

**CHANGING THE ART CULTURE OF NEWCASTLE:**

**The contribution of the Low Show Group of artists**

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## **STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY**

**This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.**

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**I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research, the greater part of which was completed subsequent to admission of candidature for the degree.**

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## CONTENTS

<b>Title Page</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Declaration</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgement</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>List of Plates</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Early Women Artists in Newcastle .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Colonial Women Artists .....	11
From Convicts to Coalopolis .....	18
Social and Cultural Development .....	22
The Situation of Women .....	25
Isolation of Women Artists .....	27
Music and Theatre .....	30
The Fine Arts .....	32
Greener Pastures .....	35
Conclusion .....	37
<b>Chapter 2 Formation of the Low Show Group .....</b>	<b>39</b>
Prelude .....	39
The Newcastle University College .....	41
The Newcastle National Art School .....	45
Art and Industry .....	47
Influences as Students .....	49
Married With Children .....	66

Achieving a Goal .....	71
Now to Exhibit .....	73
The Collective .....	75
The Low Show Group Artists .....	76
Conclusion .....	78
<b>Chapter 3 Low Show Group Exhibitions .....</b>	<b>79</b>
Early Participation .....	79
First Low Show Group Exhibition 1961 .....	85
Second Low Show Group Exhibition 1962 .....	86
Third Low Show Group Exhibition 1963 .....	88
Fourth Low Show Group Exhibition 1964 .....	90
The von Bertouch Galleries .....	92
The Establishment of New Commercial Galleries .....	94
Public Galleries .....	95
Conclusion .....	96
<b>Chapter 4 Low Show Group Artists' Artmaking Practice .....</b>	<b>97</b>
Norma Allen .....	97
Mary Beeston .....	103
Betty Cutcher .....	112
Elizabeth Martin .....	117
Rae Richards .....	125
Lillian Sutherland .....	144
Madeleine Scott Jones .....	150
Lovoni Webb .....	156
Conclusion .....	163
<b>Chapter 5 Individual Exhibitions .....</b>	<b>164</b>
Norma Allen .....	164

Mary Beeston .....	174
Betty Cutcher .....	189
Elizabeth Martin .....	192
Rae Richards .....	198
Lillian Sutherland .....	209
Madeleine Scott Jones .....	216
Lovoni Webb .....	220
Conclusion .....	221
<b>Chapter 6 Contribution to Education in Art .....</b>	<b>222</b>
Artists and Teachers .....	223
Conclusion .....	231
<b>Chapter 7 Contribution to Cultural Life .....</b>	<b>232</b>
Major Acquisitions .....	233
Retrospectives .....	233
Commissions and Public Art Projects .....	234
Prizes and Awards .....	249
Low Show Group Citations .....	256
Service to the Community .....	257
Community Arts .....	259
Charities and the Fine Arts .....	264
Group Recognition .....	265
Individual Recognition .....	268
Modernism .....	271
Conclusion .....	277
<b>Chapter 8 A Supportive Art World .....</b>	<b>278</b>
A Supportive Art World .....	278
Patrons, Mentors and Supporters .....	283



## **ABSTRACT**

Beginning in 1961, the Low Show Group was an active collective of women artists, exhibiting in Newcastle. The group members were Norma Allen, Mary Beeston, Betty Cutcher (Beadle), Elizabeth Martin, Lillian Sutherland and Rae Richards. Madeleine Scott Jones and Lovoni Webb also exhibited in later Low Show Group exhibitions. These artists continued to work independently and Richards is still making and exhibiting art.

This study examines the context in which the group was formed and how this impacted on their decision to form a collective. Their contribution to art and craft, art education and the cultural life of Newcastle is documented through their exhibitions and careers. The theories of Howard Becker regarding art as a collective action are used as a framework to examine the success of the Low Show Group. Through a discussion of shared and individual careers as practitioners, their community service and their role as teachers, their influence is shown on the artistic practices of their students and colleagues and on the art world of their time.

