

# convictions

art from Long Bay 1986–2005



### Curator's acknowledgements

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I especially acknowledge the artists whose works are presented in this exhibition and I thank all the lenders for their generosity.

Sue Paull

### **convictions** **art from Long Bay 1986 – 2005**

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## Introduction

I well remember Zig Jaworowski, a printmaking student at the College of Fine Arts, coming to me with an exhibition proposal to show the work of various inmates at Long Bay Correctional Complex, from which he had been recently released, and being at once impressed and moved by his own linocuts, often with related figures in emotionally taut groups, that variously brought to mind the war shelter drawings of Henry Moore, Auguste Rodin's *Burghers of Calais*, and Käthe Kollwitz's memorable images. You might imagine that work created whilst incarcerated in a maximum security gaol would be inward looking, limited and even disconnected from other worlds, but I found this not to be the case at all. Each inmate seemed to have found a more than adequate way to express their needs, and the imaginative freedom in their work connected their lives with mine, and with the vision of artists anywhere in the world.

It took no time at all to be convinced that here was an extremely rare opportunity to present something very special. Sue Paull, who set up Long Bay's Art Unit and has been the artistic inspiration for Zig and so many others, agreed to organise and curate the exhibition, for which I extend my deepest gratitude. I don't believe I would ever have fully appreciated her extraordinary devotion, passion and undivided commitment, not to mention *savoir faire*, had I not visited the Art Unit at the gaol. Entering a maximum security prison made me aware how we must never take for granted the freedoms we believe are our natural right. Piranesi's labyrinths came to mind, but they were no preparation for the immediate feelings of deprivation that such an environment

engenders. All the more remarkable then was the sensation of being finally in a high ceilinged, light filled and professionally equipped space with works of art of all sorts and sizes adorning the walls. And there in the midst of the all male group pursuing intently and variously their artistic endeavours was Sue Paull, calmly authoritative of all that she surveyed, and wonderfully encouraging and enthusiastic about the work and the attitude of all those present. What impressed me most in conversations with these men of different colour, creed, background and origin was how the creation of art had united them as human beings with a shared purpose, and given each individual a language through which to explore their presence. Here in this very room the necessity of art was palpable and its function clear.

John Berger, who created the seminal television series *Ways of Seeing* in the 1970s wrote:

It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world... Soon after we can see, we are aware that we can also be seen. The eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world.

Art has a unique ability to transcend not only barriers of language but also of confinement, as it releases both the spirit and the imagination, and enables new understanding to be created, as this exhibition fully reveals.

### **Nick Waterlow**

Director

Ivan Dougherty Gallery

## Faces of change: a generation of art from Long Bay

*Convictions* surveys nearly twenty years of artmaking at Sydney's Long Bay Correctional Complex. Many of the exhibits have been produced by inmates in the Art Unit, a full-time vocational art program in a maximum-security area within the Metropolitan Special Programs Centre (MSPC). Other works are from art educational classes operating in the various other centres, including the Long Bay Hospital. Nearly all the exhibits at one point or another have been displayed at Long Bay's Boom Gate Gallery. This survey is just a selection of a broader and ongoing phenomenon. It reveals some of the innovations and artistic tendencies that make Long Bay one of Sydney's most unusual arenas of studio practice.

The growth in art at Long Bay has coincided with major structural changes aimed at facilitating new policies and programs. Specialist centres have been created, the old separate prisons reorganised, and different modes of security put in place. Physically though, much of Long Bay still has the appearance—and the emotive effect—of a traditional prison. The buildings themselves carry this legacy. For example in the MSPC is a radial prison that harks back to 19th century British solutions to the penal tasks of observation and control. In their age and style, this prison's perimeter walls, surveillance towers and wings are testimony to the history of incarceration in New South Wales. Inside the wings are tiered rows of cells, firmly secured with plate steel doors. In 2002 the inmate artist Geoff Websdale made a drawing of 10 Wing, where in the evocative darkness one can sense all the weight of human confinement. In other inmates' drawings, the unsettling qualities of Long Bay's internal spaces are compounded by the details. At the end of another cellblock in Area 3 of the MSPC, a beam and trapdoor from the now-abolished system of capital punishment remain grimly evident.

Even glimpsed from afar, Long Bay seems a classic site of negation—the type of high-security environment that is represented time and again in popular literature, film and broadcast media. Yet these conventional readings are perhaps of least interest to anyone who is actually sentenced to such spaces. For them the priorities are to find their own ways of seeing and addressing their situation. One of the instructive aspects of this exhibition is the wide range of visual explorations by inmates doing time in Long Bay. Both practically and imaginatively they have made the prison a positive space for art.

This survey begins at a pictorially significant moment when the gaol started to be adorned by images that defied the expectations of the place. At the very core of the MSPC's radial prison is the most conspicuous of these

interventions—a cycle of murals painted by Tim Guider and other inmates in 1986-88. Surrounding the MSPC's Circle are the wildly contrasting scenes of a sundrenched Sydney beach; a Renaissance landscape with Sistine references; a dense rainforest; and a vision of the Apocalypse where space invaders carry out a *trompe-l'oeil* attack on the prison walls. These murals are now so intrinsic to Long Bay's physical character that they have been incorporated into later representations of the gaol by other inmates. References to them can be found in *10 Wing*, a meticulous model of the cell block made by Colombian artist Javier Lara-Gomez in 1997, and in a scene of the daily muster painted by Czech-born Peter Pavlov in 2000, where the prison's roofs and towers are converted into a fanciful skyline with all the architectural romance of Prague. Here the pictorial eccentricities gently subvert the whole setting, while still identifying it socially as the site of the artist's imprisonment.

For many inmates, art is something they have never tried or even considered before their time in gaol. Some have started to draw as a way of coming to terms with prison, by looking around and recording what they see, or giving expression to their own identity. In an environment where tattoos are so visible, the desire to replicate subcultural symbols of resistance can sometimes be a catalyst that leads on to other modes of representation. Michael Challis is one such artist explicitly concerned with "crim" identity, who has worked experimentally with smoke stains and torn collage to construct a charred, gun-fringed commentary on Sydney's criminal culture and justice system.

Rawness of a different kind, energetic yet non-specific, is evident in the vibrant abstractions of Wayne Williams, whose biomorphic colour splashes are as evocative of urban graffiti as things that are innately organic and lively. The brightness of this work is not unusual, for far more infrequent at Long Bay are the typically dark representations of alienation or despair that most outside observers might anticipate. It is a reflection of the type of art culture that has developed there that many inmates choose to objectify and thus transform their experience through processes of ironic inversion, visual paradox and metaphor. Justin Watkins, for example, has abstracted the structured day of the prison by visualising the complex from above. He has mapped the spaces around the wings in linear traces that recall the lines of movement of inmates, past and present. Repetitive rhythms, patterns of time.

