I am the author of the thesis entitled

_A Portrait of Albert Tucker, 1914-1960_

submitted for the degree of

_Doctor of Philosophy_

This thesis may be made available for consultation, loan and limited copying in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968

Janine Burke
A Portrait of Albert Tucker, 1914-1960

by

Janine Burke BA (Hons), MA

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Deakin University, September, 2001
I certify that the thesis entitled:  

A Portrait of Albert Tucker

submitted for the degree of:  

PhD

is the result of my own research, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this thesis in whole or in part has not been submitted for an award, including a higher degree, to any other university or institution.

Full Name: Janine BURKE  
(Please Print)

Signed:  

Date: 20/12/02

Signature Redacted by Library
This thesis is my work and that where reference is made to the work of others due reference is given.

Janine Burke
Any material in this thesis which has been accepted for a degree or a diploma by any institution is identified in the text.

Signature Redacted by Library

Janine Burke
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 1

Exigesis 3

Chapter 1. Family Life 29

Chapter 2. The Young Artist 61

Chapter 3. Making The Break 79

Chapter 4. Mentors 99

Chapter 5. In Love 134

Chapter 6. Dreams and Realities 168

Chapter 7. The Futile City 190

Chapter 8. The Paradise Garden 220

Chapter 9. Bert's War 250

Chapter 10. The Possessed 286

Chapter 11. Art, Myth and Society 325

Chapter 12. Images of Modern Evil 354

Chapter 13. The House of the Spirits 372

Chapter 14. Flight 397

Chapter 15. A Specialist in Loneliness 423

Chapter 16. Among Gods and Saints 457

Chapter 17. The Metamorphosis of Ned Kelly 488

Epilogue 528

Bibliography 530
Acknowledgements
My debt to Albert Tucker is enormous. He entered into my research with almost as much enthusiasm as I, making himself readily available for interviews and discussions. He gave me photographs and documents and encouraged me at every step.

I would like to thank Elwyn Crawford for sharing memories of the Tucker family with me. Thanks are also due to the executors of the John and Sunday Reed Estate, the Barrett Reid Estate and the Bundanon Estate.

Deakin University provided a mountain of support, awarding me an Australian Post-Graduate Award that kept body and soul together as I wrote the thesis. They also gave me a Travel Study Grant that made possible my research in Europe. My supervisors, Dr Robert Haysom and Professor David Walker, offered an endless stream of good ideas, advice, criticism and encouragement.

I would also like to thank the Arendsen family; Graeme Bell; Yosl Bergner; Yvonne Boyd; Roger Butler, National Gallery of Australia; Deborah Clark; Alannah Coleman; Julie Copeland; Richard and Florence Crichton; Dirk and Lesley den Hartog; Tim Fisher; James Gleeson; Ron Greenaway; Deborah Hart, National Gallery of Australia; Richard Haese; Evelyn Healy; Maureen Hickey; Joan James; Ian Jones; Peter Jones; Phillip Jones; Michael Keon; Jean Langley; Norbert Leoffler; Stephen May; Pauline McCarthy; Susan McCulloch-Uehlin; Maidie McGowan; Ken McGregor; Professor Stuart MacIntyre; Stephen May; Felicity Moore; Joy Murphy; Vali Myer; Mary Newsome; Tristano and Diana Nibbi;
Lady Mary Nolan; Professor Angela O'Brien; Vic O'Connor; Desmond O'Grady; John Perceval; Dorothy Phillips; Tom Rigg; Margaret Shaw, National Library of Australia; Sally Smart; Bernard Smith; Gregory Smith, National Gallery of Victoria; Jason Smith, National Gallery of Victoria; Betty Snowden, Australian War Memorial; Stephanie Stead; Elena Taylor, National Gallery of Australia; Nicholas Usherwood; Minka Veal; Janet Venn-Brown; Kay Vernon; Ken Whisson; Yvonne Wray.

I would like to thank staff at the Heide Museum of Modern Art for their help and my fellow Board members for their support and interest. Thanks to the Footscray and Malvern Historical Societies, the National Library of Australia, University of Melbourne Archives and the helpful staff at the State Library of Victoria.

Hilary McPhee read the manuscript as I wrote it, offering wise suggestions. My mother, Joyce Kelly, told me evocative stories about wartime Melbourne. Geoff Hogg never tired of debating history and politics with me. David Tacey offered friendship and inspiration.

In England, Damien, Judith and Patrick Burke looked after me in fine style. Darleen Bungey offered hospitality and good talks in London. In Rome, Christina Georgeff and Marco Delogu provided hospitality and assistance. Many friends listened as I talked (at times what must have seemed endlessly) about Bert. Thank you.

JB

September, 2001
Exegesis

1. Introduction

Albert Tucker was one of Australia's best known artists, his reputation largely associated with 'Angry Penguins', a circle of artists active in Melbourne in the 1940s that included Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd, John Perceval, Joy Hester and the arts patrons Sunday and John Reed. Despite Tucker's standing in Australian art, he has been the subject of uneven and insubstantial scholarly attention. Until *A Portrait of Albert Tucker, 1914-1960*, his work and life have not been examined in detail.

Christopher Uhl in his monograph of Tucker (1969) dismisses biographical details in favour of a highly critical discussion of the artist's oeuvre to 1968. James Mollison compiled two long interviews with Tucker. One was published as *Albert Tucker* (with Nicholas Bonham, 1982) and the other in the 1990 Albert Tucker Retrospective catalogue. Neither examines the work and life of the artist in depth. Richard Haese, in *Rebels and Precursors, the revolutionary years of Australian art* (1981), deals brilliantly with Tucker's role in the art/politics of the 1940s, but, due to the broad scope of Haese's book, he can only briefly address Tucker's art and life.

*A Portrait of Albert Tucker, 1914-1960* is the first thorough, detailed and scholarly account of the artist's life and work.

From 1977 until Tucker's death, I had a continuous association with him that began with my research on Joy Hester. Firstly, for my MA, published as *Joy Hester* (1983) and in relation to that project, the retrospective I organised of Hester's at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1981 and, secondly, while
editing *Dear Sun: the letters of Joy Hester and Sunday Reed* (1995). Tucker fully co-operated in these projects, making himself readily available for interviews about Hester's art and life as well as making photographs of Hester and the Angry Penguins circle available to me and giving me access to works by Hester in his collection.

One of the reasons that Tucker's oeuvre has not been the subject of scholarly attention was that, after the publication of Uhl's book, Tucker was unwilling to permit other scholars access. Tucker was angered by Uhl's often dismissive account of his art, making him wary of further contact with researchers.

My decision to research Tucker's art and life took shape slowly. Initially, I did not intend to write a full chronological account. I was aware, through conversations with Tucker, of his reservations about such a project. It made me believe it would be unwise to attempt to write a full scale study of his work.

In 1996, I suggested to Tucker I would write a memoir of my twenty-year association with him. It would focus on several key areas of his life and art, especially on his best series of paintings *Images of Modern Evil* (1943-47). It would emphasise his relationship with Hester and the years they spent together, 1938-1947. I would also discuss the way his memories, which were extremely sharp and clear, had assisted my construction of Hester's life and early work. It would be a linear but not a historically determined overview of his art, in the form of a series of essay-style chapters. Tucker accepted the proposal with alacrity.

The following year, I began research. At the same time, I suggested to Tucker I begin work on the first exhibition of his photographs.
In 1939 Tucker had bought his first camera, a Foth-Derby, that he had spotted in the window of a second-hand shop. From then on, Tucker documented his friends and family, together with his paintings and the places he lived and visited. Tucker was not an 'art' photographer. There was no aesthetic project at work and only occasionally did he resort to the special arrangements of objects or to playing with the effects of light and shadow. They are snapshots informed by a keen, intensely visual sensibility during a period of bold experimentation in Tucker's artistic practice.

It was who he photographed that make Tucker's photographs memorable. Together they form a unique group portrait of Australian cultural life in the 40s - Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd, John Perceval, Joy Hester, Yosl Bergner, Sunday and John Reed, Rah Fizelle, Max Harris, Danila Vassilieff, Sam Atyeo, Sali Herman, Adrian Lawlor, Frank and Margel Hinder are represented.

Over the years, I had suggested to Tucker the idea of producing a book or an exhibition of his photographs. I found the photographs fascinating not only because they illuminated my own research but because their presence was so striking, glamorous and disconcertingly contemporary. At times it was hard to believe they had been taken sixty years ago. Because of their power, I thought they deserved an audience.

But Tucker demurred. In the early 90s, after days spent assisting a researcher with photographs, Tucker suffered an angina attack. He blamed it on the feelings they had provoked.

For the cover of Dear Sun: the letters of Joy Hester and Sunday Reed, I had selected Tucker's evocative 1945 photograph of Hester and Reed walking together at Heide: the image captured the strong bonds between the women. Dear Sun proved to be a popular book and when its cover won a design
award, Tucker was delighted. I then suggested I organise the first exhibition of his photographs in tandem with the memoir and he agreed.

During 1997, I began work on The Eye of the Beholder, Albert Tucker's Photographs which opened at the Heide Museum of Modern Art in June, 1998 before touring interstate. (1) Tucker and I spent a great deal of time together during my research for the exhibition.

Though I had interviewed Tucker about the past, the emphasis had previously been on Hester. Tucker remained hurt and angry about the break-up of his marriage to Hester. He had every reason to be. In the ten years they were together, she had managed a series of clandestine affairs so skilfully Tucker had never known. It was only after they separated in 1947, that Tucker had discovered the truth.

As I selected photographs for the exhibition, I realised that not only had Tucker taken more of Hester than anyone else, the first photographs he took were of her. She is the muse of his camera, its central, compelling subject. Hester rarely looks the same from one photograph to the next and her variation is so great, it is often difficult to identify her. As Walter Benjamin observed 'the camera introduces us to unconscious optics as psychoanalysis does to unconscious impulses'. (2)

She is dark-haired and serious in Two studies of Joy Hester (1939), vivacious, sun-tanned and platinum-blond in Joy Hester doing a handstand (c.1940) dramatically beautiful and severe in Portrait of Joy Hester (c.1943) and fleshy and coquettish in Joy Hester at St Kilda beach (1945). There are also intimate snaps of her at the Little Collins Street apartment where she and Tucker lived.

Tucker's camera is a diary of Hester's body, her moods and expressions, her weight gains and losses, her hair colour, make-up, clothes and hairstyles.
Despite this fetishistic attention to detail, Tucker was unable to calculate what these images, what Hester's extraordinary personal diversity, might mean. It is as though with his camera Tucker tried and failed, time and again, to capture and understand her.

Tucker's photographs remark on the mystery of the beloved, the profound illusion of intimacy, that the one who is the closest to us, who shares our bed, our table and our life can be the most tantalisingly remote, the greatest and most confusing enigma. Hester, the private, troubled soul who kept her own counsel, the dissatisfied wife who had affairs, the dedicated artist with ambitions of her own - Tucker was blind to those selves. Yet in his photographs can be traced the strong-willed woman who could make her own decisions. Perhaps they were forming as Hester looked into the lens of her husband's camera.

While Tucker went on to make a successful new life after his separation from Hester, it seemed to me that Hester had made a wound in it, one that he kept open and refused to let heal. No matter how much fresh information about Hester came to light, Tucker was unable to put the situation in perspective, accept that it was finished and lay it to rest. He had no intention of either forgiving or forgetting. That would mean letting go of her, an act as irredeemable as the marriage itself. It seemed that as long as he blinded himself to the reasons for the demise of their marriage, Tucker could retain his hold on Hester, could remain passionately and miserably in her embrace. "Why did she leave me?" was a question Tucker had often asked since I first met him in 1977. It was rhetorical and reflective and not, as I learned over time, a question which he expected me to answer.

Tucker was obsessed with Hester. The advantage for my research was that it made Tucker's recollections of Hester, and the entire period they were
together, intensely alive. Indeed, it was difficult to get Tucker to stop talking about Hester. Yet the Hester that he recollected was not the one anyone else seemed to have known. John Reed remembered Hester as a 'little peroxide blonde hoyden' (3) while Noel Counihan, a painter and colleague of Tucker's, recalled her as 'warm and earthy'. (4) Others would variously describe Hester as electric, impulsive, spontaneous, provocative, a joker, a yarn-spinner, a dominant social force, a street lair and a larrkin but this woman, it seemed, was unknown to him. 'She changed after she left me,' Tucker would say, if I presented him with other, contradictory views of Hester. (5)

The closest I came to seeing Tucker's Hester, was when we were looking at a photograph of Hester and Yvon Harris, Max Harris's wife, travelling in the train to the Reeds' home, Heide. It is winter, 1945. Harris is holding Sweeney, the child of Tucker and Hester's marriage, who is a few months old. Sitting nearer the window and the camera, Harris's face is well-lit, opening in a radiant smile.

