Amber.** (1986)  
Oil on canvas stretcher  
122.0 x 106.5  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1986, solo, Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 2.; 1987, University of NSW, Invitation Art Purchase, cat. 23.  
Collection: The artist.
66. **Blue encroachment.** (1986-87)  
Oil on canvas stretcher  
91.5 x 122.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1987, University of NSW, Invitation Art Purchase, cat. 22.  
Collection: The artist.
67. **Laurie.** (1988) (Laurie Short)  
Oil on canvas stretcher  
25.0 x 30.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1989, 'Nancy Borlase Recent Landscapes and Figurative Paintings', Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 36.  
Collection: Newcastle Region Art Gallery.

68. **Molly.** (1989)  
Oil on canvas stretcher  
40.0 x 30.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1989 "Nancy Borlase Recent Landscapes and Figurative Paintings", Woolloomooloo Gallery, Greenwich (Hospital) series, cat. 31.  
Collection: Private (Melbourne).
69. **Amy.** (1989)  
Oil on canvas stretcher  
40.0 x 30.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1989, "Nancy Borlase Recent Landscapes and Figurative Paintings", Woolloomooloo Gallery, Greenwich (Hospital) series, cat. 33.  
Collection: Fred and Elinor Wrobel.
70. **Laurie Short's Aunt Alice.** (1991)  
Oil on canvas stretcher  
51.0 x 40.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Collection: The artist.
71. **New growth.** (1993)  
Oil on canvas stretcher  
101.5 x 122.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1993, Salon de Refusals, Wynne Prize, S.H. Ervin Gallery, National Trust, Sydney.  
Collection: The artist.
72. **Laurie Short, Union Leader.** (1993)  
Oil on canvas stretcher  
106.0 x 75.0  
Inscribed: l.l. 'N.B.'  
Exhibited: 1993, Portia Geach Memorial Award, S.H. Ervin Gallery, National Trust, Sydney.  
Collection: The artist.
73. **Alien.** (1993-94)  
Oil on cotton laid down on composition board  
55.5 x 71.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Collection: The artist.
74. **Self portrait, with New Guinea Mask.** (1994)  
Oil on canvas stretcher  
76.0 x 91.0  
Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'  
Collection: The artist.



## DRAWINGS - TO BE EXHIBITED AT NEWCASTLE REGION ART GALLERY ONLY

### **Ingleburn Army Camp.** (1943)

Pen and coloured ink with coloured washes

23.0 x 31.0

Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'

Exhibited: 1990, "Nancy Borlase Early drawings and Watercolours 1930s - 1950s", Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 13.

Collection: Australian War Memorial (29564).

### **Union man at rest, Laurie Short.** (1943)

Ink and watercolour

20.6 x 28.4

Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'

Exhibited: 1990, "Nancy Borlase Early Drawings and Watercolours 1930s - 1950s", Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 19

Collection: National Gallery of Victoria.

### **Caledonian Hotel, Balmain.** (1947)

Watercolour

20.5 x 24.5

Inscribed: l.r. 'N.B.'

Exhibited: 1990, "Nancy Borlase Early Drawings and Watercolours 1930s - 1950s", Woolloomooloo Gallery, cat. 33

Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales.

### **Drawings and sketch books**

Collection: Newcastle Region Art Gallery.

### **Drawings and watercolours**

Courtesy Woolloomooloo Gallery,  
the Fred and Elinor Wrobel collection,  
Susanna Short, Dr. and Mrs. Eli Revai.