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TERRY MATASSONI: a walk into town
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Acknowledgements
The Stonington Stables Museum of Art, Deakin University gratefully acknowledges the invaluable assistance of Terry Matassoni and the text contribution by Dr Christopher Heathcote. The generous support of Chris Banks AM and Judith Banks is also gratefully acknowledged along with Tom Lowenstein and Dominic Romeo for the loan of artwork.

Artist's Acknowledgements
I would especially like to thank Mr Chris Banks AM and Mrs Judith Banks for their long patronage and their generosity in the sponsorship of this catalogue.

Many thanks must go to Caroline Field for inviting me to exhibit. Her enthusiasm and diligence are very much appreciated. Thanks are also due to Dr Christopher Heathcote for the essay, Viki Petherbridge for the photography, Ronald Butters for the wonderful graphic design and the gallery staff. Thanks to the collectors of my work, particularly those who have lent works to this exhibition. Lastly, I would like to thank my partner Rose and my family for their love, encouragement and support.

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Exhibition opening hours:
Tuesday – Friday 12.00-4.00pm
Saturday 2.00-5.00pm
INTRODUCTION

With the increasing trend to contemporary high density inner city housing, we are forced to come to terms with the closeness of our human contact, and become only too aware of the manner in which our neighbours live. As the old slowly makes way for the new, the inner urban environment represents a cross over of values and styles where pristine apartments impose themselves between rows of old rundown terraces, and disparate social and economic classes gaze uncomfortably at each other from pocket sized back gardens and high rise feature windows.

The way we live within our compartmentalised urban environment presents a unique distillation of society with its fascinating insight into the modern human condition. Terry Matassoni’s peopled urban landscapes speak of diversity and disconnectedness often depicting the isolation of people who are by necessity in close physical proximity to one another. Possessed of a grim solitude, the characters in his works are often imbued with a lonely desperation, even when actively interacting with others.

Completing a post graduate diploma in painting at the Victorian College of the Arts in 1982, Matassoni worked and exhibited strongly for ten years before embarking on a revelatory journey to America during the early 90’s. Just as conditions were becoming harder for local artists through a depressed art market and resultant gallery closures. With first hand exposure to American artists and the influence of Matisse, Ingres and Manet, he re-established his painting technique to better convey his interest in urban life and on his return to Melbourne, developed his current characteristic style.

Featuring in this exhibition is the major work A walk into town, 2001 which has been recently presented to Deakin University by the artist. Forming part of an interwoven series, it is situated within the recognisable landmark of Melbourne’s Southbank, and brings many elements of Matassoni’s other works together. Populated by a cross section of society, this work is characterised by its expansive depiction of the Yarra River, which although moody, possesses a potency and vibrancy suggesting the ongoing flow of life. Taking cues from other similarly constructed works such as the earlier Love at Southbank, 1999 the scene is expressed in a more defined manner that incorporates Matassoni’s eye for architectural detail.

A walk into town presents works created over the past two years, reflecting the artist’s practice of building a narrative in his mind while walking the inner city streets. These works incorporate a recent technical move towards a heightened naturalism in rendered form. Matassoni’s previously flattened figure work now displays a personable dimension, accentuating the alienated and grim determination overlaying his character’s everyday endeavours.

Terry Matassoni is a Visual Arts lecturer, at the Institute of Koorie Education, Deakin University. He is also currently undertaking a Master of Arts at the university’s School of Communication and Creative Arts. The Stonington Stables Museum of Art is proud to present the exhibition A walk into town, and would like to thank Dr Christopher Heathcote for his contribution.