Next to her, plunged in shadows, sits Hester. She wears a dark coat and a striped scarf, her hair is drawn back from her face and swept up in the 40s style. Her eyes are downcast, her lips firmly closed, her expression is brooding, contained, contemplative. She does not seem in repose so much as pre-occupied with an inner reality, one that does not afford her peace. The contrast between Harris positioned in the light, cheerful and outgoing as she holds Sweeney, and Hester, her expression withdrawn, seated at a remove and encircled by darkness could not be more stark.

'That's her,' said Tucker, tapping the photograph. 'That's what Joy was like'. (6)

'Why did she leave me?'
That question is not only one of the reasons I decided to write *A Portrait of Albert Tucker 1914-1960* but also the reason my books about Hester came to be written. The question haunted Tucker. For him, Hester was 'the early big love...and I don't think if you have that, something that you give yourself to totally, I don't think you ever recover. You never do and it's altered the whole course of my life in this area since.' (7) In 1988, Tucker told Barbara Blackman, 'I'm still deeply concerned and fond of Joy - in love with her if you like. Very, very much so. She's dominated my entire life, that girl'. (8)

In the long interview that Blackman conducted with Tucker for the National Library’s Oral History Project, running to over 400 pages of transcript, Blackman has great difficulty in restraining Tucker from talking about Hester. When Blackman, who knew Hester in the mid-50s, tries to offer her own opinions of Hester's personality, Tucker ignores her. Barbara, Tucker's wife of thirty-five years, is mentioned by Tucker only once in the interview.

While Tucker's judgement on Hester was often vindictive and unforgiving, it was not final. He revised and revisited her, determined to reconstruct a past that, by leaving him, she changed irrevocably. It is as though he built a house, brick by brick, plank by plank, and it was the house of the marriage that she deserted, a house of the spirits where he remained and kept vigil.

Why was he so blind? Why could he not let go? My impression when I first met Tucker, and one that remained unaltered, was that the break with Hester was his life's single most compelling event. All the curses he has heaped on her did not released him from her spell.
'Why did she leave me?' was my key, my method, the beginning of my investigation into Tucker's complex and contradictory character and into the nature and formation of his art.

I set out to investigate Hester's influence on Tucker's art. I was aware that many of Tucker's most important paintings such as *Images of Modern Evil* and *Victory Girls* (1942, National Gallery of Australia) dealt with his vision of a powerful, provocative and potentially destructive feminine sexuality. That lead me to believe that Tucker's family background, his relationships with his parents and siblings, especially his mother, may have a bearing on the choices that he made about subject matter in his maturity as an artist. I felt that I needed to know as much about his childhood as possible to fully understand the sources for the manner in which gender was treated in his art.

When I explained to Tucker that I wished to extend the boundaries of my research, that it would involve a much fuller chronological, 'biographical' approach and that it would become my PhD, he was agreeable. He was satisfied with the work that I was completing on *The Eye of the Beholder* and felt that, after such a long association, he could trust me.

Because of constraints in the length of a PhD and the large span of Tucker's life and career, I understood that I would not be able to include his life and art in their entirety. I chose 1960 as the appropriate termination point.

It was the year that Tucker returned to Australia after a thirteen year absence abroad for his retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art of Australia, Melbourne. It was also the point where he began to receive critical recognition and financial rewards after many years of struggle. At the retrospective, Tucker exhibited new work, developed overseas, that
continued his preoccupation with gender: this time, the representation of masculinity. Finally, 1960 was the year that Hester, after many years of illness, died. It seemed a fitting year in which to close my study of Tucker.

2. Relationship to other studies

While *A Portrait of Albert Tucker, 1914-1960* is the first thorough, detailed and scholarly account of the artist's life and work, Tucker's work has been included in all major accounts of Australian painting. The way Tucker has been represented has been, in some accounts, both controversial and critical. The response to Tucker goes toward helping to explain the times, the man and his art.

Bernard Smith's *Place, Taste and Tradition* (1945) was the first major history of Australian art since William Moore's *The Story of Australian Art* (1934). It was expanded and republished in 1962 as *Australian Painting*. *Place, Taste and Tradition* is a book in two parts. The early chapters comprise a lucid and incisive history of Australian painting by a young art historian brimming with ideas and original research, the other is a partisan account of modern art by a Communist Party member. Smith's commitment to the Party, which had lead him to renounce painting, blinkered him to the merits of much local art.

In *Place, Taste and Tradition*, Tucker is censured for the 'death-obsessions common to surrealist painting' and his 'pessimism' linked 'spiritually with
the world-weariness of the Eliot school'. (9) Smith also criticised Tucker's 1943 essay "Art, Myth and Society", which attacked the cultural policies of the Communist Party. Smith described Tucker's views as saturated with elitism, with the 'useless anachronisms' and 'mysticism' of an aesthetic vanguard. (10) For Smith, the fundamental issues for artists were 'social and political questions', not the 'abstraction and individualism of Modernism'. (11)

It was not a happy beginning to Tucker's assessment by history and partly accounts for some of the mistrust he would later feel towards historians and critics. But when Smith rewrote Place, Taste and Tradition as Australian Painting, he modified the temper of his youthful political attitudes and wrote a more considered and detached assessment of Tucker's crucial role in the art/politics of the 1940s. He described Tucker as 'the intellectual leader' of the Angry Penguins group, 'possessed of great, almost ruthless, independence of mind and considerable mental courage'. (12)

In Australian Painting, Smith also reproduced The Futile City (1940, Heide Museum of Modern Art), a painting crucial to the understanding of surrealism in Australia, as well as one Images of Modern Evil (1944, National Gallery of Australia) and Judas (1955, National Gallery of Victoria) in black and white. In 1962, Tucker had only recently returned to Australia and none of the works Smith included were then in public collections. The Futile City was in the collection of Sunday and John Reed, Tucker's patrons, while the two others remained with the artist.

Smith described Tucker's work as being distinctly influenced by 'social realism and German expressionism'. (13) Correctly, Smith identified Beckmann as a source for Tucker, though Beckmann's relationship to German expressionism is problematic. From then, in all accounts, Tucker would be
described as being influenced by 'German expressionism'. No writer, until my study, has alluded to the greater and more lasting influence on Tucker of surrealism. I attest that surrealism with its correlative emphasis on the feminine, the dream and the irrational, its investigations of psychoanalysis and myth, and its concern with the artist's political position, that is, a commitment to radically transforming society through art, are all significant features of Tucker's work.

Smith described *Images of Modern Evil* as 'personal to the point of autobiography' recording 'disgust and despair at the brutalisation of the person by the blind authority of the mass. The life of the modern city becomes an allegory of evil: soulless, mechanical, stupid; peopled by criminals, prostitutes, clowns and psychotics'. (14) While social decay is indeed the primary motif of *Images of Modern Evil*, Smith does not refer to the series' complex and ambivalent attitudes toward sexuality - the manner in which Tucker's criticism of modern society is represented and which helps to give the work its unsettling power. This oversight makes his assessment of Tucker's best series one that lacks depth and insight.

Smith described Tucker's European years in a perfunctory manner, noting that Tucker's work 'attracted some attention on the Continent before it became known in London and New York'. (15) Smith contextualised Tucker's later work of explorers, bushrangers and the desert with that of his contemporaries. To Smith, Tucker's work had none of 'the folksy charm of Nolan's, the pathetic heroism of Drysdale's, nor the monstrous tumult of Arthur Boyd's. It was tough, scarred, residual and humourless'. (16) Smith correctly assessed Tucker's sources, saying that the paintings had absorbed into their 'leathery textures a good deal of art brut and the abstract art of Italian painters like Alberto Burri working with polyvinyl acetate in low
tones and heavy textures'. (17) Smith voices critical reservations about Tucker's later work shared by all writers, including myself.

In general, Smith's was a fair, well-researched but unenlightened assessment of Tucker.

The next assessment of Tucker was by Robert Hughes' in his February, 1964 article in *Art and Australia*. It was the first major essay to appear on the artist and would provide the material for the passage on Tucker in Hughes' *The Art of Australia* (1966).

Hughes had written several favourable reviews of Tucker's work before he approached Tucker about writing the essay. (18) Hughes gave the paintings a vigorous and complimentary retrospective, placing the early work in its cultural and historical context. But Hughes' article was also disarmingly personal, using Tucker's personality to explain the work. He prefaced the article by describing Tucker as

'difficult...sophisticated, brutally shrewd, obsessed with reputation, ironical, intelligent. He has a flair for making enemies. Diplomacy is beyond him...His reactions always happen in the open, an exposure which seems to caricature them: in a curious way, he is the victim of his own abrasive honesty, a man with no mask. "Why should I try to get on with people?" he once asked me. "I don't like people! Most of them are destructive bastards!" ' (19)

It seemed Tucker's personality was set to influence any appreciation of his work. Hughes also set out to puncture Tucker's reputation when he suggested that 'journalists have exaggerated Tucker's international standing', pointing out that 'to be represented in the Guggenheim and the Museum of Modern Art does not guarantee a major reputation in the USA'. (20)
In dealing with Tucker's work, Hughes first placed Tucker within his historical context: the art world of Melbourne in the late 1930s where Tucker 'reacted against the classical post-impressionism of (George) Bell, (William) Frater and (Arnold) Shore' and the 'internal poetics' of their style of painting. (21) Art, as Hughes correctly assesses, was for Tucker 'a weapon of protest'. (22) But Hughes is not specific about the sources of crucial shifts in Tucker's art in the late 1930s, citing 'some prints of German expressionist paintings' as providing inspiration and guidance for Tucker. (23) Hughes was not able to identify the works and does not mention surrealism in his account.

Hughes praises Images of Modern Evil, locating the series as 'with Nolan's 1947 Kelly series and Drysdale's outback paintings of 1941-5, they are among the seminal achievements of the early years of modern painting in Australia'. (24) He also located the crescent mouth, the distinguishing feature of the series, as 'the first appearance in Australia of a true iconographic form, insistently recurring within and animating a group of paintings. Tucker's red crescent, in this respect, anticipates Nolan's Kelly helmet by four years. From it, the Images of Modern Evil were born'. (25) It was the first time the series had been given the credit it deserved.

Hughes took issue with Tucker's next iconic form, the abstracted male head in profile, which, first realised in Macro of Place Pigalle (1950, National Gallery of Victoria), would be examined later in his Explorer, Gambler and Armoured Faun paintings. As Hughes noted the head needed to 'irradiate its surroundings with metaphysical properties and at the same time to sum up their inner nature, just as the red crescent had done in the streets of St Kilda'. (26) Hughes felt Tucker 'always lacked the the intuitive sense of rightness image' that 'Nolan effortlessly possess[es]'. Hughes believed that
Tucker 'laboriously tried out a number of contexts during the next four years. None of them worked'. (27)

But Hughes does not note the influence of Christian imagery and the emergence of the landscape in Tucker's Italian period which not only provides clues to the symbolism of the male head in profile but essays Tucker's first interest in the landscape as a symbolic background to the heads. The Australian landscape would become the determining feature of Tucker's work after 1956 but Hughes only mentions these paintings in passing and does not examine them in any depth.

Hughes summarised that Tucker's paintings 'at their best are lit by the harsh glow of a genuine and profound humanism...Our culture needs more painters on the dark side of experience, men who can spend thirty years insisting, against all decorum...that art can be an erratic yell, an irrational fear, a ritual in the dark, an exorcism, a dirge for lost innocence, or a supplication to a dead god'. (28)

When Hughes published The Art of Australia (1966), he placed Tucker in a central role as a formidable artist-intellectual of the war years. But Hughes' attitude towards the paintings had changed. He now described Tucker's wartime paintings as 'knotted with self-pity, raucous with contempt and totally anti-humanist'. (29)

By the mid-1960s, Tucker had achieved a secure place in Australian art but it was a contentious one. The emphasis was on Tucker's wartime paintings rather than the later work. Indeed, the critical opinion expressed in newspaper reviews of Tucker's exhibitions, which had been favourable towards Tucker's work when he first returned from overseas in 1960, had turned decidedly sour by the mid-60s. (30)
Christopher Uhl's monograph on Tucker added fuel to the fire. Originally Uhl's master's thesis at the Fine Arts department, University of Melbourne, it was given a glossy publication by Lansdowne. While there is much good original research, perhaps the book's most useful aspect is the catalogue raisonnable, which Tucker encouraged Uhl to complete. For, while scholarly, the book presents a highly critical account of Tucker's work. Indeed, Uhl's reading of Tucker's art is so uniformly negative, it is surprising that he elected to write the book in the first place.