Newcastle's background as a convict settlement and an industrial centre had developed a working class culture with a strong masculine influence. While some individual women artists were able to develop a career in fine arts, there was a long battle to establish a city art gallery and in 1961 there were no commercial galleries. The formation of the Low Show Group is shown to be as much about the society in which they lived as their artistic ambitions.

The development of the Newcastle Technical College Art School, and the formation of the Newcastle University College, was identified as the catalyst for the initial flowering of fine art. The experience of the Low Show Group artists first as students of this new art school,



and in some cases as teachers, was the impetus for their desire to develop careers as professional artists.

This evaluation of their contribution to the fine arts indicates how the contribution of this regional group of artists was important in paving the way for the present growth and promising future of the fine arts in Newcastle.

## LIST OF PLATES

1. *Mr. Paty's station, Newcastle, New South Wales*, Dorothy Paty, 1836, watercolour, 19.2 x 27.3 cm, 1836, National Library of Australia, (nia.pic-an5370188).
2. *Gigantic Lily (Doryanthes excels)*, Newcastle, Dorothy Paty, 1835, watercolour, 28.1 x 34.4 cm, National Library of Australia, (nia.pic-an3455898-5).
3. Isabella Parry, untitled drawing, (no size given), 1831, Percy Haslam Collection, A672 (iii), University of Newcastle Archives, NSW.
4. *Settlement and Nobby's Head*, 1864, photograph, Goold Collection, Local Studies Section, Newcastle Region Library.
5. *Waratah, (Telopia speciosissima)*, Marrienne Collinson Campbell, 1877, watercolour, 28 x 30.4 cm, National Library of Australia (nia.pic-an8420657-1).
6. *6 Anatomical Drawings of me [sic] leg*, John Passmore, date unknown, pencil on newsprint, 50.6 x 37.8 cm. Accession No 1986032, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
7. *Sandfight*, John Passmore, 1956, detail of drawing, ink on paper, dimensions not given, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
8. *Newcastle Art Gallery and Conservatorium Committee Meeting*, Norma Allen, 1960, drawing, ink on paper, 25.5 x 37.2 cm. Presented in 1992 by Gil Docking. Accession Number 1992.012, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
9. *Lake Holiday*, Norma Allen, 1963, gouache on paper, 45 x 61.5 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
10. *Gold Jar*, Lillian Sutherland, 1957, painting, oil on board, dimensions not given, private collection of Anne Adrienne, Newcastle, NSW.
11. *The Williams River at Patterson*, Lillian Sutherland, 1957, painting, oil on board, dimensions not given, private collection of Anne Adrienne, Newcastle, NSW.
12. *Invitation*, Low Show Group, 1961, screen print, Elizabeth Martin Archives, Charles Martin, Newcastle, NSW.
13. *Invitation*, Elizabeth Martin, 1962, screen print, Elizabeth Martin Archives, Charles Martin, Newcastle, NSW.
14. *Providing a Home for Art*, Sunday Telegraph, 1962, Newcastle Section, 9 December, page 31, Local Studies Section, Newcastle Region Library, NSW.
15. *Invitation*, Elizabeth Martin, 1963, screen print, Elizabeth Martin Archives, Charles Martin, Newcastle, NSW.
16. *Touch of the East*, photograph, Newcastle Morning Herald, 7 December, 1963, Local Studies Section, Newcastle Region Library.
17. *Ruth*, Norma Allen, 1980s, hand built majolica on earthenware, 26 x 14 cm, private collection of Ruth Samuels, Newcastle, NSW.
18. Exhibition Catalogue, New Vision Gallery, Auckland Festival Exhibition of Bronze Sculpture and Ceramics, 8-22 March, 1969.