Caroline Field
Exhibition Curator
Stonington Stables Museum of Art

a walk into town 5
A walk into town  2001
oil on linen
152.0 x 212.0 cm
Deakin University Art Collection
Future palace  2002-03
oil on linen
90.0 x 127.0 cm
I hadn’t quite clicked with Terry Matassoni’s paintings until I visited his studio. It was in Victoria Street, just a short walk from his North Melbourne flat. Entering a 19th-century shop, Matassoni led the way up some very narrow, very steep stairs to a single room that was almost a setting from one of his own pictures. Despite grubby smears of paint here and there — evidence of constant toil — it is probably the tidiest studio I have ever visited. Everything packed away and carefully stored on shelves or in drawers that encircled the carpeted workspace. Even his tubes of oil pigment sat in a neat row on a painting bench. Being a creature of disorder and mess, I found it a bit jarring, and plonked down into the armchair facing the two main easels as Matassoni started pulling out canvases. What especially intrigued me was the studio’s muted ambient lighting. The windows faced northward and should have let in fairly intense sunlight, but the artist had blocked it out with heavy timber Venetian blinds. Roundabout were several sets of lamps, and, when I queried their presence, Matassoni explained he prefers to work under electric light. Again something about this illumination recalled the subdued lighting in his paintings, one of the main visual elements used to evoke a sense of brooding inwardness.

Associations and allusions sprang to mind as the artist sorted through paintings, drawings and studies, putting some on an easel for me to view. This was most pronounced in a work-in-progress, Girl Asleep, an image of a solitary woman reclining before a shadowy streetscape. The strongest piece in the room, something about its visual poetry reminded me of Charles Blackman’s early schoolgirl paintings, and also the stark grey cities of Jeffrey Smart. I remarked to the artist that I think I can see here an indebtedness to pittura metafisica, that enigmatic semi-visionary idiom of Carlo Carra, Giorgio Morandi, Mario Sironi and, of course, Giorgio de Chirico, painter of the evocative Mystery and Melancholy of the Street — a canvas whose title alone seems to sum up the overriding inclinations of so many works sitting around this North Melbourne studio. A grin broke across Matassoni’s face, and he admitted to an admiration for these artists’ output, explaining that he has looked at their paintings closely on trips to Europe. He shuffled through oil sketches and preliminary studies on paper, picking out several other recent compositions set in a similar moody vein — a girl walking before a viaduct, figures slouching in an alley — and
pointing to how he had applied lessons learned from the study of such works.

Arts writers have tended to have a problem dealing with artists like Matassoni. Neither a follower or a Joiner, he has steered an independent course for most of his career and has not aligned himself with any curatorially recognised movement or style. Still, over the 1990s there has been an evident Melbourne flavour to his art. One can see in his paintings and drawings strong affinities with the work of several other figurative artists likewise going against the grain — people such as Paul Borg, Mark Dober, Philip Davey, Stewart MacFarlane, Rick Amor, even perhaps Jon Cattapan's St Kilda nocturnes. Mostly these artists have painted in a vein indebted to Edward Hopper, taking the mundane world of the everyday as their subject. Yet it was not just a taste for suburban scenes, that sentimental visual repertoire of parked holdens and corner milk bars that linked these artists. They all primarily work with what is best described as the still, sad music of humanity. So many of their works have conveyed a sense of shadowy loneliness: rooms and streets were usually darkened and deserted, and it was rare to show more than two dejected-looking figures in any scene.

In Matassoni's case, the rectangular shape of the canvas is a way of ordering the world. Throughout the '90s a compartmentalising logic pressed forth in picture after picture; it was as if everything had to be sorted and put in its box, indeed, when the artist spoke of contemporary life in conversation he appeared to be describing the world verbally in the same manner, a honeycomb of people and groups. In this Matassoni is most unlike the other urban painters of Melbourne. There is no mistaking that we are at the centre of something significant in the compositions of Amor or Cattapan, the picture being about focussing on not an event, but the event. But Matassoni did not present things in isolation. Each individual in his paintings was shown busily 'doing their thing' in a square personal cell within the greater visual grid of inner suburbia: loneliness was repetitious. Some of his works took an overview and depicted several separate events at once, others brought us in close and focussed on an individual drama; yet there was always an overarching sense that these little domestic events were that, inconsequential details in a large uncaring and insensitive world. Probably the most disturbing, and most telling visual summary of this viewpoint is found in a recent gouache, *Suburbia*, a moving image of
identical houses crowded together in row upon row of streets. That old emotional rule of the novelist Leo Tolstoy — that happy people are all alike, but unhappy ones are unhappy after their own fashion — has been reversed. Sadness, the exact same type of sadness, seems to be taking place in every miserable dwelling at once.