Uhl's thesis was that 'the strength of (Tucker's) art seems...to come from an aggressive energy applied to a limited range of iconography, and while that in itself may guarantee an immediate impact it does not, of course, necessarily mean good art'. (31) To Uhl the red crescent suggests that Tucker used his art 'as a means of purging private obsessions, as an exorcism of personal demons'. (32) Uhl correctly cites Picasso and Dubuffet as influences and responds critically to Tucker's art in the late 1950s.

He examines Tucker's interest in German expressionism in slightly more depth than Smith or Hughes, locating a volume of Propylen Kunstgeschichte in Melbourne State Library as important to Tucker 'sometime after 1939'. (33) In fact, the volume Tucker studied was most likely Carl Einstein's Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts (1926) where he saw reproductions of Max Beckmann and Otto Dix who were not really 'expressionists' at all but founders of the 'New Objectivity' in German painting, known as Neue Sachlichkeit.

Uhl mentions Tucker's interest in surrealism but is dismissive, writing that 'Tucker never fully understood the basic assumptions of Surrealist art but merely borrowed elements of its vocabulary'. (34) But Uhl's attitude towards the link between Tucker and surrealism is superficial. I argue that
Tucker responded deeply to surrealism's mytho-poetic subject matter and that surrealism helped to shape Tucker's sensibility and to prepare the ground for his major series *Images of Modern Evil*, a series whose importance Uhl gravely underestimates.

However, I agree with Uhl that Tucker's response to Italian art in the 1950s, which focused on themes of Christian tragedy and suffering, was 'in keeping with the gloomy or tragic ethos of his earlier work' (35) and that some of the later landscape paintings from the 1960s do indicate 'a weakening of expressive power'. (36) Tucker, angry and upset with Uhl's book, did not allow it to be reprinted.

In the early 1970s, Richard Haese began his PhD thesis, 'Cultural Radicals in Australian Society 1937-1947', which was published in 1981 as *Rebels and Precursors*. Tucker became actively supportive of Haese's project. Not only did he assist Haese's research but Tucker's evocative photographs, published en masse for the first time, enlivened the book. Haese stated his book was 'about the development of a core of Australian artists...central to contemporary Australian art...a portrait of a period, a generation and its art'. (37)

Haese not only focused on the art but on the artists' lives, giving a vivid sense of the times - the Depression and the war years, as well the political and artistic disputes, the networks of friendship and patronage that shaped the era and the literary publications in which Tucker and other artists participated as well as the paintings. Haese created a generous, complex and adroitly realised overview, a benchmark in writing about Australian culture.

For the first time, Tucker's role as an artist-intellectual was properly and positively investigated. Due to Haese's broad canvas, however, Tucker could be but one player in a large cast. Nonetheless, Haese placed Tucker at the
centre of the Melbourne art world, sketching his background, his self-motivated training, his involvement in the Contemporary Art Society and Angry Penguins, the significance of Images of Modern Evil and assessing his position as a formidable figure in Melbourne's cultural scene.

Haese also recognised that 'Tucker's developing conception of his painting in 1943 and his sense of its social role can be located within the general ambit of surrealism'. (38) But Haese did not have the opportunity to examine Tucker's complex personal relationships, particularly with Hester, to account for the reasons that surrealism was a fecund influence on Tucker.

The following year, James Mollison, director of the National Gallery of Australia and Nicholas Bonham produced Albert Tucker, published jointly by Macmillan and the National Gallery of Australia. It comprised interviews with the artist and paintings, drawings and watercolours from the NGA collection. It provided a useful primary source document but was an entirely uncritical account of Tucker's life.

In 1990, James Mollison, then director of the National Gallery of Victoria, assisted Jan Minchin, curator of Australian art, with organising Albert Tucker, A Retrospective. Once again, Mollison did an interview with Tucker that was edited and published, covering much of the same ground that was addressed in his previous book.

More recently Christopher Allen in Art in Australia (1997) dealt briefly and superficially with Tucker. Allen's odd summary of Images of Modern Evil described the series as 'the most contemporary dramatic image of non-work or work perverted'. (39) He did not contextualise Tucker's role as an artist-intellectual or account for the influences to which Tucker's art was subject. But Allen did draw attention to an aspect which problematised Tucker's art for many critics. 'Tucker's artistic vision was driven, and
ultimately distorted, by anger (art cannot feed on hate alone)'. (40) But without examining Tucker life and artistic sources such statements are meaningless.

As a feminist art historian, I was aware of the influence that gender brings to bear on the life of the artist and the work of art. My research for Australian Women Artists, 1840-1940, Joy Hester and Dear Sun had alerted me to the social, economic and personal differences in the lives of male and female artists. I had been keen, in my previous research, to examine incongruities in education, professional attitudes and expectations, iconography, media and the personal lives of women artists.

Writing for the first time about a male artist, one whose work I admired and whom I knew well, I did not choose to take a 'feminist' position but, given my concerns regarding Tucker's attitude towards the feminine, it would necessarily be one where gender was an emphasis. I sought texts that would assist me in this project.

Significant Others (1993) edited by Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron charts the nature of artistic 'companionships', the roles of gender and sexuality, social stereotypes and identity in artist couples including Camile Claudel and Auguste Rodin, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst and Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg.

I was particularly interested in the Carrington-Ernst relationship which corresponded with Tucker and Hester's and occurred at precisely the same time in Europe. Both were surrealist painters, Ernst was the older, more successful one who drew Carrington into the prestigious surrealist circle. As Susan Rubin Suleiman wrote, for Carrington 'meeting Ernst had an inestimable importance. Here was a major artist whose work she understood and admired and who took her own work seriously...Literally, he brought her
into a new life'. (41) Correctly, Suleiman points out that 'it is important to acknowledge the positive consequences of recognition by an established, male "authority" before dwelling on the disadvantages'. (42)

Sulieman's view corresponded to my own that Hester and Tucker had discovered beneficial creative elements in their relationship, even though Tucker was the 'father figure' who dominated the relationship by his age, artistic maturity and force of personality. That Hester left Tucker suggested to me that Hester may have reached an artistic blossoming that incited her to seek a freer creative environment. It also suggested that while Hester seemed the 'junior partner', Tucker was emotionally dependent on Hester in ways which would have consequences for both his life and his painting.

In previous accounts of his art, Tucker has been assessed in by what he shared or did not share with his male peers that included Nolan, Boyd and Perceval. No-one had examined the role that Hester may have played in influencing Tucker's art. Indeed, it is likely that, given prejudices and stereotypes regarding women artists, anyone had thought she could influence his art. Significant Others provided an approach where the complexities of artistic partnerships and and collaborations were explored.

Texts by Jungian influenced writer and academic David Tacey also proved useful. My assessment of Tucker is not strictly 'Jungian' but draws, at crucial passages in Tucker's art and life, on a rich store of classical mythology and symbolism, employed by Jung in his psychoanalytic practice and later in his writings. The Jungian emphasis in Tacey's Patrick White, Fiction and the Unconscious (1988) provides a mythic, archetypal reading of creative endeavour while Remaking Men, The Revolution in Masculinity (1997) addresses the influence of social and spiritual masculine 'authorities'.
Tucker himself was directly influenced by Jung, which assisted in the formation of his 1943 essay "Art, Myth and Society" that criticised the cultural policies of the Communist Party and that privileged myth and the spiritual as the true domains of art. Surrealism, Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* and, finally and most importantly, Jung had acquainted Tucker with the notion of the unconscious at work in artistic production. It also indicated Tucker's personal responsiveness to such issues and his interest in examining them in his art.

Finally, Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae* (1990) is a provocative, idiosyncratic and robust account of aspects of Western civilization that insists on a myth-influenced and gendered reading of culture that I found particularly useful in my analysis of Tucker's post-1950 paintings.

3. Methodology

As the PhD focussed not only on Tucker's art but on the interface between his art and his life, I wished, wherever possible, to use primary source material. Though I read in the area of Jungian and gender-oriented studies, I did not wish to operate within the confines of a narrow theoretical perspective.

I elected that Tucker's paintings, together with crucial facts from his own life, would determine the direction of the thesis. The thesis would therefore be chronological, starting with his earliest extant works, following through to the paintings he produced for his 1960 Museum of Modern Art retrospective.
Thus an important focus of my research was Tucker himself and, by extension, on his friends, family and colleagues. Firstly, I compiled interviews so I could cite the artist's own words about his life, times and art as well as interviewing those who had a direct involvement with him. These included Professor Bernard Smith, John Perceval, Yvonne Boyd, Lady Mary Nolan, Yosl Bergner and Michael Keon, all of whom had known Tucker since the late 1930s and early 1940s. In all, I interviewed forty people about Tucker in the course of my research.

As I had previously interviewed Tucker regarding Hester, I was also able to incorporate those earlier interviews. I was aware and had done significant research on the historical period Tucker and Hester shared, and on certain mutual artistic and literary interests, such as expressionism and TS Eliot. My research on Hester also allowed me to trace links between their art at specific, important times, especially mid-1945.

I was also most fortunate to have Albert Tucker's encouragement and support in my research. Tucker had a keen interest in history and genealogy and enjoyed my research into his family background. When I found the house in Yarraville where his mother had grown up, he suggested we drive out there so he could photograph it. We also visited and documented his grandfather's home in MacKean Street, North Fitzroy and the places he had lived in Malvern, the inner city, East Melbourne, Jolimont, Elwood and St Kilda.

Tucker was a mesmerising storyteller and he was not averse to telling the same story many times, giving me the opportunity to question him often about the same incidents and issues. Until shortly before his death, he also had an excellent memory. Tucker's constant co-operation and involvement in this thesis cannot be overestimated. He loaned me catalogues, books and
photographs as well as taking photographs of his paintings for me. We spent a great deal of time together and there was nothing he would not do to help me.

My research on Hester also meant that I had a pre-existing network of Hester and Tucker's associates. Those whom I had not previously interviewed but who were relevant to my research knew of my work and, when I approached them, agreed to be interviewed.

In 1999, shortly before his death, Tucker assisted me in planning my trip to England, France and Italy to document the places where he had lived and worked. Tucker's sojourn in Europe and New York lasted from 1947-1960. Though I did not expect to be able to interview people who knew Tucker in London, Paris, Noli, Grottaferrata and Rome, I felt it was important to visit the streets, sites and vistas that inspired his paintings.

During Tucker's period in Europe, his choice of subject matter changed, as did his colour range, materials, influences and the scale of his paintings. Tucker returned to Australia a different painter and though the moral impulse at the center of his art was unchanged, its form was vastly different.

Once again, Tucker was helpful, recollecting, as far as his memory would allow, the hotels and apartments where he had lived as well as the artworks and landscapes that inspired him. Sadly, my trip took place after Tucker's death so I was unable to share its fruits with him.

I was most grateful to receive a travel study grant from Deakin University which made the trip possible in May-June 2000. I literally traced Tucker's footsteps in London: a letter he had written to Sunday and John Reed, his patrons, gave me his exact route on his first day in London. In the National Gallery I saw works by Renoir, Van Gogh and El Greco that excited Tucker.
In London, I stayed with Darleen Bungey who is writing the authorised biography of Arthur Boyd, Tucker's longtime friend and colleague. Ms Bungey introduced me to Nicholas Usherwood who has done significant research on Sir Sidney Nolan. Ms Bungey, Dr Usherwood and I had several stimulating discussions about our research. Dr Usherwood also alerted me to Alannah Coleman's Papers held in the Tate Gallery Archives which documents exhibitions by Australian artists in London from the 1950s and which I found to be useful for my research.

In Paris, I found and documented the places where Tucker had lived and painted, as well as the Left Bank gallery where he had had a solo exhibition, before travelling to Noli, a fishing village on the Italian Riviera, where Tucker lived in 1953. Tucker's contact with Christian and Biblical imagery begins at Noli. In Rome, I was fortunate to interview Tristano Nibbi, the son of Gino Nibbi, who gave Tucker a solo exhibition at his Rome gallery in 1954. Tristano recalled both Tucker and his show. I also visited Grottaferrata, a village in the Alban Hills where Tucker lived, and found Tucker's apartment in Rome.

Due to the European trip, my appreciation of Tucker, of the difficult circumstances in which he managed to live and to make art in those years was considerably enhanced.