19. *Father and Son*, Betty Cutcher, c1990, Bronze medallion, no dimensions given, private collection of Ian Cutcher, Sydney, NSW.
20. *Women Suffrage NZ*, Betty Cutcher, 1993, bronze sculpture, no dimensions given, Mount Eden Picture Framers Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand. <http://www.mtedenart.co.nz/html/artwork1-7.htm> accessed 14 January, 2005.
21. *Untitled*, Betty Cutcher, 1999, bronze medallion, no dimensions given, Mount Eden Picture Framers Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand. <http://www.mtedenart.co.nz/html/artwork1-7.htm> accessed 14 January, 2005.
22. *The Frog*, Betty Cutcher, date unknown (later career), painting, oil on canvas, no dimensions given, private collection of Ian Cutcher, Sydney, NSW.
23. *Sculptural Pot*, Elizabeth Martin, 1980s, hand built terracotta, no dimensions given, private collection of Ruth Samuels, Newcastle, NSW.
24. *Harri Jones*, detail, Rae Richards, c1960, painting, oil on canvas, book cover, *T.H Jones: Artist in Exile*, 2001, Bernard Jones and Don Dale-Jones, private collection of Madeleine Scott Jones, Newcastle, NSW.
25. *Persimmons*, Rae Richards, 1991, painting, oil on canvas, 30.2 x 40.5 cm, gift of the artist. Accession No 1996022, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
26. *Untitled*, Rae Richards, untitled painting, 2006, oil on canvas painting, no dimensions given, collection of the artist. Artist's photograph.
27. *Rae Richards at the opening of her exhibition at John Paynter Gallery, Newcastle 2008*. Author's photograph.
28. *Storage Jar*, Madeleine Scott Jones, 1980, wheel thrown stoneware, 18 x 13.5 cm, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
29. *Green Park*, Lovoni Webb, 1958, drawing, black ink and wash on cartridge, no dimensions given, private collection of Robert Webb, Newcastle, NSW.
30. *Hill End*, Lovoni Webb, 1963, drawing, no dimensions or media given, private collection of Robert Webb, Newcastle, NSW.
31. *Banksia & Yellow Roses*, Lovoni Webb, 1982, drawing, ink and watercolour on Arches paper, no dimensions given, private collection of Robert Webb, Newcastle, NSW.
32. *Dalwood Homestead*, Lovoni Webb, 1994, drawing, no dimensions or media given, private collection of Robert Webb, Newcastle, NSW.
33. *Mirror: Self Portrait*, Norma Allen, 1959, painting, oil on paper on board, 62 x 52 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
34. *Newcastle Harbour Triptych*, Norma Allen, 1972, crayon drawing, 3 panels each 64 x 70 cm, University of Newcastle Collection (003484/000).
35. *The Story*, Norma Allen, 1977, painting, oil on canvas, 51.5 x 88 cm, University of Newcastle Art Collection (005927/000).
36. *Girl with Bird, sketch of Jill Cutcher*, Norma Allen, 1977, pencil, pen and black oil drawing on paper, 29.8 x 21.2 cm. Gift of Pat McGilvray, 2005, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection
37. *Still Life with Goblet*, Mary Beeston, 1964, painting, oil on composition board, 91.1 x 121.9 cm, presented in 1965 by the Young Friends of Newcastle Art Gallery. Accession No 1964020, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