Of course, stylistically Matassoni’s pictures have injected allusions to both the cartoon and the soap opera into the urban idiom. There have been obvious suggestions to that simplified narrative realm of the comic strip and the television screen in his pumped up colours, his schematised rendering, and the distinct way he cropped scenes into compositional boxes. But — and this was part of his paintings’ charm — exact meanings have never been there; this was like seeing television with the sound switched off, or trying to read a comic without talk bubbles. It is as if we are spying through binoculars on the pattern of life in a distant block of flats, for the absence of words means that we are never quite sure of what is taking place when we look through windows, seeing a young couple together on a couch, or a solitary figure standing alone. Indeed, as assorted critics have noticed, the paintings’ logic seem to echo the 1940s short story ‘Rear Window’ by the master of the hardboiled thriller Cornell Woolrich (later translated into film by Alfred Hitchcock). We have to be careful that we do not read too much emotionally intense drama into what could be unpretentious little suburban scenes. Nothing might be happening here at all.

Returning to my visit to the artist’s North Melbourne studio, there was a moment in which my eyes flicked off the compositions and registered the view of the bare street outside which we could see through the thick dark slats of the blinds. A dusty tram rattled and rumbled past on the near deserted street. Then a youth ambling along the pavement opposite paused for a moment to peer into a shop front. Framed by the rectangle of its plate glass window, for an instant he seemed to mirror the world of the paintings. Noticing my distraction, Terry Matassoni followed my gaze and looked out at the lone figure. ‘You see now,’ he said, and we quietly laughed.

Christopher Heathcote
January 2003
right
**Summer days**  2003
oil on linen
75.0 x 90.0 cm

top
**Seascape**  2002
oil on linen
25.0 x 35.0 cm

left
**Seascape II**  2002
oil on linen
25.0 x 39.0 cm
right
*Another chance*  2001
 oil on linen
 152.0 × 212.0 cm

top
*Study for the casino picture*  2001
 oil on linen
 25.0 × 35.0 cm

left
*The couple in trouble*  2001
 oil on linen
 25.0 × 35.0 cm
The spectator  2002
oil on linen
90.0 x 127.0 cm
Office politics 2002
oil on linen
90.0 x 127.0 cm
right
*Girl asleep* 2002
oil on linen
76.0 x 90.0 cm

top
*The local poet* 2002
oil on linen
25.0 x 35.0 cm

left
*The ambitious artist* 2002
oil on linen
28.0 x 36.0 cm
Bright future  2002
oil on linen
76.0 x 106.0 cm
Collection of Mr Chris Banks
and Mrs Judith Banks
Trendy apartment  2002
oil on linen
76.0 x 90.0 cm
top
*Small interior* 2002
oil on linen
25.0 x 35.0 cm

left
*Girl on bed* 2002
oil on linen
25.0 x 35.0 cm
The world outside  2002
oil on linen
130.0 x 181.0 cm
The last dinner party 2001 – 02
oil on linen
76.0 x 106.0 cm
Early start  2002
oil on linen
76.0 x 106.0 cm
Suite of seven, 4-plate, colour lithographs 2001
Magnani aquarello 300gsm
sheet size 22.5 x 30.0 cm
ed.10
Printed and published by Lancaster Press, Melbourne

1 *Asleep* 16.0 x 21.0 cm
2 *It all ends in tears* 16.5 x 21.0 cm
3 *What took you so long* 16.0 x 21.0 cm
4 *New neighbours* 21.0 x 16.0 cm
5 *Woman with cat* 16.5 x 21.0 cm
6 *Hello there* 16.0 x 21.0 cm
7 *Sea change* 16.0 x 21.0 cm
a walk into town
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Measurements</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>oil on linen</td>
<td>152.0 x 212.0 cm</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>oil on linen</td>
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<td>Future palace</td>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>oil on linen</td>
<td>90.0 x 127.0 cm</td>
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<td>Seascapes II</td>
<td>2002</td>
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<td>28.0 x 36.0 cm</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>gouache on paper</td>
<td>90.0 x 127.0 cm</td>
<td>Collection Tom Lowenstein</td>
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Sea change 16.0 x 21.0 cm
Selected Biography