My other primary source material was found in the letters between Tucker and Nolan, the Reeds and Hester. Letters between Tucker and the Reeds provided an excellent document of Tucker's life, thoughts, art and creative inspiration between 1947 and 1960, as did his letters with Nolan. Letters between Tucker and Hester in 1942, while Tucker was in the army, and in 1947, while Tucker was in Japan, also alerted me, not only to aspects
of Tucker's personal life, but to Tucker's responses to social and cultural change.

Since enrolling at Deakin University, I have had an excellent opportunity to write fulltime about one of Australia's most significant painters whose work has never before been thoroughly investigated. Dr Robert Haysom and Professor David Walker have constantly provided encouragement and beneficial criticism. An Australian Postgraduate Award has meant I have been able to devote myself entirely to the thesis, producing a work that, I hope, addresses Tucker's art and life with respect, honesty and scholarship.
Notes


8. ibid.


10. op.cit.,p.255.

10. ibid.


12. ibid.
13. ibid.
14. ibid.
15. ibid.
16. ibid.
17. ibid.
18. Robert Hughes. E-mail. 3.1.2001.
20. ibid.
21. ibid.
22. ibid.
23. ibid.
24. ibid.
25. ibid.
26. ibid.
27. ibid.
29. See Chapter 18 'A New Life' for a detailed account of the critical response to Tucker's later work.
31. ibid.
32. ibid.
33. ibid.
34. op.cit., p.30.
35. op.cit., p.68.
36. ibid.
40. ibid.
42. ibid.
1. Family Life

'It's only a paper moon,
Hanging over a cardboard sea,
But it wouldn't be make-believe
If you believed in me.'
1930s popular song

Albert Tucker was a Depression child, inheriting the pessimism and anxiety of a generation. He also inherited a quality equally as strong and quintessentially Australian, a belief in making his own luck against the odds. There was little enough good fortune at home.

Behind a facade of suburban gentility, the Tuckers hid a family life of quiet desperation. They moved constantly, seven times in fourteen years, the moves set against a background of the Depression, of constant bickering and financial troubles. From struggling to be middle-class, the Tuckers fell on hard times and never recovered. It was a galling lesson for Clara, one she bitterly conveyed to Bert, her youngest child.

John and Clara Tucker were a mismatched couple: he was a sombre, modest, unworldly man while she was a sensitive, ambitious and imaginative woman, filled with yearnings. Clara decided the family was destined for better things, even if married life seemed no more than an endless grind of moves, squabbles and penny-pinching. Depression was the era - and it was also the atmosphere of the Tucker household.

'‘My mother had middle-class aspirations’, Tucker reflected, ‘and it had the effect of de-classing me. There was the awful anxiety and tension of not
enough money to sustain that lifestyle'. (1) Clara clung to her values and insisted Bert did the same. (1a) As far as Bert was concerned, his father wasn't up to the task. John 'dropped right out'. (1b) It meant Bert 'didn't fit into the middle class because I was too poor, and I couldn't function with the working class because I was conditioned to different values and aspirations. In a sense, I was broken loose from my social moorings...I was alienated'. (1c)

Clara's life was rife with dashed hopes. First, she was disappointed in her husband's inability to succeed, to create the comfortable, bourgeois life she craved. Nor did Clara did form satisfactory relationships with Jack, her older boy and Ida, her daughter. Ida, the oldest, was forthright and strong-willed: mother and daughter clashed. Clara found Ida haughty and cool, Ida thought her mother was a doormat. (2) Vague and timid, Jack was cast in his father's mould. With his thin, sad face and enormous ears, Jack resembled a sad pixie. Clara lavished her attention - and her ambitions - on Bert.

It was reciprocal and Bert formed a passionately devoted relationship with his mother. To him Clara was a central loving force, a moral centre, an affectionate and generous person, maternal, patient, gentle and biddable, his model of all a good woman should be. Over the years, Tucker often wistfully remarked to me that the only time he was truly happy with a woman was with his mother. 'She was my ideal'. (3)

Bert's connection with his father was less defined and satisfactory. There was a sense that John simply wanted to be left alone. John might have lived up to his obligations as head of the family by having a steady job but he was passive, emotionally unavailable, providing no guidance or inspiration. John's failure to provide in the manner Clara yearned for led to persistent arguments and a domestic atmosphere of simmering discontent.
John was an undergear repairer with the Victorian Railways. A semi-skilled job, the wage was just below that of a tradesman and in the mid-20s, he was paid 17 shillings a week. (3a) His work involved checking and repairing the bogies or pivoted trucks supporting the railway carriage, together with the undergear of wheels, brakes and suspension. Requiring a set vocabulary of mechanical know-how and an eye for precision, it was a job he kept for life. In 1929, when Bert left school, John pressed Bert to join him on the railways. Bert disdained the idea.

John's own upbringing was worlds apart. His father, Albert Lee Tucker, Bert's namesake, was not only an MLA for more than twenty years he was also Minister of Lands in the Service-Berry government and twice mayor of Fitzroy. (4) Albert Lee's father had migrated from Devon in 1842, a region where Tuckers had lived since the seventeenth century.

Albert Lee was a robust and confident man, toughly handsome, broad-chested and thickset. A shrewd politician, he negotiated Fitzroy's first municipal loan, known as 'Tucker's loan', (4a) which led to improvements in North Fitzroy, an area where he had made significant property investments. (5) He was born in 1843 on the site of the Fitzroy town hall. (5a) The foundation stone bears his name - the loan had also paid for its construction.

During the boom of the 1880s, Albert Lee built 'Colebrook', a splendid mansion at 223 MacKean Street, North Fitzroy, designed by Olaff Nicholson, the architect of the day, to house his brood of twelve. His politics were middle of the road, liberal protectionist. Albert Lee promoted strong tariffs to protect local industries and took every step to look after the small independent entrepreneurs like himself. When the Progressive Political League, a forerunner of the ALP, tried to muscle in on the Fitzroy scene, Albert Lee staunchly opposed it, citing the party as divisive, setting class
against class. (6) He won the day but at the turn of the century, Albert Lee was defeated and the PPL swept in. (6a)

Albert Lee began as a canny, enterprising businessman of marvellous Melbourne who became a respected civic leader. Local ties led him to play an active role in neighbourhood sporting and community groups while in parliament he put forward succinct, pragmatic views about the larger issues of the day, public works schemes that transformed Melbourne like the building of the cable tram system. (7) Capable and energetic, he chaired several royal commissions and inquiries from Victoria's financial system to its state forests and timber reserves. (7a) A freemason, Albert Lee was also a temperance advocate and it furthered his early political career. (8) Temperance supporters helped elect him to council in 1870 and he repaid them by chairing and attending their meetings. An astute investor in the property market, his fortune did not collapse even when the land boom did.

Until his midtwenties, John had lived at home, his duties no more onerous than driving his busy father into parliament in the family gig. Perhaps it was Albert Lee who insisted his son find work and, for a few years around the turn of the century, John was a labourer at the Victorian Railways North Melbourne yard. The seventh child with brothers who followed professional careers, John must have appeared a less than promising prospect to his father.

In 1902, Albert Lee collapsed and died of a stroke in the drawing room at 'Colebrook'. His father's death released a spurt of ambition in John and he quit the railways. His inheritance of one hundred pounds helped, too, though it was hardly a princely sum. (9) Having died intestate, Albert Lee's assets were valued at five and a half thousand pounds. Divided ten ways (two
siblings had died) it didn't go far but it was enough for John to open a stationer's first in Collins Street, then Elizabeth Street, Melbourne.

'John Henry Tucker & Co - Stationers' was proudly announced on his pale-green business card. John specialised in printing and bookbinding along with selling quality writing and printing paper. But he was no businessman. He went bust and by 1906 he was running a newsagent's in Nicholson Street, Fitzroy in a building that had been owned by his father. After a few years, John found that the early hours didn't suit him and, defeated, he returned to the North Melbourne yard where he stayed. 'Our whole life from then on was a gentle slide down hill', Tucker reflected. (10)

Not long after John retired in 1941, he died of a heart attack. Bert accompanied his father in the ambulance to the hospital. During the journey, John sat up and slowly looked around him in despair. 'Shit,' he muttered and lay down again. (11)

Clara Davis had grown up, the only daughter and youngest child among five brothers, in the little town of Kangaroo Flat, just outside Bendigo, in the heart of the Victorian goldfields. (12) James, her father, was a carpenter who had made a living on the goldfields first at Ballarat, then Bendigo. But the tempo of the rush had slackened by 1877, the year that Clara was born, even if the residents of Ballarat were happy to have their main street dug up to find more gold. (13) James and his wife Maria joined the thousands of families flooding into Melbourne as the goldfields' boom declined. He chose a suburb where a man was guaranteed work.

By 1899 James and his family were living at 90 Francis Street, Yarraville, a workingclass suburb in Melbourne's west. Like its next door neighbour Footscray, Yarraville was heavily industrialised, its serried skyline of factories and chimneys towering above the Maribyrnong River. There were
the sugar, tanning, fertiliser and ropeworks factories, together with metals and machinery, and the sprawling Yarraville woollen mills. Factories had their own elite groups of artisans where James, along with coopers, blacksmiths and plumbers, not only found work but enjoyed status. (14)

Francis Street divided the workers cottages from the factories and the quarries lining Stony Creek where each day, a tide of workers would flow from the cottages to the river front and the Creek. 'Everyone their own landlord in progressive Footscray' boasted an auction notice and the home ownership ideal was widespread, giving the area the highest home ownership levels in Melbourne. (15) It was certainly an ideal Clara ascribed to.

But a visitor to the area in the late 1880s found it 'painfully flat.' (16) There was 'little to relieve a suburb wreathed in clouds of smoke from factory chimneys, pitted with quarries, flourishing with Bathurst burr and grazed at will by flocks of wild goats which made a beeline for cottage gardens'. (17) The streets were dusty or muddy and treeless, the yards empty except for washinglines heavy with bedlinen, workclothes and nappies. Even Yarraville's most loyal admirers had to admit it stank to high heaven.

But it was the right move for the Davis family and they flourished. Apart from Arthur, the black sheep, Clara's four older brothers pursued solid careers as bank managers and police officers. (18) Clara was a dreamy, sensitive girl, the cherished youngest child, with a slim frame, an oval face and large, soulful eyes. Even when she smiled, she looked wistful.

Marrying into the Tucker clan, with tales of the illustrious Albert Lee, made Clara feel her own fortunes would rise. But, when they married in 1906, John didn't have the deposit for a home, so they moved in with Clara's
parents. The little weatherboard house in Francis Street must have been near to bursting with four adults and two infants. Ida Isabelle Lee was born in 1909 and John (Jack) Frederick Lee in 1913. Albert Lee, named for his grandfather, was born on December 29, 1914.

Clara had her sights set on the other side of the Yarra, and in 1919 the Tuckers moved to Malvern. It must have signalled an exciting fresh start, away from smelly, industrialised Yarraville, proof to Clara her dreams were coming true.

Malvern, with its imposing Victorian houses graced by well-kept gardens, its quiet, leafy streets, parks and private schools was a haven of bourgeois taste and conviction. The Tucker home at 1 Kingston Street, East Malvern wasn't grand, just a simple weatherboard but Kingston Street was close to the green expanse of Central Park with its massive eucalypts, oaks and beeches.

For Bert 'East Malvern was quite marvellous because it was all bush across Burke Road and this is where I played as a child...Now it's a middle-class suburb with hardly a gum tree in sight but when I was there as a child my memory of it was bush and flocks of parrots bursting out of the grass...and the grass would be up to my chin'. (19)

Before long, however, money problems erupted. John and Clara could not meet the repayments on Kingston Street, they lost the house, and by 1924 they were living above a shop in Glenferrie Road. There were two further moves before, on the eve of the Depression, they scraped together the deposit to buy a house at 11 Fraser Street. But they fell short again and lost that house, too. John was devastated. After the news, Bert found his father crouched over the gulley trap, his face white, physically sickened by the event. (20) They never owned their home again.
In 1931 the Tuckers were renting the first floor of a big Victorian terrace at 8 Valentine Grove. Their last move took place in the mid-30s when Clara spotted smart, new apartments being built opposite the railway line down from Valentine Grove and the Tuckers moved into 1/Leeton Court at 69 Wattletree Road.