Former inmate Zig Jaworowski has commented that Long Bay's artists "do not sit in judgment. They simply observe, and in so doing they escape repression by acting as if they



*Orphalese*. Mural on 10 Wing, Metropolitan Special Programs Centre, Long Bay, painted by Tim Guider and other inmates, 1986. Photo: Sue Paull 1996

are not repressed.” Such a tactic is not a denial of criticality, but implies instead that perception itself is empowering. Geoff Websdale is one artist who, over the past fifteen years, has scrutinised the different facets of prison life, observing the card games and other social interactions among inmates, as well as figures in solitude. On a more abstract level he has made minimalist assemblages out of uniform rows of tea-bags—disposable items that have a particular resonance as allegories of his prison context. Underpinning his other investigations is Websdale’s self-portraiture—the artist coolly analysing himself as prisoner, his image encoded with imposed systems of classification that raise wider questions about the nature of identity and self-knowledge.

A different use of language occurs in the work of Chris Stewart, who has inscribed statistical and personal texts about prison onto the surplus material he has found there. His two disused prison stretchers of 2000 are arresting social documents, quite different in approach from the large painterly abstractions and improvised landscapes that Stewart accomplished at Long Bay. Working in the same period, Jaworowski evoked the anxious claustrophobia of the prison’s social spaces in figurative linocuts that were as much about his developing awareness of printmaking’s own historical frameworks. His faceted compositions and agitated linear style situate his experience within the expressionist heritage of European graphics.

Metaphors of containment and release circulate through the many works that lyrically conjure escape—the retreat into desire, into memories of lost experiences, or into limitless fields of sensory delight. The fluid abstractions by Alexios Spathis in 2003 were inspired by his recollections of his physical immersion in Sydney’s surf. In their work of the mid-1990s, both Allan Edwards and Tom Foster repeatedly painted the burgeoning forms of flowers, rendering them as natural mandalas or objects of fascination. Edwards also made a series depicting a Magritte-like shroud floating freely over distant landscapes, while in a study by Mark Serrano in 1992, the artist figuratively straddled the prison’s razor wire in an eroticised union with his lover, a woman personifying his eventual liberation. The female figure of desire as the embodiment of external freedom can also be seen in an illustration of the prison’s visiting area, on a bowl by Cess Black in 2005.

Another form of release—into the absorbing complexities of handmade objects—can be found in the paddle-pop and matchstick constructions often pursued by inmates, such as a delicate ferris wheel by Michael Lee, or the intriguing *Life*

*in a box*, by Thomas Keir, both of 2002. Keir’s construction is like a surrealist cabinet of symbolic objects—a box that opens up to reveal a spiralling staircase (the forward movement of life) and a collection of miniature objects signifying specific aspects of the artist’s background and personal existence. A separate tableau in the form of an open book provides the key to the work’s interpretation.

At Long Bay between 1993 and 1997 a most spectacular collection of assemblages was made by Javier Lara-Gomez. After completing a series of colourful ceramic figures, Lara-Gomez devoted himself to highly laquered objects, including swanky Latin American furnishings and architectural models. He improvised with materials he had gathered from around the gaol—itsself quite a creative feat. His objects of worship and entertainment suppressed the austerity of prison life by endorsing the artist’s different cultural reality. Lara-Gomez shared his vision in *Spirit of Freedom*, a solo exhibition he staged at Long Bay’s Boom Gate Gallery in 1994. Since his death in 1997 his celebratory work has come to international attention.

For painters like Terry Ayres and Stephen Watson, escape can occur in the prison walls themselves. In their compositions of 2000-2001, both artists transformed the gaol with colours so exuberant that the viewer is forced to reconsider the functional and symbolic significance of the architecture. Long Bay’s sombre brickwork and metal bars are dramatically reconfigured as radiant sources of light and colour. In Ayres’ case, his exploration of the potential for freedom within imposed constraints led him into a series of rotating, colour-speckled spirals that become exquisite emblems of transcendence.

The quest for structures of aesthetic intrigue has been a recurring phenomenon at Long Bay. In part it can be attributed to a studio situation where inmates from different cultural backgrounds have worked side by side, their individual projects influencing each other and encouraging the group’s curiosity about other ways of seeing. A remarkable example of this cross-fertilisation is the interaction between indigenous and modernist modes of representation.

The affirmation by Aboriginal inmates of the values of their culture has been as distinct a tradition inside Long Bay as it has been in other Australian prisons. The mid-1990s work of Anthony Flanders and Chris Gale, and the more recent paintings by Douglas Pearce are strongly representative of the styles of mark-making, totemic figuration and cultural narrative pursued by inmates of indigenous background. In the pictorially inventive, culturally convergent imagery of

Steven Feeney, Aboriginal emblems come to the fore in a spatially ambiguous interplay with European heraldic forms. A more expressive hybridity can be seen in the art of Kevin Blakeney, notably in his tragic depiction in 1999 of a drug overdose in Redfern, a work with an urgent sense of social commentary.

Herman Smith and Jerry Lee Lewis are indigenous artists who have taken the cultural language of dot painting and extended it into new, infinitely complex fields of non-figuration. In 2002 Herman Smith launched into a series of innovative, highly restrained works, placing multiple dots of colour into regulated grids based around the square. Even in his sublimely abstracted images, the prison is a not-too-distant metaphor, for Smith first studied the geometry that inspired his compositions in the screens of security mesh all about him. His sense of optics and design transformed that hard external source into something totally gem-like and entrancing.

In other parts of the exhibition, there is ample evidence that visual sensibility is a communicative agent in its own right. In his recent, quite unaffected studies, Frank Maconochie has wryly observed the individual differences that the prison population manages to extract from its standard-issue headwear. There is real delicacy in the fine pen and wash studies of fellow inmates by Steven Little, and in the symmetrical, organic collages of George Prats. Like Prats, Thomas Walker has taken a dried plant form as his material, but he has worked it three-dimensionally into a wonderfully direct, almost gestural figure of a hedgehog. In these less assuming spaces of the show, the many individualities within the art at Long Bay become more apparent.

Proud in a mock-heroic way are the collaged commentaries on sexual metamorphosis and identity that transgender inmate Kimmie Macpherson compiled into her *Sisters United* newsletters in the late 1980s. An outsider on so many levels, Macpherson developed a large body of illustrated texts that employed child-like games of scrapbook whimsy as a sharply satirical, transgressive device.

Macpherson's other pictorial work, such as *The end of the world from under a mushroom*, of 1987, bears comparison with the more recent image-making elsewhere in the show that has the *art brut* hallmarks of raw artistry and poetic insight. Giovanni Falconetti, Charles Saba and Dennis Fryer have at different times been inmates of Long Bay Hospital, where they produced extended series of self-referential imagery that offer an unmediated conduit into their states

of mind. Saba's work hypnotically focuses on the eye, while Falconetti has spontaneously rendered the human face in various guises, with his own signature as an integral part of the overall expression. Like Lara-Gomez, Falconetti came to critical attention through solo exhibitions that he mounted at the Boom Gate Gallery in 1996 and 1998.