TERRY MATASSONI

Terry Matassoni was born in Melbourne 1959. He began his studies in 1978, culminating in the completion of a Postgraduate Diploma in Art in 1982 at the Victorian College of the Arts. Since 1983 Matassoni has travelled extensively throughout Europe, the USA and the Pacific, incorporating both personal and professional study tours. He is currently undertaking his MA Fine Arts at the School of Communication and Creative Arts, Deakin University, and is a lecturer at the University's Institute of Koorie Education. His work is featured extensively in public, corporate and private collections throughout Australia and overseas.

STUDIES

2001 Master of Arts Degree, Deakin University, current
1982 Post-graduate Diploma in Art, Victorian College of the Arts
1980 Diploma in Painting, Victorian College of the Arts
1978 Fine Art studies, Bendigo College of Advanced Education

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2003 A walk into town, Stonington Stables, Museum of Art, Deakin University, Melbourne
2001 Recent work, Mira Fine Art, Melbourne
1999 Works on Paper, Bulle Galleries, Melbourne
1998 New Lifestyle, BMGART, Adelaide

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2002 POST 1970s, from the permanent collection, Swan Hill Regional Gallery
2001 Kunst for born og unge, Horsens Museum of Modern Art, Denmark
Muko, International exhibition of Youth prints made at the Muko Workshop, Auckland, New Zealand, travelling Europe in 2001, 2002
Reza Ellen Jones memorial print award 2001, Warrumbool Art Gallery
2000 Selected Works by Gallery Artists, Bulle Galleries, Melbourne
Interpretation, Muka Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand
Thinking aloud. (a drawing show), Ray Hughes Gallery, Sydney
Affordable Treasures, Bulle Galleries, Melbourne
1999 Fiction Factory, Project Space, RMIT, Melbourne

Exchanging Places, Ray Hughes Gallery in residence at the George Gallery, Melbourne
We are Australian, The George Adams Gallery, Melbourne (in association with the Melbourne International Festival)
1998 Geelong Contemporary Art Prize, Geelong Art Gallery (by selection)
National Works on Paper, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, Mornington
Selected Works by Invited Artists, Bulle Galleries, Melbourne
Works on Paper and Original Fine Art Prints, Bulle Galleries, Melbourne
Inkspots to Internet—Nucleus to Diversity, Former Student Art Exhibition, The Phyllis Palmer Gallery, La Trobe University, Bendigo
1997 Summer Show, BMG Art, Adelaide
Preview 1997, Lyall Burton Gallery, Melbourne
Highlights from the Collection, Swan Hill Regional Gallery, Swan Hill
Vizy Board Art Prize, "The Orangery", Richmond Grove Winery, Tanunda, South Australia
Nilumbik Art Award Exhibition, The Nilumbik Shire Council, Eltham
1997 Muka International Youth Print Exhibition, Gallery 101, Melbourne
Figures from Life, Ray Hughes Gallery, Sydney
1996 The Art of Collecting 2, Linden Gallery, Melbourne
ACAFS Fifth Australian Contemporary Art Fair, Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne
Gallery Artists, Lyall Burton Gallery, Melbourne
1995 Youth Prints, Auckland Museum, travelled throughout New Zealand
Save Albert Park 9 x 5 Invitation Exhibition, Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne
Recent Lithographs and Commissioned Youth Prints, Muka Studios, Auckland