Clara and John's generation survived the trauma of the first world war and entered the 1920s with renewed optimism about the future. Ambitions arose about a stylish life centred on a home complete with the modern electrical gadgets imported from Britain and America. It was a vision that dovetailed with Clara's. Women's magazines promoted the new appliances - the washing machines and refrigerators that promised freedom from drudgery. They also promoted the image of the New Woman who, fashionably coiffed and attired, was in a privileged position to indulge in leisurely pursuits, even to combine motherhood with a career. (21)

The reality, of course, was rather different for Clara, as for most women of her generation. The Tuckers made do with an an ice-chest and washing was a laborious task, wet clothes heaved from the copper to the mangle in the backyard laundry. Clara was keen on the Leeton Court flat because it had some of the mod cons, including an indoor toilet. Clara's plans to start her own business and run a cake shop in Wattletree Road came to nothing and, while perhaps it rankled, like most married women she stayed at home. Malvern, Kew, and Sydney suburbs like Burwood and Strathfield, were desired destinations in the 20s for the middleclasses quitting the crowded 'unhealthy' inner suburbs. (22) John's occupation, too, was the norm. Most Australians were engaged in manual labour or some form of trade. Clerical or managerial jobs were few and far between. (23)
Tucker family, Malvern, c.1933
From left: Ida, Jack, Clara, John and Bert
Malvern was where Clara was determined to stay. Despite the Tuckers' unpredictable fortunes which took them gipsying around the suburb, Clara clung to her notions of respectability. John's suggestion, during one financial crisis, that they shift to North Melbourne, was dismissed outright. (24) Apart from being a cheaper suburb in which to buy or rent, John was probably tired of the long trek between home and the North Melbourne yards each day. But Clara would have none of it. She may have been down on her luck but she clung to her emblem of honour, a social rank bequeathed by the east side of the Yarra.

Not that Clara was ever in the position to entertain grandly. Apart from occasional visits from the Tucker and Davis clans, Clara's only regular guests were two genteel elderly ladies with whom she took tea.

Clara and John were not great readers but on the family bookshelves were McKinley's *Explorations in Australia* and Pears Encyclopaedia, together with books of parliamentary debates inherited from Albert Lee. (24a) As a child, Bert preferred comics like *Tiger Tim, Chum, Sexton Blake, The Gem* and *The Magnet*. 'I'd get tuppence a week to buy one of those. I couldn't buy them all'. (25)

George Johnston was also growing up in nearby Elsternwick in the 20s and 30s. Recalling those years in *My Brother Jack*, he had no illusions about the suburban dream. 'What was so terrifying about these suburbs was that they accepted their mediocrity. They were worse than slums. They betrayed nothing of anger or revolt or resentment...they had no suffering, because they had mortgaged this right simply to secure a sad acceptance of a suburban respectability'. (26)

When the Depression came, it exacerbated the Tuckers' financial problems. 'We ate ate badly and paid the rent and had virtually nothing else....It took
the wages of three males just to survive. We ate bulk foods: potatoes, bread, sausage meat, semolina - you know those cheap, bulk carbohydrate foods - and practically never saw fruit or greens'. (26a) It was a time of tremendous anxiety and it affected Bert deeply. 'There was a dreadful scramble for survival which traumatised a lot of people', he recalled. 'Even now it's no effort for me to be instantly back in a state of insecurity and terror and anxiety. Just a flick of the switch and I'm back experiencing it full force'. (26b)

The poverty, mass unemployment, social turmoil and despair generated by the Depression traumatised an entire generation. George Johnston noted it was 'out in the suburbs mostly that one came to see it...a time of sad and terrible human degradation for which there seemed to be no remedy'. (27)

The Depression had a deeper and more lasting impact on Australia because of a greater gap between normal conditions and those of the Depression years than existed elsewhere. (28) Australia's dependence on world prices for wheat and wool and the drying up of overseas loan funds ensured that 'the great Depression lasted longer and caused more misery than in most countries, even if marginally so.' (29)

Those years underscored the pressures at home: the fights and the money problems, the irritations and the fear, the unnerving sense of instability. Yet materially the Tucker were quite comfortable. There were three men in the family to shoulder the burden and Clara to keep house. At Valentine Grove, they managed to pay their rent and they didn't face eviction, a terrifying reality for many. The Depression may have straitened the Tucker's way of life but it did not tear them apart. They coped like many other families: pulling together and making do.
'If I want to think of a symbol for that period', Tucker reflected, 'I'd think of a pair of scummy old grey woollen socks with holes in them because my mother was eternally sitting there darning them. We didn't have nylons or synthetics and so if you have heavy wool socks they are always getting holes in them. And with three males in the family it was endless and my mother every evening would be darning away at these darn socks. They became a kind of image for the period'. (30)

Psychologically, Bert felt dislocated by the conditions. His world might have been no better or worse than many others but the atmosphere of the times poisoned him with a feeling of dread, one that never left him, making him declare 'I have never felt secure'. (30a) While 'to external eyes, I was normal' within him was 'a feeling of floating in a void, about to be consumed by vast and hostile forces'. (31) It encouraged him to be self-motivated and self-interested, a hoarder of necessities, obsessively careful about money, constantly worried that circumstances could suddenly turn against him and outwit him. The Depression taught Bert to be vigilant, apprehensive and parsimonious. In his own mind, he lived in a constant state of threat.

But at the end of 1929 when Bert left school, he was 'walking on air'. (32) He was nearly fifteen. He had loathed school since the day he had started at Spring Road state school and felt that any education he received had to be belted into him. 'We'd be given twenty words to spell when we left school...and next morning we'd be tested on those twenty words and for each one that was wrong you had a cut with a strap..Sometimes you got three or four wrong and that was a very painful episode. And so I became a good speller very smartly'. (33)

A lively, cocky kid, Bert got into playground fights. One left him with a broken cartilage in his nose which he managed to disguise from Clara. His
capacity for drawing made him excel at art but apart from that, school was a
dead loss. He left, having failed the year with arithmetic 'still pending'. (34)

School did have one benefit. It was where Bert realised he wanted to be
an artist. 'I think I was five years old...and I remember standing at the
corner of the schoolhouse, which was a white weatherboard, the sun was
shining on it and I was just standing there and I was thinking, "What do I
want to go to school for? I don’t like being at school. What am I doing here?
I'm going to be an artist so what do I want to go to school for?"' (35)

Though Tucker often said he was forced to leave school due to the
Depression, this was not the case. (35a) He left because he wanted to. (35b)
Encouraged by Clara, Bert decided to try out his talents by entering a
drawing competition in a newspaper. The prize was a year's free tuition at
Leyshon White's School of Commercial Art at 226 Little Collins Street. (36) To
Bert's delight and Clara's pride, he won. Despite its fancy name, White's
studio 'trained' fledgling commercial artists by having them complete
White's jobs for nothing.

Together with White's, Bert also spent a day each week learning
carpentry at Swinburne Technical College, Hawksburn. It was an education
that well equipped him for the privations of life as a Depression artist.

Bert's talent for drawing was recognised 'as soon as he put pen to paper'.
(37) The Arendsen sisters, Clarice and Unnie, Bert's neighbours in Malvern,
were impressed by the clever little drawings of Mickey and Minnie Mouse
that Bert sketched in their autograph books. (38) Stan Gin (1928, Collection
the artist), Tucker's first extant drawing, is a sketch of the Chinese boy who
sat next to him in class. Bert isolated the boy's features that interested him -
the undulating profile, the slanting eye and brow - while the rest is
undeveloped and cursory.
The Lodestar

In Sydney yesterday 500 men and boys clamored and fought for six factory jobs whilst on the N.S.W. coal fields 20,000 miners are out on strike.
At 15 Bert wanted to become an artist but 'I really didn't know what an artist was. I used to think Sam Wells, a cartoonist on the Melbourne *Herald*, was the apogee of artistic achievement...that if one was successful, eventually you might become the *Herald* cartoonist'. (39)

As a public commentator with a daily cartoon on the *Herald's* editorial page, Wells provided an interesting model of a contemporary and a socially conscious artist. His vigorously drawn cartoons were populist, sentimental, melodramatic and politically conservative. In *The Lodestar* hands strain for a star emblazoned with the words 'The Job'. Below it reads, "In Sydney yesterday 500 men and boys fought and clamoured for six factory jobs whilst on the NSW coal fields 20,000 miners are out on strike." (40) In *The Tug-of-War* the hapless figure of the Civilised World is caught between a grimly determined Spirit of War and the major European nations plus Japan. 'It begins to look as if the boys will save him by pulling together' is the fortifying message. (41) For Wells, apparently, Australia had no role to play in global power games.

As Bert developed as an artist, Wells was discarded as a mere adolescent foible - but the example of the artist as moralist became an intrinsic part of Tucker.

Bert began to train himself. It was the beginning of his long, self-generated apprenticeship. He made a little wooden contraption, that, strapped to his chest, opened out into a support for his drawing pad. Each morning he would set off to sketch at the Malvern Cricket Ground or a local park, and then return home in time for school or work. He also painstakingly copied photographs of movie stars from *Screen* magazine, bought at the New Malvern cinema. Jack was baffled at his younger brother's labours. Why
would anybody waste their time drawing? Bert had been given a set of
paints but, at five, they were little more than playthings.

The gift came from Uncle Arthur who lived for a time in a tent in the back
garden at Kingston Street. Arthur, Clara's brother, had won second prize in
Tattersall's and then proceeded to drink himself to death with the booty.
(42) When the Tucker's offered him shelter, John setting up the tent and
equipping it with a wooden floor, Arthur was already ill with cirrhosis of the
liver. The Tucker's were not entirely altruistic. There was a faint hope, never
realised, that Arthur might leave them some money.

Arthur encouraged little Bert to wander into the tent. 'I still remember
looking over the floor and seeing Uncle Arthur on the stretcher bed, a forest
of bottles underneath and Uncle Arthur looked exactly like Henry Lawson.
He'd give me drinks and I would go back cross-eyed and sideways.' (43)
Clara only became aware of it when a relative pointed out Bert stank of
alcohol. Clara was horrified and forbade further visits. Arthur was 'rather
sad because he had the urge and he finished up living out in the country,
odd-jobbing round country towns, painting scenes in bars and on butcher
carts and once he worked as an undertaker's assistant'. (44)

After leaving Leyshon White's and despite the Depression, Bert did not
have difficulty finding work as a commercial artist. His first job, at a small
agency who had an account with Foy and Gibson's department store, was
pure exploitation.

'My God', Tucker remembered, 'the way I worked, doing miles of lettering
and little drawings. On Christmas Eve the boss summoned me and said,
"Tucker, you've got a lot to learn. You use too much process white. We shan't
need you any more. I'm not required to pay you anything, since you were on
trial but here's ten shillings".' (45)
Bert found a better job at T.S. Gill's shopfront and glass makers in Chapel Street, South Yarra, producing window displays for the art department. Vernon Jones, Tucker's boss at Gill's, was so impressed with his skills that, when Jones accepted a job as advertising manager at Fayrefield Hats in Abbotsford in mid-1932, he took Bert with him. (46) There Tucker helped design and construct advertising signs and display stands.

Not that Tucker thought much of his boss. Jones had employed his younger brother, Douglas. 'I painted the big displays and this younger brother nailed the wooden backs on the displays that I'd painted so they stayed up - and he got five bob a week more than I did: my first introduction to nepotism'. (47) It made Bert feel that 'when the young are introduced to injustice in their formative years it has a terrible effect on them. There's an inbuilt morality in the human being which has a natural sense of justice and a natural sense of decency which can be spoiled in this early period'. (48)

Tucker ran foul of the other staff. He couldn't afford to wear a hat and they did not approve. Management came to the rescue and gave him a hat. Bert donned it each morning - just as he approached work. (49) In 1933, when Bert left Fayrefield Hats, Sidney Nolan took his job, working there for six years, though neither was aware of each other at the time. (50)

Depression working conditions were bad. Employees were often expected to work all weekend and were paid no overtime. Tucker's resentment about the treatment of workers began to build. The Depression scarred him in more ways than one. Bert was a proud and talented young man forced into jobs he considered beneath him. Discussions with Arthur Hartney, a fellow staff member at Gill's and a member of the Communist Party, gave him a political analysis.
For Hartney, the Depression had its origins 'in the very nature of capitalism, and there is nothing accidental about it. Crises are the capitalist way of life even during its expanding period'. (51) Hartney extolled the benefits of a workers' paradise, a classless society. (52) He suggested Tucker join the Party. Bert's search for answers to the social turmoil he witnessed was mixed with his own feelings of privation and exclusion. Though impressed by Hartney's idealism, Bert's political views were still forming and, interested but unsure, he rejected Hartney's offer.

Tucker soon decided that commercial art was not for him. As a means of making money, yes, but not the challenging career he had hoped for. He found the fiddly business of ticket writing tedious and repetitive and, temperamentally, he was not suited to being told what to do.