38. *Blue Gum*, Mary Beeston, 1966, painting, oil on composition board, 76.2 x 65.2 cm. Accession No 1966039, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
39. *Gleam in Shade*, Mary Beeston, 1966, painting, oil on masonite, 109 x 121 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
40. *Autumn*, Mary Beeston, 1975, tapestry, wool on linen, 105 x 133 cm, University of Newcastle Library, University of Newcastle Collection (004792/000).
41. *Cave 1*, Mary Beeston, 1976, painting, oil on composition board, 74 x 59 cm, University of Newcastle Collection (005656/000).
42. *Sea Piece 1*, Mary Beeston, 1989, paper collage, 21 x 21.52 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
43. *They Moved Last Week*, Mary Beeston, 1993, drawing, pastel on Canson paper, 54 x 72 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
44. *Loco Machine Shop Honeysuckle*, Mary Beeston, 1993, drawing, pastel on Canson Paper, 60 x 90 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
45. *Betty Cutcher and William Dobell with 'Swan'*, 1959, photograph, Newcastle Morning Herald. No date on newspaper cutting.
46. *The Cat*, Betty Cutcher, 1959, sculpture, walnut wood, no dimensions given, private collection of Ian Cutcher, Sydney, NSW.
47. *Bronze Medallions*, Betty Cutcher, 1980s, no dimensions given, private collection of Ian Cutcher, Sydney.
48. *Self Portrait*, Elizabeth Martin, c1960, von Bertouch Galleries Collection, Newcastle. (no other information available).
49. *Menagerie*, Elizabeth Martin, early 1960s, woodblock print on paper, 37 x 32 cm, gift of William Bowmore, 1995, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
50. *The Birth of Athene*, Elizabeth Martin, 1975, pigmented terracotta, no size given. Accession Number 19775068, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
51. *Girl with Pots*, Elizabeth Martin, 1974, terracotta sculpture with oxide decoration, 37.6 x 24.6 x 18.4 cm. Bequeathed in 2003 by Anne von Bertouch. Accession No 2003089, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
52. *Girl and Boy Pot*, Elizabeth Martin, c1974, terracotta sculpture with oxide decoration, 23.8 x 21.4 x 13.4 cm. Bequeathed in 2003 by Anne von Bertouch. Accession No 2003090, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
53. *Sunk Lyonesse*, Rae Richards, 1960, painting, oil on composition board, 85.5 x 112.5 cm, University of Newcastle Collection (004099/000).
54. *The Magi*, Rae Richards, 1969, painting, oil on compound board, 102 x 150 cm, purchased in 1973, University of Newcastle Collection (003477/000)
55. *Adoration*, Rae Richards, 1971, gouache and ink drawing, 68.8 x 50 cm. Gift of the Art Gallery and Conservation Committee, 1972. Accession Number 1972055, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
56. *Redhead Heath*, Rae Richards, 1980, painting, oil on canvas, 84 x 67 cm, University of Newcastle Collection (008182/000).
57. *Waratahs*, Rae Richards, 1990, mixed fabric seminole, 113 x 86 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.

58. *Limestone Creek, Wee Jasper*, Lillian Sutherland, 1982, painting, oil on canvas, 182 x 182 cm, private collection of Professor Germaine Greer, Essex, England.
59. *Big Rock at Brady Creek*, Lillian Sutherland, 1988, watercolour, 76.6 x 57.7 cm. Accession No 1988.030, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
60. *The Gorge*, Lillian Sutherland, 1988, watercolour, 110 x 70 cm. Exhibition catalogue cover 1990, Wagner Gallery, Sydney.
61. *Stoneware Bottle*, Madeleine Scott Jones, 1966, wheel thrown stoneware, wax resist decoration over black pigment with wood ash glaze, 14 x 27 cm, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
62. *Stoneware Jug*, Madeleine Scott Jones, 1971, wheel thrown stoneware, underglaze with brush decoration and wood ash glaze, 29.5 x 14.6 cm. Accession No 1971.059, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
63. *Stoneware Jug*, Madeleine Scott Jones, 1971, wheel thrown stoneware with underglaze brush decoration and wood ash glaze, 27 x 18.3 cm. Accession No 1971.058, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
64. *Stoneware Bowl*, Madeleine Scott Jones, 1975, wheel thrown stoneware with brush oxide decoration, 14.5 x 27 cm. Accession No 1975.070, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
65. *Mr. C A H McNeil*, Norma Allen, 1963, painting, oil on canvas, 99 x 80.9 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
66. *Professor Tony Vinson*, Norma Allen, 1977, ink on paper drawing, 55 x 44 cm, University of Newcastle Collection (122599/000).
67. *Tony Vinson Portrait*, Norma Allen, 1978, painting, oil on canvas, 165 x 89 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
68. *Academic Procession*, Mary Beeston, 1982, wool on linen tapestry, 1520 x 35560 cm. Commissioned for the foyer of the Great Hall, University of Newcastle, University of Newcastle Collection (100339/000).
69. *Hunter Tapestry*, Mary Beeston, 1988, wool tapestry, 233 x 1610 cm, 12 panels each 233 x 150 cm. Commissioned by the Friends of the University of Newcastle for the Great Hall, University of Newcastle, Newcastle University Collection (107184/000).
70. *The Ten Virgins*, Mary Beeston, date or size not given, tapestry, fine linen warp – crewel wool weft, Newcastle Christ Church Cathedral.
71. *Arcadia*, Rae Richards, 1974, fabric collage, 153 x 270 cm, for the Great Hall, University of Newcastle, University of Newcastle Collection (004201/002).
72. *Academia*, Rae Richards, 1974, fabric collage, 153 x 260.5 cm, for the Great Hall, University of Newcastle, University of Newcastle Collection (004201/004).
73. *Sunburst*, Rae Richards, 1974, fabric collage, 153 x 154.2 cm, University of Newcastle Collection (004201/001).
74. *Tree of life – The Tree of Knowledge*, Rae Richards, fabric collage, 153 x 260.5 cm, University of Newcastle Collection (004201/003).
75. *The Banners*, Rae Richards, 1976, Christ Church Cathedral, Newcastle. Diagrams and images of individual banners. Australian wool and appliqué, size not given. Newcastle Christ Church Collection.