In contrast to Falconetti's innate graphic confidence, Dennis Fryer's work has a recessive character—his picture stories move between the fantasy figures from his childhood, the races and games of the outside world, to his present persona in gaol. His human types are both imaginary and real, curiously symbolic yet empathetic. In 2005 the artist known as Cooper has similarly drawn on early visual impressions—his symbolic *Tree of Life* is based on the style of illustrated books that he remembers from his childhood. Along the branches, myriad figures are climbing or tumbling between salvation and damnation.

In the studio production at Long Bay over the past twenty years, art has become more than a recreational or therapeutic pursuit. It is a visible, collective culture—a shared activity among inmates, commanding respect in an enclosed environment habitually seen as tough. Indeed Long Bay's creative evolution is that of a penal institution which is rehabilitating itself as much as the inmates—a legitimate cultural exchange. It is today far more fluid and complex than its past history of crime and punishment suggests. The artworks by inmates are faces of that wider change.

### **Bruce Adams**

## **A place for art**

Thinking over my years of involvement at Long Bay, I admit I knew very little about the place when I was first invited there in 1986. Like all goals it had a reputation, but I went into it with no preconceptions. Once inside, however, I was struck by the many paradoxes. What impressed me most of all was the evidence of art in progress, for Tim Guider had already embarked on his justly renowned cycle of murals. The creative ambition I saw that day encouraged me to accept the task of setting up a small, part-time art class in what was then Long Bay's Assessment Prison.

For my first lesson I planned a careful exercise in linocut printing, but almost immediately the class gathered a momentum I didn't anticipate, as the inmates began to devise their own creative apparatus—even the use of a drill to expedite the whole process! Looking at what was happening, I realised that conventional lessons were not going to work in gaol. A flexible delivery responsive to the different needs and improvisational abilities of inmates was essential. Thus began a studio experience that was more like an ongoing exchange with a group of creatively committed people. For me, art in prison became a very fulfilling mission.

The opportunity to develop something more than a casual class came in 1988, when a room above the centre's medical clinic was vacated. With ample natural light it was an ideal studio, away from the distractions of the prison's circulation areas and large enough to conduct group exercises and individual projects. There was room for figure drawing, for experimenting with a range of media and working on an increased scale. Above all, there was the chance to be focused. The activities that evolved in this space provided the basis for the Vocational Art Studies curriculum that NSW Corrective Services published in 1992.

At that time there was already a range of art and craft programs in Long Bay's different correctional centres, and the expansion of these facilities reflected the increasing number of people in custody. With the significant growth in the output and quality of work, it was apparent that a large complex like Long Bay needed a publicly accessible space where the inmates could benefit from the exhibition and sale of their art. It seemed an appropriate time to start a gallery. In October 1992, as a trial run, the Boom Gate Gallery was established in small premises on the prison's Anzac Parade boundary. Staffed by minimum security inmates, it soon became popular with inmates' families and friends, prison staff and members of the wider community. In 1994 it moved into larger facilities facing the new public entrance to Long Bay.

One of the happy consequences of establishing an on-site gallery was the obvious enjoyment of the inmates' work among the different sectors of the prison community. Many of the weekend visitors to Long Bay also took such an interest that they became first-time purchasers of art, who often returned to follow the progress of the inmates' work. Largely by word of mouth the gallery attracted a diverse clientele, and the art from Long Bay has found its way into collections as far afield as Europe, America and Africa.

After a major restructure of Long Bay in 1997, the full-time art program was given its own accommodation in the old laundry of what was originally the Female Reformatory. The conversion of this light-filled, well-proportioned building into a dedicated studio was a turning point for the program, which re-opened as the Malabar Art Unit in October 1998. Now known as the Art Unit, it operates as an independent area in the MSPC. It accepts inmates from correctional facilities around New South Wales, who can stay for variable lengths of time depending on their needs and their security classification.

When an inmate joins the Art Unit, he quickly becomes aware of the creative and personal challenges that lie ahead, for all around the studio he can see quite advanced projects at different stages of completion. Initially new participants undertake a series of directed exercises aimed at providing them with a foundation. They are then encouraged to explore their own areas of interest in an atmosphere of serious application, with space for experimentation.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of its high security environment, Long Bay has proved to be a place where art has an undeniable capacity for human enrichment.

### **Sue Paull**



The Art Unit, Metropolitan Special Programs Centre, Long Bay Photo: Sue Paull 2002

## Artists in residence: recollections of Long Bay's Art Unit

The Art Unit at Long Bay has a special reputation throughout the prison system in New South Wales. I first learned of its existence when I was in Bathurst gaol at the beginning of my sentence. Later, at "the Bay," I came across it again. The message that reached me was always the same: you can put your name down for a transfer if you're interested, but there's quite a waiting list before you're even considered (as *bad as the Housing Commission*, I thought) and you've got to be *very good* to get in.

Even though I had always harboured a secret ambition to pursue some sort of vocation in the arts, I was sure that I would be wasting my time and everyone else's by putting my name on a list that already was, by all accounts, as long as the proverbial Maoist journey. Had that been the end of it, of course, I wouldn't be writing this now . . .

As it turned out, the matter was far from settled.

After some time I was transferred to Long Bay's programs unit. In the process of rediscovering myself, I reawakened my long-dormant passion for the visual arts. I began to challenge a lifetime of assumptions and indoctrination that a career in the arts was something less than an "honest living." I was at one of those cross-roads in life: a point at which you can choose to carry on as you always have (perhaps a little bit more carefully) or take an entirely new direction into the unknown. I chose the latter and determined that I would enrol in the Art Unit regardless of the excruciatingly long waiting list. This time I was not entirely alone: I had the support (or was it the goading?) of the senior psychologist, who arranged an interview for me with the coordinator of the Art Unit, Sue Paull (a name that, like the Unit she founded, tended to be mentioned *in hushed and reverent tones*).

That interview, and the bizarre events that surrounded it, might just as well have been taken from an episode of *Porridge*. I went to the meeting armed with a dubious collection of meditative pencil drawings and what, in retrospect, was a rather feeble portrait in acrylic (the "art medium of necessity" in prison). I sat at a table in the cell block's dining area with an open sketch book, a couple of pencils and some fellow inmates posing for me in a less-than-subtle way (well, it was an *image* thing and it *did* look quite impressive, or so we thought). That first meeting lasted, perhaps, thirty seconds: introductions, handshakes, sit down, perhaps an opening sentence—then the sudden wail of an alarm bell and the frantic rush past of blue uniforms, lots of blue uniforms—and lots of shouting. While I was preparing to realise my dream, someone else was receiving a facial from a sock-full of billiard balls.