But a piece of luck awaited Tucker when Hendrik Arendsen became his patron. Arendsen was the first in a line of talented, older, self-made men who, during the 1930s, recognised Bert's gifts and encouraged him.

The Arendsen family were neighbours in Malvern and Bert had filled Clarice and Unnie's autograph books with his sketches. Arendsen's eldest son Hendrik, known as Henny, was Bert's best friend and the boys had gone to Spring Road state school together. (53) With Molly and Patsy O'Dea, two attractive Irish sisters who lived in the next street, and two local lads known as Slimmy and Beefy, Bert and Henny made a group. It was all innocent fun-picnics, movies and skylarking around the neighbourhood.

Arendsen might have ruled his children with an iron hand but he was also cultured and talented. At The Hague's Academie van Beelende Kunsten, Arendsen had studied design, modelling and drawing before being apprenticed to a silversmith. (54) Emigrating to Australia in 1912, Arendsen
established a flourishing engraving, die-sinking and silversmith business. He was fluent in four languages and had a passion for craftsmanship. (55)

In 1932, Arendsen invited Bert to spend the Christmas holidays with his family at Emerald in the Dandenong Ranges. While the others enjoyed themselves, Bert would set off alone and spend the day painting 'gnarled old gum trees and black wattles or anything native'. (56) Arendsen, struck by Bert's talent and dedication, made him an extraordinary offer - if Bert would paint portraits of the family, Arendsen would supply him with everything he needed: a studio, an easel and palette, paint brushes and oil paint plus canvases of various sizes specially made at an art supply shop in Chapel Street. Bert accepted. Arendsen also gave Bert 15/- a week pocket money. (57) In 1933, with thirty per cent of the workforce unemployed, 15/- was a substantial sum.

Soon Arendsen had installed Bert in the unfurnished front room of the family home where he began to paint and draw for his benefactor. The Arendsen children were not impressed. Not only did Clarice and Unnie have to fidget and squirm through regular after school sittings but why should they go to school wearing odd socks when their father dispensed largesse to Bert? (58) That year, Arendsen had to cut his staff's wages to keep them on - but he managed to find enough money to pay Bert.

Arendsen had a fiery temper and he expected to be obeyed. He also felt, with his own art training, he had the right to give Bert advice. One day, as Bert was finishing Mrs Arendsen's portrait, a row broke out. 'No, that will not do!' Arendsen exploded. 'What I see is the outside of the face...I want to see the inside. Muscles, bones. There is no blood flowing beneath'. (59)

As Mrs Arendsen and Clarice scurried from the room, Bert declared that he would paint in his own fashion. Furthermore, Arendsen was only
supporting Bert because Arendsen was interested in getting a collection of Tuckers for nothing! (60) In fury, Arendsen grabbed a brush and a tin of red lead and painted all over Bert’s paintings. Then he ordered Bert out of the house.

It was an awful experience. Bert had lost a benefactor, a studio (he painted in his bedroom at home) as well as materials and money. There was also the shock of having his work destroyed. Plus Arendsen forbade Henny to contact Bert. Not that Henny complied - he continued to see Bert on the sly until his father died in 1937. (61)

During the period of Bert’s ill-starred patronage, which lasted about six months, he was working for a variety of commercial art studios. He might have dismissed Arendsen’s words in the heat of the moment but he also felt the truth in them. He hadn’t studied anatomy or drawn from the nude. Bert’s natural talent for portraits, which could have earned him a lucrative career from an early age, was tempered by a higher ambition. He wanted to be much more than a portraitist.

By July, 1933 Bert was exhibiting at the Victorian Artists’ Society and attending life drawing classes three nights a week at the VAS East Melbourne studios. It was the beginning of his life as a professional artist.

Clara was relieved her son had the talent to avoid what her husband was unable or unwilling to transcend: lifelong labour in a menial job. Bert would not work on the railways. No, not her son. When a job for a local garbage collector came up and some Tucker relatives suggested Bert apply, Clara was horrified. Nor would she allow him to receive ‘sussio’, the pittance men received as the dole, when he was between jobs. (62)

Clara entrusted to Bert her disappointments, large and small, along with her dreams for a better future. John was a hopeless failure, Ida was haughty
and cool and Jack, too much in his father's mould. Bert was Clara's confidante. If Clara could not realise her dreams, at least she could communicate them to Bert, the talented one. She felt Bert should be heir to Albert Lee's privileges and affluent life, rather than forced into undignified scrimping and scraping for survival. Clara lived through Bert, through his vigour and resolve.

Her encouragement was a mixed blessing. She taught Bert to be dissatisfied with his lot, that he was worth more than his cramped circumstances allowed, that he was better and brighter than the rest of his family and that he had a destiny. It made him ambitious, irritable, frustrated and restless.

Clara and Bert's passionately entwined relationship echoes that of Gertrude Morel and her son Paul, the senstitive, artistic protagonist of DH Lawrence's Sons and Lovers. Mrs Morel 'clung to Paul...he stuck to his painting, and still he stuck to his mother. Everything he did was for her. She waited for his coming home in the evening, and then she unburdened herself of all she had pondered, or of all that had occurred during the day. He sat and listened with his earnestness. The two shared lives'. (63)

Like Gertrude, Clara was disappointed in her husband. 'The pity was she was too much his opposite. She could not be content with the little he might be: she would have the much he ought to be'. (64) Paul Morel, too, was critical of his father's failure, his 'look of meanness and paltriness' as he aged. (65) When Paul was 'in the crucial stage of adolescence, the father was like some ugly irritant to [his] soul'. (66)

Clara's aspirations added to the family's woes. Desperate for the items of respectable middle-class taste that John's wage could not supply, she splurged and bought goods on hire purchase. The inevitable happened. There
was not enough cash to cover the repayments and debt collectors arrived at
the front door. 'Quick!' Clara would tell the children. 'Hide, or he'll see you
through the window!' (67) So Ida, Jack and Bert would scurry beneath the
table and wait, breathless, for the all clear from Clara to come out. 'We lived
in absolute terror.' (68)

Clara might have offered Bert an unconditional source of affection and
attention but, equally, she was embroiled in self-executed dramas of desire
and delusion. Her attitude created a vortex of disappointment and irritation
that John wished only to avoid. Reticent and gloomy, he was the opposite of
his articulate, driven, prosperous father, a fact Clara was probably not slow
to point out. As far as John was concerned, masculine duties were not
shunned but nor were they cherished. One simply did the best one could.

John abnegated his role, not as provider, but as father figure by retreating
to an increasingly private world, away from a family atmosphere strained by
rancour and impecunity, a situation for which he was held accountable. Clara
told Bert that it was only Albert Lee's death that had forced John to find a
job. In fact, John was already working when his father died. Bert also
believed that John 'had got quite a large inheritance but blew the lot'. (68a)
John's inheritance was small but an image of John as utterly unmotivated,
fostered by Clara, was one Bert grew up with and accepted.

As John aged, his lantern-jawed face gained an increasingly dour,
introspective cast. In John Tucker (c.1941), a photograph taken by Bert when
his father was in his 60s, John sits in the Leeton Court garden, his hair white,
a pipe clenched in his jaw, his big hands hanging limp between his thighs.
His expression is dogged, withdrawn, exhausted. Clara could not transform
her husband as the move to Malvern was meant to do. The frantic shifts
around the suburb chart not only the family's misfortunes but Clara's futile hopes that a new home would would guarantee a happier life.

In November, 1932 Jack contracted meningitis. A year older than Bert, Jack worked as a clerk in the city office of H.C.Sleigh's shipping company. One morning at three am, Clara woke Bert with the news, 'He's going!' Bert hurried to his brother's bedroom in the Valentine Grove house. (69) He laid his hand on his brother's heart to feel it flicker and cease beneath his touch. Bert's parents, grief-stricken, left contacting the doctor and the undertakers to him. Rushing next door to ring for the doctor, Bert stared at the telephone before he gingerly raised the receiver. It was the first telephone call he had made. (70) Death provided Bert's coming of age and at 18, he assumed the role of 'man of the family'.

'You know, I had to look after everything...I rang the undertakers, Drakeman and Garson in Malvern, and I remember in the morning when they came. And Jack was lying in the bed in the spare room and they asked where he was and I told them. Again, my mother and father, they were in the living room in a state of collapse.

'...It all had a very depressive and traumatic effect on me and I think a permanent effect. It was my first encounter with death under conditions that were drab and miserable and totally, you know, despairing and extremely unpleasant – as it would be anyhow but the drabness of life and the inability of my parents, you know, it burnt right into me'. (71)

Death can be a turning-point and provide illumination. For Tucker it cast sharp and dramatic shadows on his life. The pain of losing someone close was not resolved by letting go, but rather by doing the unbearable, by holding on. Clinging to what was lost, brooding on what was gone became a central, shaping impulse of Tucker's art and life. To Freud, the depression that
accompanies mourning is 'melancholia', a fixation on the loved one. (72) Like its counterpart, mourning, the work of melancholy is a long, healing process but its processes are more intricate, having a greater bearing on the life and relationships of the person involved - and, in the case of an artist, on the work produced.

In Tucker's maturity as an artist, melancholy opened a rich vein of darkness, a pre-occupation with death and decay, with degeneration and decline, with social and sexual corruption and disharmony, and it provided the content for his art for the rest of his life. For Tucker, the worm was in the apple and the surface of life, no matter how seductive or appealing, only attested to the rot beneath. Tucker's art of despair was shaped by the Depression years. Later he would reflect that his chosen subject was 'the drama and tragedy of life...this "shadow or deep pit of darkness" where "mankind lives"...To sing of death and disaster does not make for popularity I'm afraid. But it's my song and I've got to sing it'. (73)

The Depression years set Tucker's character rock-hard, proving life was unfair and he had to be on his mettle, engaged in a contest where only the quickest and sharpest survived. There was no rest, no still point, only unceasing struggle. Tucker reflected that 'the word "happiness" is meaningless. It's a very superficial notion of what life is about. I'm very happy to have the opportunity to fight the good battle...When I get to the end and find I've won more than I've lost, then this is the occasion to say I've lead a fulfilled and happy life'. (74)

Tucker was a master story-teller and his use of language was expressive, precise, verbose and dramatic. Clara, Bert's absorbed and adoring audience, watched a performance in which Bert came to excel, where the narration of fortune is refined to the level of soliloquy. Bert's command of language was
first tested on Clara and the story she encouraged him to tell was his own, the minute exposition of his hopes, fears and dreams, and his manner of delivery was rhetorical.

Over the years, I found that to be in Bert's company was to be privy to a seemingly endless monologue, a relentless exposition of his life story. Certainly he did not expect, or at times even welcome, interruptions of any kind. It seemed to be difficult for him, once his monologue was launched, to pause or respond to another's point of view. He seemed used to and comfortable with, at least in my case, an attentive and mostly silent female audience.

His story, the one he honed as Clara listened, the one he continued to tell, was that survival is a ruthless business because the negative forces, the nasty shocks and bad luck that lie in wait to conquer the person, can so easily prevail. Perserverance is a virtue but the real skill is gambler's luck, risk without guarantees. It is a scenario where self pity and self dramatisation played powerful roles.

The Depression years provided Bert's first vital test. Traditional roles were upset. A respected father was seen as a vague, incompetent man who could not shield his son from poverty or tragedy. Clara, his beloved mother and confidante, was also an erratic manager, an unhappy woman and a disappointed wife. John was unable to offer Bert the guidance or the financial support he needed. His grandfather and namesake was the desired father but Albert Lee's memory offered only fantasies of refuge and sustenance. Uncle Arthur may have aspired to be an artist but, eccentric and dissolute, he hardly offered an example. Henrik Arendsen's protection was brutally withdrawn.
The feminine, in these years, may have been represented by Clara's vain longings but at least she had ambition, the test his father had failed. That energy she passed on to her son. Mother and son shared other, less tangible qualities. With his mother, Bert shared paranormal experiences. The feminine would be connected with these heightened instances and supernatural occurrences, with intuition, mysterious connections, the evidence of a spirit world tangential to reality. Clara was the initiator of Bert's spiritual sense.

Religion was not an issue in the Tucker household. Though Clara and John were brought up Presbyterians, neither bothered with conventional church-going or with giving their children religious instruction. Clara spun Irish tales of leprechauns, evoking a pagan, animist mythology of magical reality that was more real to her, and to Bert, than Christianity.