76. *Professor Auchmuty*, Rae Richards, 1994, painting, oil on canvas, 50 x 74.5 cm, University of Newcastle Collection (114577/000).
77. *Ceramic Mural*, Madeleine Scott Jones, 1974, hand-made glazed and coloured bricks, app. 114 x 215 cm (each panel). Greater Newcastle Building Society, Hamilton, (removed 1983).
78. *Honeysuckle Phoenix I*, Mary Beeston, 1994, painting, oil on canvas, 90 x 120 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
79. *Painting – study*, Elizabeth Martin, 1966, painting, oil on masonite, 70 x 92 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
80. *La Cathedrale*, Rae Richards, 1959, painting, oil on masonite, 75 x 54.5 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
81. *The Game*, Lillian Sutherland, 1962, watercolour, 42 x 32 cm, Maitland Regional Art Gallery Collection.
82. *The Australian*, Lillian Sutherland, 1963, painting, oil on hardboard, 120 x 90 cm, Muswellbrook Shire Art Gallery Collection.
83. *Elizabeth Martin with puppets*, 1959, photograph, Newcastle Morning Herald. No date on news clipping, Elizabeth Martin Archives, Charles Martin Collection, Newcastle, NSW.
84. *Carnival Heads*, Elizabeth Martin, 1966, Newcastle Morning Herald. No date on news clipping, Elizabeth Martin Archives, Charles Martin Collection, Newcastle, NSW.
85. *The Dadswell Figure Group*, Lyndon Dadswell, installed 1957, bronze sculpture, Newcastle War Memorial Cultural Centre. Photograph, Artemis Nov/Dec 1973, Newcastle Region Gallery, page 17.
86. *Lumsden cartoon*, Lumsden, 1957, Newcastle Morning Herald. Local Studies Section, Newcastle Region Library.
87. *Rock Patterns*, Viola Bromley, 1958, painting, oil on hardboard, 51 x 67.5 cm, Muswellbrook Shire Art Gallery Collection.
88. *Open Cut*, Viola Bromley, 1959, painting, oil on hardboard, 60 x 85 cm, Muswellbrook Shire Art Gallery Collection.
89. *November Lillies*, Cecily Mitchell, 1958, watercolour on paper, 68.3 x 34.9 cm. Accession No 1960.016, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.
90. *Geraniums*, Cecile Mitchell, 1958, watercolour on paper, 47.7 x 38.1 cm. Accession No 1960.017, Newcastle Region Art Gallery Collection.

## **NOTE**

Page numbers have not been included in the exhibition catalogue references as the catalogues, although professionally printed, where in most cases only a folded single A4 sheet of card with four faces, comprising of an artwork image on the front and the artist a statement, artist CV and list of works on the centre two pages. Maitland City Art Gallery catalogues were photocopied A4 pages stapled together (with no page numbers).