Thinking that my dream was about to be still-born, I breathed again when a second meeting was arranged for the following Friday afternoon. There I was assured (*where had I heard this stuff before?*) that although there were a limited number of places and strong competition for them, I would be the first to be considered the moment a vacancy arose. But fate once again intervened, for the next day a position suddenly became available when one of the artists was hospitalised. The following Monday morning I walked into the art studio for the first time.

So began my unique and privileged introduction to the visual arts. My first step into the studio brought me within the gravitational pull of names such as Chris Stewart, Geoff Websdale and Javier Lara-Gomez. Whilst not widely known among Australia's gallery aficionados and art disseminators, these artists had in their own way achieved eminence and a cult following. The gravitational metaphor is apt, because I was well and truly "sucked in".

Websdale is a superb technician (his draughtsmanship is so precise and unlaboured). His social documents of prison life suggest more beyond the boundaries of the image. When I eventually met Geoff in person, he was exploring matters of identity, and in particular the many ways in which we as individuals are replaced by the labels that have been created for us. What was most poignant for me was the question his more recent work constantly poses: *do we, as potential individuals, relinquish our individuality in favour of the labels that have been hung on us . . . ?*

Stewart is more of an expressionist. He likes to recycle found materials into his work. At the time we met he was executing monumentally large hand-painted canvases that explored the natural environment and its human desecration. I can still remember seeing him in the yard with a huge canvas laid out on the concrete before him as he pounced on it, Pollock-like, with tins of surplus enamel from the maintenance store, and tubes of precious-guarded oil paint. Around him the other inmates would be playing cricket, working out, or simply pacing the length of the yard and gathering in groups—but always at a respectful distance from the artist at work!

Javier I never met, but his name was totemic. His sculptures and assemblages were already well known and admired in Sydney. Intricate in detail and often lyrical in an undeniably *Latino* sense, he recreated buildings and fantastic objects from whatever materials would come to hand, transforming the mundane into objects of beauty and vibrant colour.

There were also indigenous artists who were developing a fresh voice both with traditional symbols and marks and contemporary narratives told in a Western expressionist vein (as in Keith Blakeneys powerful urban landscapes).

Across the prison system, art is often a way of filling in time. A skill with the brush can earn the prison artist some of the necessities of life on the inside, such as tobacco. Much of this work has a raw, untutored quality—the visual narratives of artists who exist on the fringe of society or in total institutions like gaols. However, not everything produced in prison can be bundled under such generic labels as *art brut* or outsider art, for there is also a considerable amount of work that reflects a trained and informed eye, as this exhibition attests.

Art—serious art—is in Long Bay’s blood. It seems to be everywhere, from the murals that adorn the cell blocks (the Wings) radiating from the Circle, to the stone sculptures that appear here and there in the grounds like Mayan relics whenever the overgrown ivy is cut back by the gardeners.

### **“Zen and the art of...”**

Working in a spacious studio that boasts an airy, open-truss ceiling and tall windows, up to ten inmates at a time undertake the full-time intensive art program at the Art Unit. It is not, however, a structured training program in the conventional sense, but a *community* of trainee artists who have the privilege of working in a fully equipped art studio under the guidance of a professional artist as a mentor. There, they are encouraged to explore their own interests in studio practice, to build up their own art portfolios and to prepare their work for public exhibition through the Boom Gate Gallery at Long Bay. There, newcomers would make linocut greeting cards (the typical “starter’s project”) side-by-side with seasoned artists working on large-scale canvases.

Faced with easels, large stretched canvases, and more tools and materials than we knew what to do with, I think all of us experienced that “kid in a candy shop” feeling. Surrounded by impressive paintings hanging on all the walls, I was impatient to set-to upon my first canvas and to make my own impression on the art world. However, that impulse was soon tempered. Even though I had more than a passing ability with drawing, I soon realised that I had a lot of un-learning to do. The early weeks, stretching into months, were set aside for the building of both discipline and the fundamentals: we learned the qualities and uses of line, cross-hatch and tonal variation; we practised automatic and gesture drawings of what seemed to be an endless stream of thirty-second poses; we mastered

the use of various materials from charcoal to graphite and pastels, from acrylics and gouache through to oils and batik dyes. Drawing practice was followed by interminable still life studies using student acrylics on cardboard.

I found the training to be relentless—it was the artist’s equivalent of a workout. What we couldn’t finish in the studio we completed overnight, rendering whatever objects we could summon in our cells (pieces of fruit, cups, items of clothing, and so on). We used each other as models for life drawing, we used towels, sheets and clothing for the study of drapery, we used glass and ceramic objects for rendering light reflections. When we weren’t working on set exercises, we continued our own projects.

Although at times the process seemed tedious and uninspiring to me, I came to understand that the foundations of a sound visual art practice were being established. These were the ability to observe dispassionately that which is around us (which for me means seeing without socially constructed judgements), and the ability to reproduce what one observes with accuracy (draughtsmanship). We were being taught a visual vocabulary. Even pattern-making and abstraction, I came to realise, is predicated first and foremost on an ability to apprehend objectively what we physically see before we attempt to distil its essential features.

Mastering the tools was equally important, and we learned how to stretch canvas and screens, how to mount, frame and generally present works to a gallery standard, how to prepare materials such as paint and dyes. We read books on art history and modern art, current exhibition catalogues and newspaper articles, so that we could articulate our ideas with maturity, inform our conceptual schema and keep abreast of current issues and our contemporaries on the outside.

Over the months that we remained in the Art Unit (my own experience lasted almost two years) art became a way of living and an obsession. We were consumed by it. As Terry Ayres said: “If they knew where I went every night, they’d be out after me and I’d be doing a million years for escape!” You have few personal possessions in gaol—but one thing you do have, and which cannot be taken away from you, is your imagination and your dreams.

### **Learning to see...**

Most importantly, the Art Unit taught us respect for each other’s work and the ideas from which it came. Art is more than a facility with visual media; it is also critical thinking and objective

analysis. Learning to see the world without filters leads to an appreciation of, and opening to, others’ points of view. This was something of a minor revolution in the prison system.

It is widely accepted that human beings predominantly engage with the world through sight. To be more precise, they learn to negotiate their world by means of a *cognitive interpretation of what they see*. An awareness of visual perception was the most valuable lesson that I took away with me from the Art Unit. It has informed my image-making ever since, enabling me to focus on the physical act of making images by allowing the eye to communicate directly with the hand, without the mediation of the brain. Learning to see influences the way we recognise and interact with our social environment.

For me, this meant seeing the everyday comings and goings of gaol life with a fresh vision. The commonplace became as important and noteworthy as the dramatic. The social customs around me soon coalesced into a “gaol culture”: the yard, with its cliques and its pacing; the inmates’ telephone with its impatient queue; the muster; the weekly “buy-up” with inmates hanging out for their weekly tobacco, and others

waiting in the wings for debts to be repaid; the frenetic activity lining up for food; the prison haircut . . .