Bert's lifelong interest in the supernatural was awakened by his mother. Clara took Bert to the Spiritualist Church as a child where, it was prophesied, Bert would become famous and would die a wealthy man. (75a) Spiritualism developed as a modern movement in the nineteenth century and its basic claim - that the dead have simply gone into another world where they communicate with the living - took off in America, then England before spreading to Australia in the 1850s. Melbourne was the centre of Australia's spiritualist activities.

Christian Spiritualist meetings are similar to evangelical church services with prayers, hymns, Bible readings and sermons but the difference is the emphasis placed on communication with the dead, with addresses sometimes given by a person in a trance and with messages relayed from the dead or from spirit guides. (75b)
One day Clara and Bert were sitting in the kitchen at Valentine Grove. Suddenly a loud crash was heard in the livingroom, as if the bookcase had fallen to the ground. When they rushed in, all was in place. Clara and Bert were convinced that spirits were involved. (76) Poltergeists, literally noisy-ghosts, manifest their presence by knockings, bumpings and by moving the furniture. Later Bert would have similar experiences with Joy Hester.

Clara had grown up with ghosts. The Kangaroo Flat house was haunted and mysterious knockings and bangings were regular occurrences. As a lad, Arthur was surprised when a sailor strolled in the back door. Arthur hurled a stone at the unlikely visitor to find that it went clean through him. (77) Bert heard other ghoulish stories, too, inherited from Maria, Clara’s mother, about Tasmanian convicts whose chains clanked dismally as they filed through the streets of Hobart. (78)

The high jinks and amusements of the jazz age didn’t make much of an impression on the Tucker household. Nor did they participate in the simple, home-made entertainments that were standard fare in the 20s: the singalongs around the piano, the church attendances, the neighbourhood social events. John and Clara kept to themselves. To Clarice and Unnie Arendsen, the couple seemed very old. (79)

But home life was not entirely bleak. Jack rigged up an amateur crystal radio set and John, keen for a bet, devoted himself to the races. On Saturday afternoons Bert and Jack crowded into the New Malvern cinema with the local kids and watched movies, serials and cartoons. Further up Glenferrie Road was the glamorous Metro Malvern with its plush scarlet seats and red and gold carpets where the latest Hollywood ‘talkies’ were screened. Bert and Jack set off on adventures to Gardiner's Creek and further afield to Ashburton Forest.
John's job at the railways also meant that he received a free railways pass with his annual leave. During the three weeks over summer, the family 'tried to get as much out of it as we could. Nearly every day we'd go out on picnics, right into Gippsland and going in all directions. So I got a good coverage of a great deal of Victoria...I think my pre-occupation with the Gippsland bush developed then because...it was really superbly beautiful and marvellous country'. (80)

Home life had other benefits, too. John was a handyman who taught Bert thrift and practical skills: how to mend his own shoes with pieces of leather and a last kept in the toolshed. John had an eye for detail and earned extra money by fixing workmates' watches. Bert inherited his father's craftsmanship: there was little he could not fix or build.

If John was punctual and reliable, he was also abstemious in his habits and behaviour. No matter how tight the budget, Clara managed to produce hot meals twice a day and the house was kept as neat as a pin.

Bert's parents might have warred but there was no chance that they would separate and in that security, Bert took comfort. 'My father and mother were always there. The food was always on the table' (81), a paradigm leading Tucker to believe that 'if the mother leaves, everything falls apart. The mother has utter centrality'. (82) Clara and John were sober, earnest and hardworking, all values Bert honoured. 'They were two very good people' even if, in retrospect, Tucker viewed them as 'weak, negative, bewildered people. It took me years to break down my narrow, rigid, upbringing...though it did give me a personal discipline and stability'. (83)

As a masculine force in Bert's life, John represented weakness and submissiveness, a particular kind of failure. At least Clara had the passion to howl about her fate. Bert inherited her anger, her un-lived dreams and, with
them, a voice that railed against inequity. Tucker's anger provided him with a powerfully articulated sense of right and wrong, of good and evil but it also lead him to deem others guilty, responsible for the reversals he suffered, whether it was entirely true or not. Even as a young man, Tucker's highly developed moral clarity made him judge, and damn, where he saw fit.

Notes
1b. ibid.
1c. ibid.
3a. I am grateful to Mr. Tom Rigg for his research into John Tucker's work records at the Victorian Railways, Melbourne
5a. Weekly Times, op.cit.
6a. ibid.
15. Lack, op.cit., p.120.
16. op.cit., p.119
17. ibid.
23. ibid.


25. ibid.


26a. Mollison and Bonham, op.cit., p.18.

26b. ibid.


29. ibid.

30. Blackman, Tucker interview. op.cit.

30a. Mollison and Bonham, op.cit., p.49.

31. op.cit., p.17.

32. Burke, Tucker interview, op.cit.

33. Blackman, Tucker interview, op.cit.

34. Burke, Tucker, interview, op.cit.

35. Blackman, Tucker interview, op.cit.


White ran his art school at 226 Little Collins Street, Melbourne. Sands and McDougall directory records. State Library of Victoria.

37. Burke, Arendsen interview, op.cit.
38. ibid.
40. Herald, 7.2.1930.
41. Herald, 22.2.1930.
42. Burke, Tucker interview, op.cit.
43. Blackman, Tucker interview, op. cit.
44. Burke, Tucker interview, op.cit.
45a. ibid.
46. Peter Jones. Interview. 1.2.00 Williamstown.
47. Mollison and Bonham, op.cit., p.18.
48. ibid.
49. Burke, Tucker interview, op.cit.
52. Burke, Tucker interview, op.cit.
53. ibid.
54. Burke, Arendsen interview, op.cit.
55. Arendsen, MS., op.cit., p. 3.
56. ibid.
57. ibid.
58. ibid.
59. Burke, Arendsen interview, op.cit.
61. ibid.
64. op.cit., p.25.
65. op. cit. p.143.
66. ibid.
67. Tucker, interview, op.cit.,
68. ibid.
68a. ibid.
69. Burke, Tucker interview, op.cit.
70. ibid.
71. Blackman. Tucker interview. op.cit.,
73. Albert Tucker to John and Sunday Reed. 23.4.1950. Reed Papers.
76. Burke, Tucker interview, op.cit.
77. ibid.
78. ibid.
79. Burke, Arendsen interview, op.cit.
80. Blackman, Tucker interview, op.cit.
81. Burke, Tucker interview, op.cit.
82. ibid. 83. ibid.
2. The Young Artist

Back in the Thirties and Forties there were about fifty square yards at the top of Melbourne's Little Collins Street where you could wear corduroy trousers without being taken for a poofer and where the sight of a beard didn't provoke a display of popular indignation. You could even get away with sandals.
Alister Kershaw. (1)

When Bert found himself a job working for John Vickery at the 'Paris' end of Collins Street in 1934, his life opened up to art, friends, books and ideas. He was drawn into an inner city bohemia of studios, cafes and bookshops, signalling his separation from Malvern, and Clara, and the definition of himself as an artist. The city offered Tucker a great deal, not only an escape from suburbia, but ultimately the inspiration for his art.

By 1934, the worst of the Depression was over and unemployment figures revealed a steady progressive movement was taking place. Misery was being replaced by cautious optimism and turmoil by a degree of social harmony. The street scuffles, eviction riots and confrontations between the police and the unemployed were diminishing. (2) Gradually, the country was returning to normal.

Vickery’s commercial art studio in Motherwell's Gateway was part of a network of studios linking artists in the inner city. Though Bert considered commercial art nothing but hackwork, during the Depression it was how many young painters not only survived but fostered personal and
professional links. Commercial art was a means of earning a living and it was also an acceptable first step to becoming an artist.

Tucker was Vickery's only employee and though Vickery gave Bert the dirty work to do - masses of small lettering - the studio itself was a charming, atmospheric place. Upstairs behind the Holly Tea Rooms in Collins Street, it was part of a block of nineteenth century bluestone stables with gabled ceilings and large windows facing a courtyard. (3) Next door was George Blay's studio, which Bert would rent.

Vickery was a minor artist but his election to the Victorian Artists Society council gave him a whiff of prestige. Artists called by the studio. The elderly Sir John Longstaff, whose studio was across the road at Tom Roberts' old address, 9 Collins Street, made one memorable appearance, and, at the other end of the artistic spectrum, so did Sam Atyeo.

Atyeo had been a star pupil at the National Gallery School and carried off a swag of prizes. He was an ebullient and argumentative larrikin, 'perpetually restless and active, articulate and never satisfied to passively accept authority'. (4) By 1934, the Melbourne art world was proving too narrow for Atyeo. He was experimenting with abstraction, designing modernist furniture and giving public lectures about art. A close friendship had developed with Sunday and John Reed, and Atyeo visited them at Heide, their newly established home at Heidelberg, with his girlfriend Moya Dyring. (5)

Atyeo was hoping to exhibit at the Sedon Galleries and needed a suitable place to show his paintings to the director. Vickery agreed to loan him the studio, and Atyeo set up the paintings, heavily influenced by Gauguin. (6) But WR Sedon was unimpressed and refused to give Atyeo an exhibition.
82  JOHN LONGSTAFF, The Arrival of Burke, Wills and King at the Deserted Camp at Cooper’s Creek, canvas, 111 x 169\(\frac{3}{4}\), 1902-7, Melbourne
Tucker, however, took a cue from Atyeo and the following year organised a two-man show at Sedon Galleries with sculptor Reuter Hall.

When Tucker met Vickery's other visitor, Sir John Longstaff it was rather like shaking hands with God. Longstaff arrived at Vickery's in a bowler hat, every inch the English gentleman. (7) Longstaff's enormous, gloomy painting *The Arrival of Burke, Wills and King at the Deserted Camp at Cooper's Creek* (1902-07) had already made a deep impression on Tucker.

*The Arrival of Burke and Wills* remains the most popular image of the explorers. Measuring nine feet by fourteen, it was the largest painting to enter the National Gallery collection and it hung on permanent display. (8) Despair engulfs the explorers as they discover no help awaits them at Cooper's Creek. The search party has gone and, weakened and emaciated, the men prepare to die. The scale of the work together with its sombre palette appealed to Tucker, so did its tragic mood. Arranged in a shallow theatrical space, the explorers stage the failure of heroic endeavour, cast in the shadows of death. Expression and gesture unfold in a rhythm of misery and exhaustion and Burke's face, the pictorial focus, is a mask of terror and bewilderment. (9)

In 1968 Tucker painted his own *Arrival at Cooper's Creek* (Art Gallery of South Australia), a triptych that examines masculinity and alienation in the landscape, where the stiff and dehydrated figure of the explorer is transformed into a veined and blackened phallus. Longstaff's reading of the outback as a theatre for masculine defeat and isolation would inform the landscape paintings that dominated Tucker's art from the mid-50s on.

Longstaff was a member of the club of powerful old men who ran the Australian art world. This clique of Edwardian expatriates, including Sir Arthur Streeton, exercised a deadening effect on local art. Opposed to post-
impressionism, disgusted by Picasso, expressionism and the Fauves, insular, ill-informed and smug, their taste dominated gallery acquisitions policies, prizes, criticism and the art market. Their vision of Australia was typified not by the sparkling brilliance of the Heidelberg School but by the pastoral calm and banality of Hans Heysen, Ernest Buckmaster and WB MacInnes. They were the group of men with whom Tucker would soon be pitted in battle.

Visits from Longstaff and Atyeo gave Bert a welcome break from ticket-writing. The pay at Vickery's was a meagre one pound a week and Bert supplemented it by doing freelance illustrations for the women's magazines *Table Talk* and *New Idea*, and also *The Bulletin*, under the pseudonym 'Tuk'.

At 19, Bert was still living at home and painting in his bedroom. His apprenticeship as an artist began in 1933 when he started life drawing classes at the Victorian Artists Society. By July, Bert had exhibited in two VAS group shows. The classes, apart from a minimal donation that included joining the VAS, were free. There were no teachers, simply the facilities provided.

For the next seven years Tucker attended the VAS three evenings a week. It was his art school, the place where he met other young painters and where he would be discovered as an artist. Bert's training was entirely self-imposed and from the start he was rigorously disciplined about it. Joy Hester might have been a gifted student but her attendance at the Gallery School was erratic, though she was rather better than Sidney Nolan who treated the entire exercise with a dilettanteish indifference. 'Sex and ping pong' was Nolan's summary when asked what he had learned at the Gallery School.
A sense of high purpose marked Tucker out as a young man. Behind him were the grim, unsettled years in Malvern and the death of his brother. The Depression years were a harrowing experience for Tucker, never to be expunged. As far as Clara was concerned, Bert was a young prince disinherited of all that should be his - wealth and prestige, the grand birthright of Albert Lee Tucker. Clara's dreams helped Bert to shape a vision of himself, not only as worthy of success, but as impatiently waiting to claim it. Even as a young man, Bert had few doubts either about his talents or his destiny.