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1994  Recent Gouaches, Gallery of Contemporary Art, Rovereto, Italy
ACAF4 Fourth Australian Contemporary Art Fair, Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne
Who's Who, Who's Hot, Kirkaldy Davies Galleries, Melbourne (curated by Carol Pollack)
Selections from the Collection, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne
Castlemaine Drawing Prize, Castlemaine Art Gallery
Works by Gallery Artists, Lyall Burton Gallery, Melbourne
1992 Miniatures: Small Works by Selected Gallery Artists, Realities Gallery, Melbourne
Selected Works from the Margaret Stewart Endowment, National Gallery of Victoria
1991 National Swan Hill Print & Drawing Show, Swan Hill Regional Gallery of Contemporary Art, Swan Hill
Raising the Furies: Elements of Disquiet in Figurative Painting 1985-1990, toured Regional Galleries Wodonga, Wangaratta, Benalla and Shepparton (curated by Stephen Cox)
Eighth Ansett Hamilton Art Award, City of Hamilton Art Gallery (Acquired)
Australian Drawing - Contemporary, John Buckley Fine Art, Melbourne
Australian Water Colours and Gouaches, John Buckley Fine Art, Melbourne
ACAF2 Second Australian Contemporary Art Fair, Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne
1990 The City: A Very Different Place, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne
1989 Popular Front, Australian Centre of Contemporary Art, Melbourne
Swan Hill Print and Drawing Show, Swan Hill Regional Gallery of Contemporary Art, Swan Hill (Acquired)
Heidelberg and Heritage - Two Visions of Australians 100 Years Apart, Linden Gallery, Melbourne
Freestyle Australian Art 1960s - Now, National Gallery of Victoria
Private View 3, A tribute to the Melbourne Cup. DGG Needham Gretz Galleries
1988 Exquisite Corpse, 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne
Selected Finalists: Faber Castell Drawing Award, Rex Irwin Gallery, Sydney
A Horse Show: The Horse in Contemporary Australian Art, Museum of Modern Art at Heide
1987 Selected Contemporary Drawings, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne
1985 Keith and Elizabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship, Victorian College of the Arts Gallery, Melbourne (Received Honourable Mention)
1980 The Paris Prize, Victorian College of the Arts Gallery, Melbourne

AWARDS
1997 Invited to participate in the Visky Board Art Prize
1989 Esso Commission for young artists
1988 Grant for the Victorian Health Promotion to work on a Theatre Arts Project
1987 Broadband Prize (shared)
1985 Artist Development Grant - Victorian Ministry for the Arts
1982 Visual Arts Board Travel Grant to Europe
1981 Sir Russell Drysdale Memorial Prize for drawing

COMMISSIONS AND RESIDENCIES
1997 Poster, Bununwaring Food and Wine Festival
1994 Commissioned to design image for the Melbourne Theatre Company's Summer of the Seventeenth Doll, written by Ray Lawler
Artists in Schools Program, Preston Special Development School
Youth Prints, Muka Studios, Auckland, New Zealand
1993 Artist in Residence, St Johns Baptist College, New York, USA
Diamond Valley Invitation Art Award
1992 Commissioned to paint a tram, Ministry for the Arts, Transporting Arts Programme sponsored by Vic Health
1991 Commissioned to design image for the Melbourne Theatre Company's Money and Friends, written by David Williamson
1989 Victorian Racing Club, New Pavilion, Flemington Racecourse, Melbourne