My project became the documentation of these social customs. Gaol is a world where property is limited and choices are virtually removed from the individual. Under these conditions, human behaviour adapts itself for survival in ways that are ingenious. It is the same for culture and its customs. It is not that these behaviours and customs are profoundly different, but that they are greatly simplified; the subtleties and social cues are reduced to the minimum required to survive. In documenting this world that most people consider to be so alien, I found that I was holding up a mirror that showed it to be the same world as their own, with the cosmetics removed.

I have often mused that the grass is green inside the wall as well as outside—and the sky is blue regardless of which side of the wall you are standing on. The truth of it is that only human beings see the wall there at all!

### **Zig Jaworowski**



Allan Edwards *White mandala* 1994 Oil on canvas 121 x 96 cm



Tom Foster *Nature's gift* 1996 Oil on canvas 131 x 89 cm

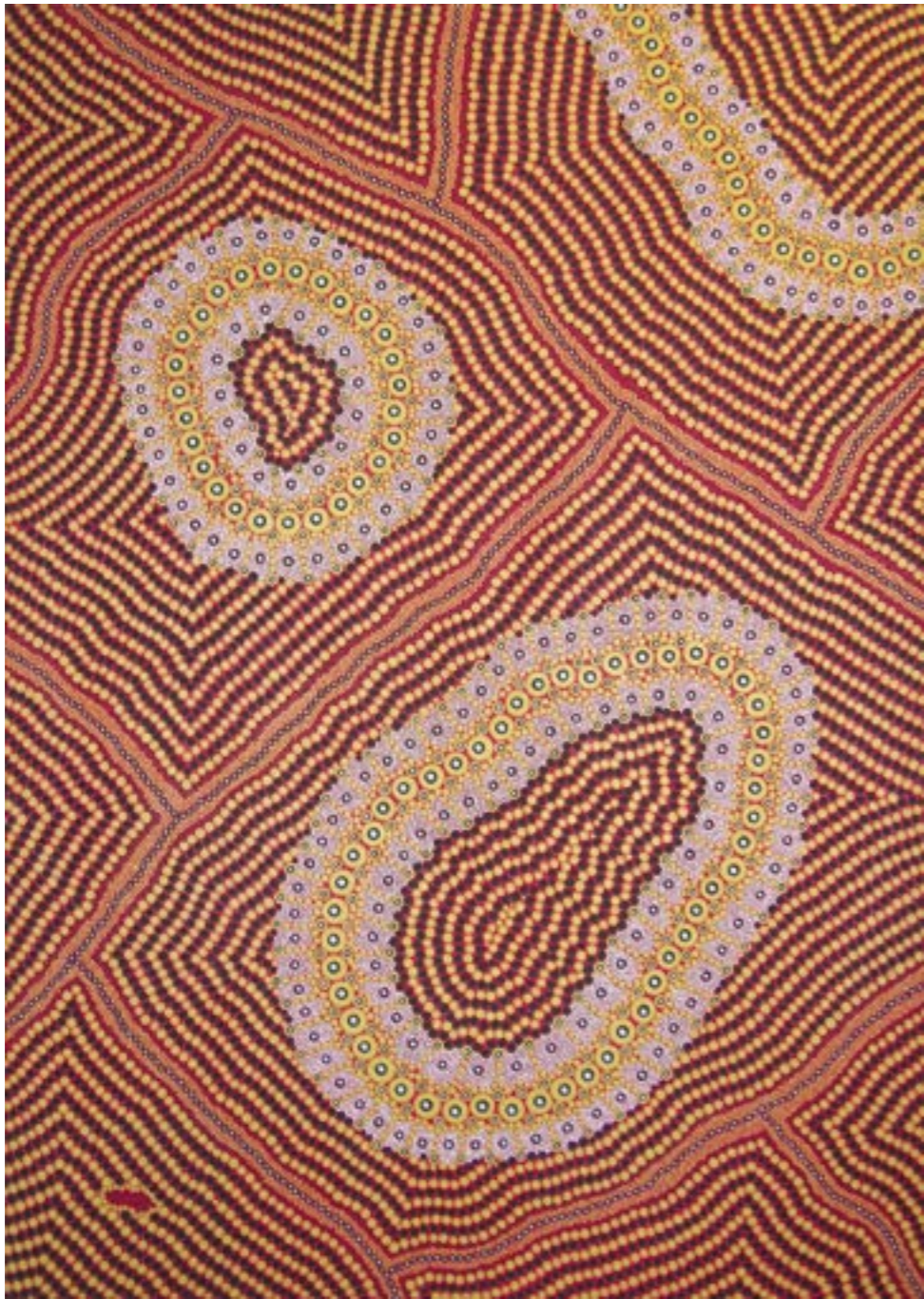




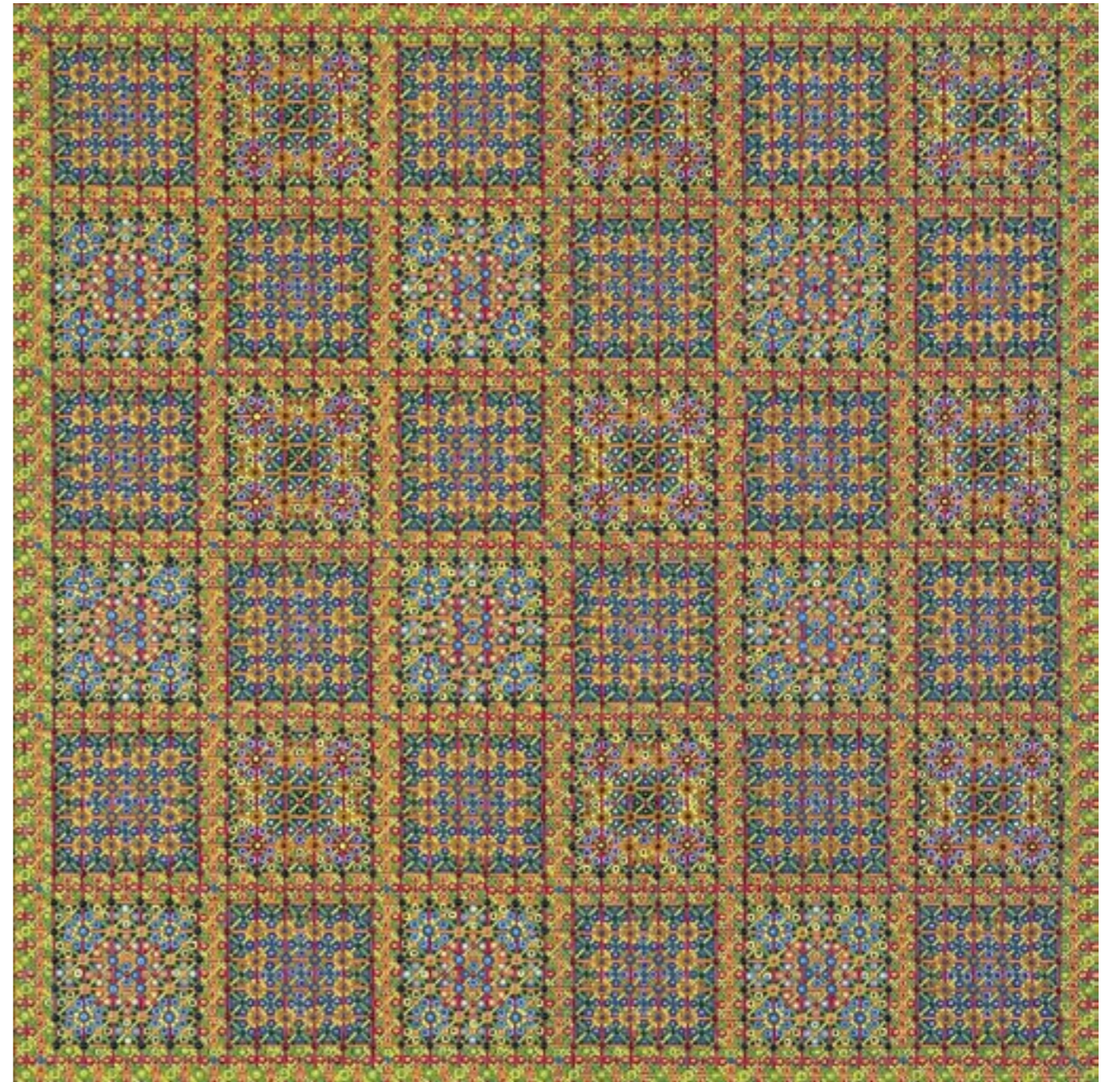
**Terry Ayres** *All hue spiral* 2001 Acrylic on canvas 100 x 100 cm



**Alexis Spathis** *Summer lost* 2003 Acrylic on canvas 125 x 92 cm



**Anthony Flanders** *Untitled* 1997 Acrylic on canvas 168 x 120 cm



**Herman Smith** *Garden 2* 2002 Acrylic on board 75 x 75 cm



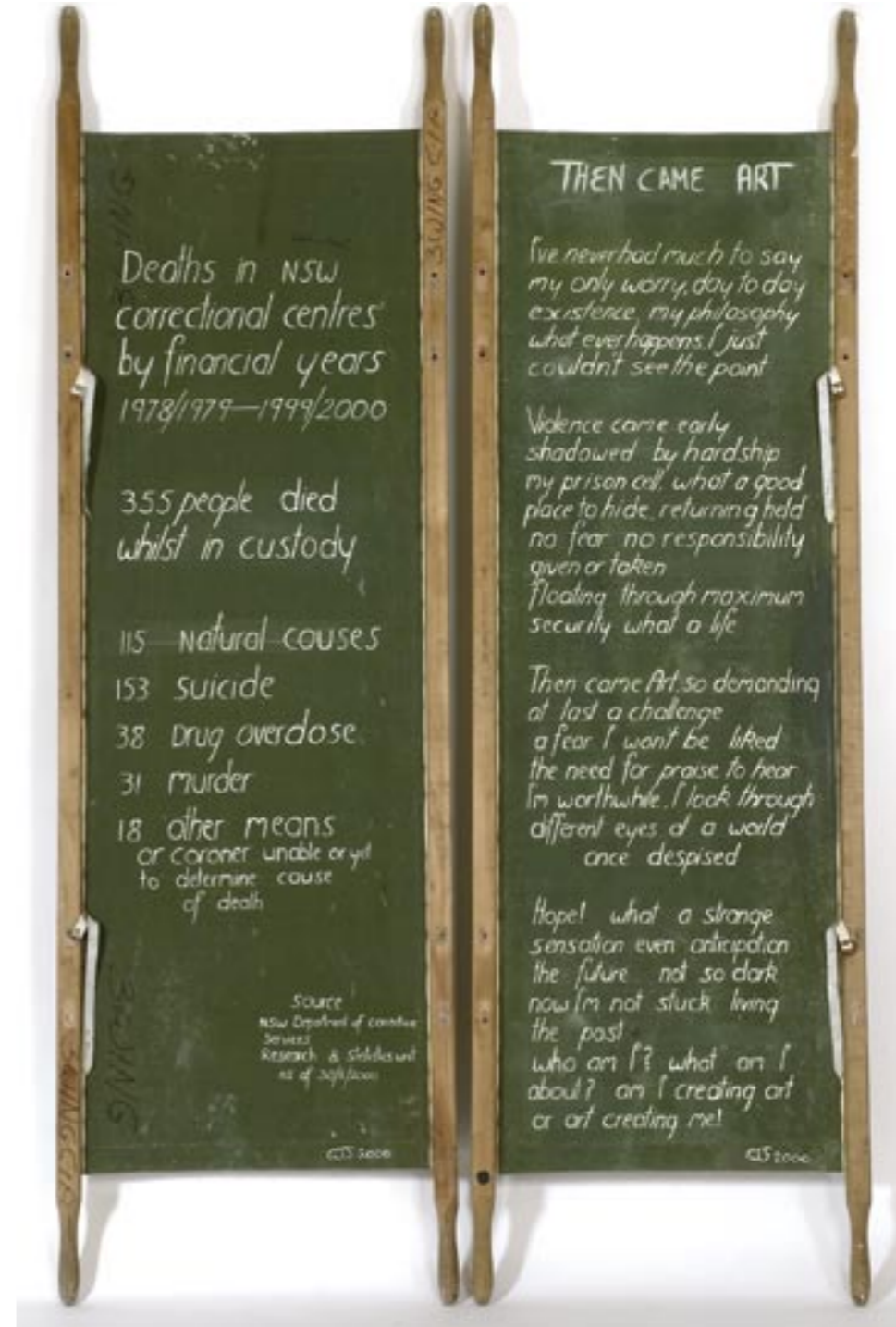
**Jerry Lee Lewis** *Untitled* 1998 Gouache on mount board 50 x 68.5 cm



**Douglas Pearce** *Emus dancing* 2003 Acrylic on canvas 67 x 94 cm



**Keith Blakeney**  
*Sadness of the high life of Redfern* 1999  
 Acrylic on canvas  
 91 x 46.5 cm



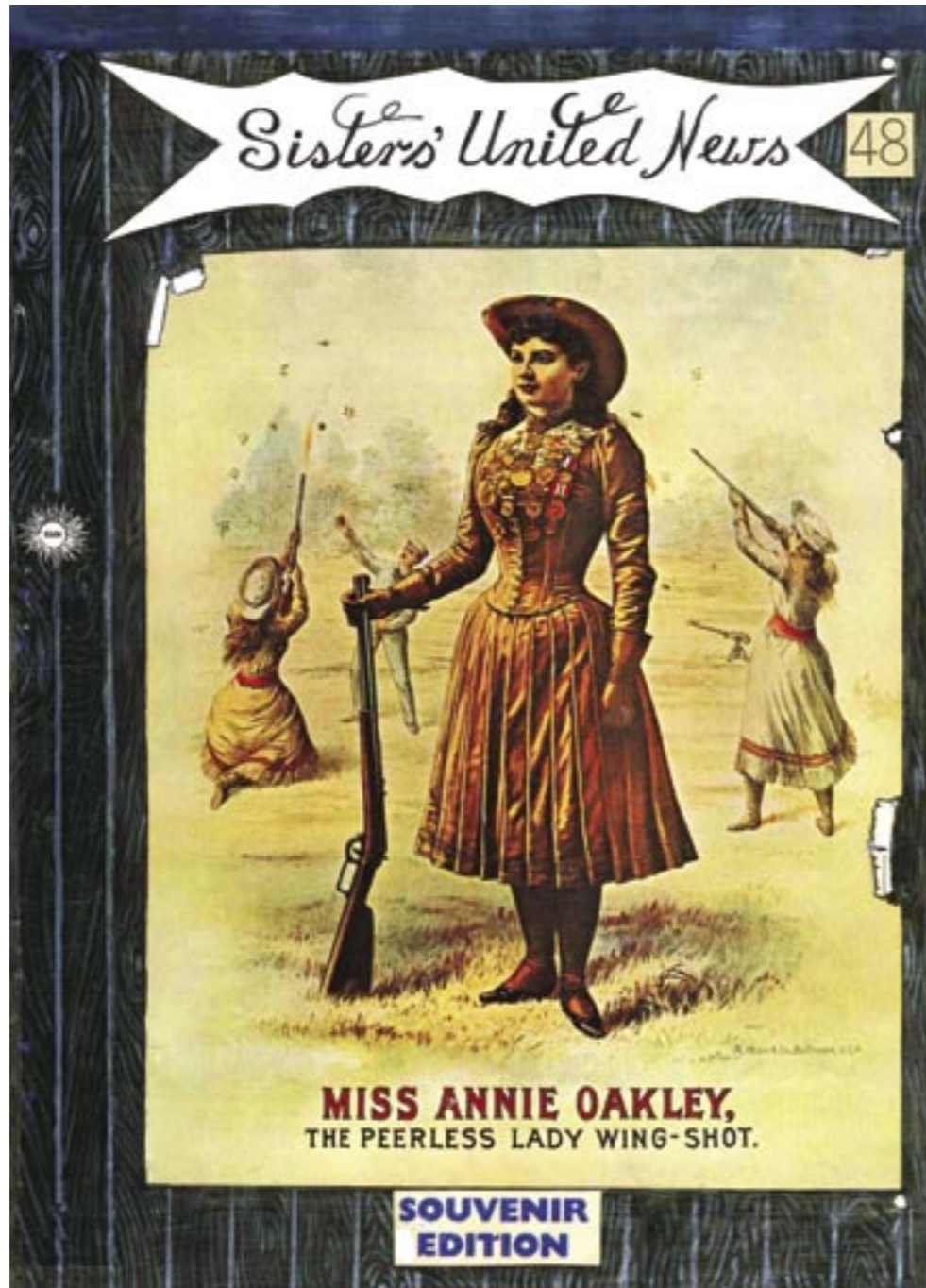
**Chris Stewart** *Deaths in custody* 2000, *Then came art* 2000 Ink on medical stretchers each 229 x 68 cm



Giovanni Falconetti *Mixed shapes* 1996 Acrylic on paper 59 x 83 cm



Dennis Fryer *Self portrait with Santa Claus* 2003, *Sheriff (self portrait)* 2003 Acrylic on paper Two sheets, each 49.5 x 35 cm



Kimmi Macpherson *Sisters United News 48* 1986 – 1989 Coloured photocopy of collaged newsletter 30 x 21 cm



Cooper *Tree of life* 2005 Acrylic on canvas 135 x 106 cm



Thomas Keir *Life in a box* 2002 Mixed media Box with open sides 25.5 x 77 x 100 cm



Javier Lara-Gomez *10 Wing* 1997 Mixed media 48 x 50 x 98 cm



**Stephen Watson** *The yard* 2000 Acrylic on canvas 90 x 108 cm



**Justin Watkins** *The well-trodden path* 2004 Acrylic on canvas 115 x 110 cm





Geoff Websdale *Innovations of identification* 2003 Acrylic on canvas 120 x 120 cm



Steven Little *Muchachos* 2002 Watercolour on paper 29 x 36 cm



Zig Jaworowski *Dining in 2000* Linocut on paper Edition 6/25 90 x 60 cm



Peter Pavlov *Muster (Long Bay, long day)* 2000 Acrylic on canvas 107 x 108 cm



**Mark Serrano** *Untitled* 1992 Ink and wash on paper 38 x 56 cm



**Thomas Walker** *Hedgehog* 2002 Palm frond and wire on plywood base 40 x 85 x 53 cm

## List of works

### Terry Ayres

*Long Bay Hilton foyer* 2001  
Acrylic and compound on canvas  
160 x 120 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Sydney

*5=1 spiral* 2001  
Acrylic on canvas  
120 x 120 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Sydney

*All hue spiral* 2001  
Acrylic on canvas  
100 x 100 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services. Gift of the artist to the Art Unit, Long Bay

### Cess Black

*Visits* 2005  
Ceramic bowl  
19 x diam. 30 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

### Keith Blakeney

*Sadness of the high life of Redfern* 1999  
Acrylic on canvas  
91 x 46.5 cm  
Collection: M. Rehberg

### Michael Challis

*Play with fire and you'll get burnt in the real deal . . .* 2004  
Collage  
137 x 63cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services. Gift of the artist to the Art Unit, Long Bay

### Cooper

*Tree of life* 2005  
Acrylic on canvas  
135 x 106 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

### Allan Edwards

*White mandala* 1994  
Oil on canvas  
121 x 96 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Sydney

*Escaping cloth 1-V1* 2000  
Oil on board  
Six panels, each 30.5 x 37 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Sydney

### Giovanni Falconetti

*The square face* 1996  
*Mixed shapes* 1996  
*The face* 1996  
*The broken nose* 1996  
*The triangle face* 1996  
*The vampire* 1996  
Acrylic on paper  
Six sheets, each 59 x 83 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre, Silverwater

### Steven Feeney

*Untitled* 2001  
Acrylic on board  
122 x 129 cm  
Collection: LawAccess NSW, Attorney General's Department of NSW