PUBLIC AND CORPORATE COLLECTIONS
Accenture
American Consulate, Florence, Italy
Arthbank, Sydney
Australian Alliance Insurance, Victoria
Banyule City Council, Victoria
BHP Billiton Collection
City of Hamilton Art Gallery, Victoria
Deakin University Art Collection, Victoria
E.R. White Club Collection, Trinity College, Melbourne University, Victoria
Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital Collection, Victoria
Kangan Batman TAFE, Victoria
Latrobe University Collection, Victoria
Marcelle Servous Collection, Paris
Southern Health Art Gallery, Victoria
Monash University Collection, Victoria
Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Victoria
Museum of Victoria; National Gallery of Victoria
Northern Territory University
Philips Fox Collection
Preston Special Developmental School, Victoria
Robert Saxton Collection, South Australia
Santos Mining Collection, South Australia
Smorgon Collection, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, New South Wales
Swan Hill Regional Art Gallery, Victoria
Victorian College of the Arts
Victorian Racing Club, Flemington, Victoria
World Congress Centre
Horses in Art', Good Weekend Magazine, 1 November, 1988
Jeibert M.: 'See it', The Herald Sun, 4 October 1995
Kaptein H.: Swan Hill National Print & Drawing Acquisitive Awards, Swan Hill Regional Gallery of Contemporary Art, 2000, catalogue introduction
Kronenberg S.: Artnotes Victoria, Art Monthly, November 1995
Lynn E.: 'Blame it on the lemmings', The Weekend Australian, 3-4 September 1988
Makin J.: 'Choice Views', Herald Sun, 6 September 1999
Matassoni T.: 'Artist Profiles', Art Almanac, September 1999
Matassoni T.: 'Artist Profiles', Art Almanac, October 1986
McCulloch A.: 'Paris and others', The Herald, 2 October 1980
Millar R.: 'Alice in the sky with ripcords', The Herald, 9 March 1986
Millington, B.: 'Flower tribute to a high flyer', The Age, 1 September 1988
'Mural improves their dreary surrounds', The Age, October 1984
'Muri anti-chil arte eterna', Alto Adige, 24 August 1994
Nicholls L.: 'In a new light' (illustrated and text), The Art Collection of Trinity College, The University of Melbourne,
Nelson R.: 'The enigma of urban life', Today Arts, The Age, 8 September 1999
Robinson E.: 'Recent Work', Art Almanac, March 1989
Rooney R.: 'Melbourne Art', The Australian, 6 October 1995
Rooney R.: 'Crime does not paint', The Weekend Australian, 3-4 February 1990
Rooney R.: 'That essential power of silence', The Weekend Australian, 4-5 March 1989
Rooney R.: 'An unbridled path to Dada', The Australian, 3 December 1988
Rooney R.: 'Good ideas come to Paris', The Age, 1 October 1980
Smith D.: 'A time for change', Swan Hill National Print & Drawing Acquisitive Awards, Swan Hill Regional Gallery of Contemporary Art, 2000, catalogue essay
Stone D.: 'Putting greasepaint on artists' palettes', The Sunday Age, 16 April 1992
Tabot J.: 'Transporting Art', 1992, catalogue essay
Tabot J.: 'Transporting Art: the greatest art movement' joint project by Arts Victoria and the Public Transport Corporation, Interview video, Sept. 93
'The Apartment Dwellers', in See this, The City Weekly, 2-8 October 1997
'Trouble in the 90's', The Australian Diary, 1996
Whateley G.: 'Naked City bares all for Art', Herald Sun, 26 July 1995
Woudstra, J.: 'Leaving town', The Age, 17 February 1984
The Stonington Stables Museum of Art has been established to foster a general awareness and understanding of the visual arts among the Deakin University community and the general public. It provides a focus for current scholarship, research and professional practise, and is committed to delivering a dynamic visual arts focus for the University both nationally and internationally.

The Deakin University Art Collection comprises over 1,500 important and diverse works of art which are circulated and displayed on the University's five campuses throughout Victoria. This structured and well balanced collection represents works of art of excellence and significance by principally Australian contemporary artists, in a wide range of mediums.

The Deakin University Art Collection is administered at the Stonington Stables Museum of Art, Toorak Campus, Melbourne, where it is extensively researched and catalogued. With the aim of expanding and enriching the Collection, potential acquisitions of historical and contemporary importance are examined and appraised for their cultural merit, in accordance with an acquisition policy designed to preserve and enhance the character of this unique repository of works.

The Premium Collection comprises the University's most prestigious artworks, which have been acquired over a period of 40 years through a combination of careful purchasing, and generous gifts and bequests. This collection focuses on the work of contemporary Australian and international artists who have a record of practice and development of their artform, and are well represented in public collections.

The Campus Collection is a dynamic synthesis of works across a wide range of media that includes painting, printmaking, drawing, ceramics and photography. Rich in a variety of artistic expressions and experimental approaches to visual media, the works represented have a charm, dynamism and potency of their own that represents the University's history and the cohesion of Deakin today. This collection contains over 500 examples of mostly student and staff works of art that have been acquired over a period of 50 years.

Donations of artworks to the Deakin University Art Collection are tax deductible under the Cultural Gifts Program.

front cover
**Girl walking into town** 2001-02
oil on linen
76.0 x 106.0 cm

back cover
**Seascape** 2002
oil on linen
25.0 x 35.0 cm