### Anthony Flanders

*Untitled* 1997  
Acrylic on canvas  
168 x 120 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Sydney

### Tom Foster

*Nature's way* 1996  
Oil on canvas  
71.5 x 109 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre, Silverwater

### Nature's gift

*Nature's gift* 1996  
Oil on canvas  
131 x 89 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Metropolitan Remand and Reception Centre, Silverwater

### Dennis Fryer

*Self portrait with Santa Claus* 2003  
*Sheriff (self portrait)* 2003  
Acrylic on paper  
Two sheets, each 49.5 x 35 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

*Eight drawings from a sketchbook* 2003  
Coloured pencil on paper  
Eight sheets, each 21 x 29.5 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

### Chris Gale

*Untitled* 1996  
Acrylic on canvas  
80 x 100 cm  
Private collection

### Tim Guider and other inmates

*Orphalese* 1986  
Mural on 10 Wing overlooking the Circle, Metropolitan Special Programs Centre, Long Bay  
Photo: Sue Paull 1997

### Bicentennial apocalypse

*Bicentennial apocalypse* 1988  
Mural on 7 Wing overlooking the Circle, Metropolitan Special Programs Centre, Long Bay  
Photo: Sue Paull 1997

### Zig Jaworowski

*Dining in* 2000  
Linocut on paper  
Edition 6/25  
90 x 60 cm  
Private collection

### Whispers

*Whispers* 2000  
Linocut on paper  
Edition 5/25  
90 x 60 cm  
Private collection

### Thomas Keir

*Life in a box* 2002  
Mixed media  
Box with open sides 25.5 x 77 x 100 cm  
Book on stand 23.5 x 44.5 x 10.5 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

### Javier Lara-Gomez

*10 Wing* 1997  
Mixed media  
48 x 50 x 98 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

### The town hall church

*The town hall church* 1997  
Mixed media  
44 x 45 x 75 cm  
Courtesy of the artist's family and Casula Powerhouse

### Michael Lee

*Ferris wheel* 2002  
Painted paddle-pop sticks and matchsticks  
81 x 77 x 22 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

### Jerry Lee Lewis

*Untitled* 1998  
Gouache on mount board  
50 x 68.5 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services. Gift of the artist to the Art Unit, Long Bay

### Untitled

*Untitled* 2005  
Gouache on paper  
30 x 36.2 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

### Steven Little

*Muchachos* 2002  
Watercolour on paper  
29 x 36 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

### Kitchen crew

*Kitchen crew* 2002  
Watercolour on paper  
25.5 x 35 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

### Frank Maconochie

*A thing about hats* 2004  
Watercolour on paper  
2 sheets, 23 x 33.5 cm, 20 x 24.5cm  
Courtesy of the artist

### Kimmie Macpherson

*Sisters United News 6* 1986 – 1989  
*Sisters United News 10* 1986 – 1989  
*Sisters United News 48* 1986 – 1989  
*Sex change* 1986 – 1989  
Coloured photocopies of collaged newsletters  
Each 30 x 21 cm  
Private collection

### The end of the world from under a mushroom

*The end of the world from under a mushroom* 1987  
Acrylic and pen on paper  
38 x 55.5 cm  
Private collection

### Name withheld

*Old segro cells, Long Bay '99* 1999  
Graphite on paper  
30 x 42 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

### Front of wing and yard, Long Bay '99

*Front of wing and yard, Long Bay '99* 1999  
Graphite on paper  
30 x 42 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

### End of the line, Long Bay '99

*End of the line, Long Bay '99* 1999  
Graphite on paper  
42 x 30 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

### Peter Pavlov

*Muster (Long Bay, long day)* 2000  
Acrylic on canvas  
107 x 108 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services. Gift of the artist to the Art Unit, Long Bay

### Ramp

*Ramp* 2001  
Acrylic on board  
40 x 51 cm  
Private collection

### Douglas Pearce

*Two brothers* 2003  
Acrylic on canvas  
89 x 89 cm  
Private collection

### Emus dancing

*Emus dancing* 2003  
Acrylic on canvas  
67 x 94 cm  
Private collection

### George Prats

*Banana leaf* 2004  
Collage  
49.5 x 21.5 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

### Prada x four

*Prada x four* 2004  
Collage  
16 x 19 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

### South Pacific x four

*South Pacific x four* 2004  
Collage  
16.5 x 16.5 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

### Charles Saba

*Insight II* 2000  
Oil stick on paper  
42 x 60 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Sydney

### Insight III

*Insight III* 2000  
Oil stick on paper  
42 x 60 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Sydney

### Mark Serrano

*Untitled* 1992  
Ink and wash on paper  
38 x 56 cm  
Private collection

### Herman Smith

*Garden 2* 2002  
Acrylic on board  
75 x 75 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Dillwynia, South Windsor

*Them and us* 2005  
Acrylic on board  
2 panels, each 59 x 59 cm  
Private collection

### Alexios Spathis

*Sunset by the sea* 2003  
Acrylic on canvas  
130 x 85.5 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Sydney

### Summer lost

*Summer lost* 2003  
Acrylic on canvas  
125 x 92 cm  
Private collection

### Chris Stewart

*Deaths in custody* 2000  
Ink on medical stretcher  
229 x 68 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay  
Gift of the artist

### Then came art

*Then came art* 2000  
Ink on medical stretcher  
229 x 68 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay  
Gift of the artist

### Thomas Walker

*Hedgehog* 2002  
Palm frond and wire on plywood base  
40 x 85 x 53 cm  
Private collection

### Justin Watkins

*The well-trodden path* 2004  
Acrylic on canvas  
115 x 110 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Sydney

### Repetitive beats

*Repetitive beats* 2004  
Linocut on paper  
Nine prints, each 30 x 30 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

### Self portrait

*Self portrait* 2004  
Acrylic on board  
32 x 24.5 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services. Gift of the artist to the Art Unit, Long Bay

### Stephen Watson

*The tower* 2000  
Acrylic on canvas  
117 x 83 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

### The yard

*The yard* 2000  
Acrylic on canvas  
90 x 108 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

### Geoff Websdale

*The cheat* 1990  
Conte crayon on paper  
45 x 35 cm  
Private collection

### Time 1

*Time 1* 2002  
Mixed media on paper  
70.5 x 53 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Sydney

### Waxing sublime

*Waxing sublime* 2003  
Teabags and acrylic on board  
54 x 47 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Long Bay

### Innovations of identification

*Innovations of identification* 2003  
Acrylic on canvas  
120 x 120 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Sydney

### Self portrait

*Self portrait* 2005  
Graphite on paper  
59.5 x 42 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

### In sense

*In sense* 2005  
Graphite on paper  
59.5 x 42 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

### Wayne Williams

*Untitled* 2000  
Acrylic on canvas  
140.5 x 90 cm  
Collection: NSW Department of Corrective Services, Sydney

**IVAN  
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