Malcolm Good, a fellow student at the VAS, recalled Tucker was 'ambitious. He had a conception of himself as a professional artist with a career and a market ahead of him. It was very unusual at the time'. (12) Another student remembered that 'he didn't horse around and fool around like the rest of us adolescents did'. (13) Tucker reflected that 'apparently I was a very bug-eyed, obsessive, anxiety-ridden, aggressive young character at the time and beginning to think and argue and talk'. (14)

Bert was appointed class monitor at the VAS evening classes, meaning he set the model's poses. He had an instinctive feeling for it and students remember his 'brilliant' ability to not only choose the right pose but the correct length of time for students to sketch. (15) He was competent, rather bossy and well in control of the class. 'That pose will be right,' Bert would announce. (16)

The classes were held at VAS headquarters in Albert Street, East Melbourne, a gracious, nineteenth century romanesque revival building, with stained glass panels over an entrance decorated with palette, brushes and a bust of Michelangelo. A dozen or so students, mostly amateurs and a few art students, crammed into the low-ceilinged room under the stairs three nights
a week. While Tucker was class monitor, Alan Warren, Maidie McGowan, Laurie Veal and Malcolm Good attended classes regularly. Joy Hester's close friend Joy Murphy met her husband John there. Hester would arrive a year later, an escapee from the Gallery School. It was where her own expressive drawing style developed.

Young Apollo was a favourite model. A local weightlifter, known for stunts like pulling a tram along the tracks by his teeth, Young Apollo was small and enormously muscly. He swore by his staple, Weeties for breakfast. (17) Young Apollo would strike poses with a staff while decorously clad in a loincloth. Male models did not pose naked.

The drawing class was a social occasion, too. 'We all told our life stories, our love stories, at the drop of a hat', Joy Murphy recalled. (18) But not Bert. He was reserved about his personal life and didn't share in the gossip. Good looking, well-turned out with immaculately polished shoes, his appearance was of a different order to the casual, op-shop inspired artiness of the other students. 'He was the most untypical art student you could imagine...there was no oil paint under the nails'. (19) Nor did Tucker seem at ease with the young women, one of whom had a crush on him. 'Bert had the gift of the gab. He made us feel like frivolous little flibbertigibbets'. (20)

Afterwards, the students would troop off to the Holly Tea Rooms in Collins Street or to the Russian-styled Cafe Petrushka at 144 Little Collins for a supper of tea and toasted raisin bread. Petrushka, Minka Veal's 'match-boxed-size cafe', was one of Melbourne's few bohemian restaurants which served good, cheap, European cuisine. (21) It was the haunt of 'the hollow-bellied artists...a menagerie of neurotics'. (22) Regulars included Max Meldrum, Hal Porter, Arnold Shore, Nutter Buzacott, Alan Marshall and
Justus Jorgensen. Hal Porter and Colin McGowan decorated the walls with murals. (23) Bert went rarely. He simply couldn't afford it.

Maidie McGowan listened in on the conversations between Bert and Colin, her future husband, which Tucker dominated. Colin, popular and easygoing, was a commercial artist at Victory Publicity in Queen Street. A student of George Bell's, Colin was dissatisfied with his attempts at painting. Maidie, a sensitive painter who combined working at a city florist's with studying at George Bell's and attending VAS classes, respected Bert as an up and coming artist - but she also found him daunting and abrasive. (24)

Bert spent the evenings he wasn't at the VAS in the Reading Room at the State Library in Swanston Street. The Reading Room with its huge domed ceiling and glowing lights, its rows of creaking chairs and wooden desks inlaid with green leather which fanned out in a vast wheel around the hub of the librarian's raised desk was a vast, tranquil and mysterious space.

'...My real education began there', Tucker said. (24a) 'I read in there two or three nights a week for several years'. He read 'everything that I could find. Mainly, of course, I'd read all about, voraciously devour every book I could find, on art...Then I'd sort of play around with physics and philosophy and religion, but very ineffectively because I had no disciplined capacity or way of approaching it'. (24b) Now that Tucker's 'real education' had begun, he was hungry for more and, briefly, wanted to attend university. (24c) Having not even gained his Intermediate certificate, however, it was nothing short of a pipe dream but it indicates Tucker's love of an intellectual life, an avid and persistent pleasure in books, research and reading.

Bert also found that Gino Nibbi's Leonardo bookshop at 170 Little Collins Street was more than just a place to browse. A refugee from Mussolini's Italy, the genial, tubby, moon-faced Nibbi was a sophisticated commentator
on cultural issues. A contributor to *Art in Australia, Manuscripts, and Stream*, Nibbi’s were some of the first Australian essays on Picasso, Matisse, Cezanne and Giorgio de Chirico. In Rome, Nibbi had been familiar with a circle of artists and intellectuals that included de Chirico and he arrived in Australia with paintings by de Chirico, Severini and Moise Kisling under his arm.

Tucker remembered that 'Gino was a bearer of other attitudes to life and other realities...He expressed it through certain paintings he brought with him and through the bookshop. He went out of his way to import a whole lot of the postcard prints, cheap reproductions and better quality reproductions and books covering the contemporary movement because coming from the outside he instantly saw the state of Australian painting and what it needed, so he fulfilled that need. His kind of European sophistication was immensely valuable'. (25)

In wowser Melbourne, Nibbi soon ran into trouble. He displayed a print of a voluptuous Renoir nude, 'breasts and all', in the Leonardo's front window. (26) It was immediately removed by police and a furore of publicity followed, making Nibbi something of a hero to his young clientele.

Nibbi ran the shop rather like a club and everyone in the art world dropped in. George Bell was a regular, so was Sam Atyeo, Adrian Lawlor and Danila Vassilieff. Nibbi took the shy traveller Ian Fairweather under his wing, arranging assistance and commissions. (27) As the poet Allister Kershaw observed, 'about the only thing we didn't go there for was to buy books'. (28) But when a devoted reader like Vic O'Connorr expressed interest, Nibbi allowed him to take home a book and pay it off at sixpence a week. (29) The Leonardo wasn't the only place to find modern art prints and books
Arrival at Cooper's Creek
in Little Collins Street - there was the Primrose Pottery Shop at 374 and the Bookshop of Margareta Weber at 343 - but it was by far the liveliest.

Bert and Nibbi became friends. In 1954 when Nibbi had returned to Rome, and Bert was living in Italy, Tucker had an exhibition at Nibbi's Galleria ai Quattro Venti.

Tucker's hard-won, self-organised education gave him a further sense of his independence from conventional forms of tuition and reward. Bert defined himself as a loner, struggling against the odds. Joy Murphy and Maidie McGowan remember him as a loner, too, never quite fitting in with the relaxed conviviality of their group. Bert might have found himself in bohemia in the mid-30s but his meticulous appearance, dogged discipline and painful shyness with women precluded anything unconventional about his lifestyle. He was still the boy from Malvern, Clara's lad, and a clean shirt and polished shoes were the only proper manner in which a young man could dress.

Bert exhibited for the first time in the 1933 VAS autumn group show. There were few venues for art in Melbourne, making the VAS a vast grab-bag of young talent, established artists and mediocrity. Sir John Longstaff and John Vickery contributed to the exhibition along with over one hundred others including Rupert Bunny, Ernest Buckmaster and Louis McCubbin. Bert showed two watercolours of the same Malvern subject: the bridge over Gardiner's Creek. (Both now lost). The following year, Bert's contribution to the VAS Drawing Show, a head study, might have been tame but his price wasn't. At 3 guineas, he asked more than Vickery did for his Portrait and the same price as well-known watercolourist John Shirlow.

The Road to Ferntree Gully (1933, Heide Museum of Modern Art) is a small, lushly handled watercolour. Merely a sketch, it nonetheless shows
Albert Tucker *The Road to Ferntree Gully* (1933, Heide MoMA)
Tucker's light, sure treatment of medium and perspective. It was a medium that suited Tucker and for which he had an innate flair, remaining a master of the medium for the rest of his life. In *The Road to Ferntree Gully* he doesn't bother with an elaborate description of form but settles for a swift and casual annotation of road, trees and car. Even at 19, he prudently records the work's title and signature - 'By A.L.Tucker 33'. In his first year in the art world, Bert proudly signed his work, and exhibited it, under his own name which also belonged to his powerful, worldly grandfather.

But Bert's first oil painting, and thus his first statement as an artist, was a conventional and respectful study of John - *Portrait of the Artist's Father* (1933, Collection the artist). John's heavy face is in profile, his pipe clamped in his mouth and his glasses perched on the bridge of his nose, and he betrays little of the anguish that haunts Bert's photographs of him. While the portrait can be read as a gentle homage where John is perhaps reading the paper after the evening meal, in fact, the portrait is a cliche, a stereotype of a grey-haired, reliable father.

The portrait represents the divide Tucker felt about John: he should have been an authoritative, guiding, masculine force, a 'real man' of vitality, maturity and action but instead he was a caricature of Bert's expectations, a father who was weak, ineffectual and unreachable. John looks away, his eyes are obscured, his gaze shrouded. There is no contact, no connection possible. Bert wanted his father to be proud of him and he gave John the honour of being the subject of his first oil, yet the painting dissatisfied Bert and he never exhibited it.

Tucker's first major foray into the art world was a two-man show with Reuter Hallam Hall at WR Sedon's gallery at 340 Little Collins Street in October, 1935. It showcased the talents of, in Hall's case, figurative sculpture
and, in Bert's, twelve paintings and an equal number of life drawings. The paintings, aside from a still-life and a nude study, were all portraits, including one of Ida, Bert's sister, and another of Reuter Hall. Hall is a fugitive figure in Australian art, disappearing completely from view after the show. Bert and Hall had met at the VAS early in 1935.

Sedon's was a respectable gallery, and the two young men took their debut seriously. Their catalogue carried an idealistic quote from Tolstoy; 'Art is a human activity having for its purpose the transmission to others of the highest and best feelings to which human minds had risen'. The opening was a formal affair. George King, a former principal of Geelong's Gordon Institute of Technology where Hall had been a student, introduced Sir James Barrett who declared that all young artists should 'go abroad to see and judge for themselves, without being told what they should admire'. (30)

Sedon usually preferred group shows of saleable, conservative artists like Lionel Lindsay, Harold Herbert and Penleigh Boyd. As Sam Atyeo had learned, Sedon didn't take too many risks though sometimes he let his guard down. The year before in October, 1934, Sedon gave an exhibition to a talented twenty-one year-old cartoonist, Noel Counihan. (31) Like Tucker, Counihan was another young man in a hurry. Tucker and Counihan's connection would come a little later, around 1938.

When Counihan wasn't active in the Young Communist League or partying with Melbourne's leftwing bohemia at the Swanston Family hotel, he scraped a living from caricatures published in the same magazines that employed Bert - Table Talk and the Bulletin. Counihan (under the name Cunningham) was also a regular contributor to the Communist Party's newspaper, The Worker's Weekly. At the Sedon Gallery, Counihan exhibited a selection of his caricatures - which earned praise from Arthur Streeton, the venerable critic
of the Argus. (32) Nothing sold and, to Sedon's dismay, Counihan couldn't afford the fortnight's rent. In repayment, Counihan had to forfeit the entire show. (33)

Having had his fingers burned, Sedon decided to take his fees upfront with Tucker and Hall. It was the right idea because the two didn't exactly set the world on fire. But Tucker was commended by Arnold Shore. Shore was filling in for Sun critic George Bell, off in London, immersing himself in the theory and practice of modern art.

Shore and Bell, part of the small core of Melbourne's committed modernists, had started an art school in Queen Street, which was already a focus for contemporary art. Perhaps it was a nascent modernism emerging in Tucker's work that Shore considered 'healthy'. (34) Unhealthy meant Gallery School-oriented, academic style drawing. Even better was Tucker's 'definite colour sense'. (35) Shore himself was a subtle and expressive colorist. Shore criticised Hall for his lack of formal construction and linear design, principles he and Bell emphasised in their teaching.

Argus critic Louis McCubbin would have observed Tucker from his lofty heights as a VAS president. He dismissed Tucker's portraits in oil as being 'hardly up to exhibition standard, needing much more study and experience with his materials' though he granted the life drawings were 'vigorous'. (36) It was a way of pointing out that VAS life drawing classes were not, in McCubbin's eyes, enough to train a young painter. As far as McCubbin was concerned, Hall was 'the more advanced of the two'. Though Tucker showed skill as a draughtsman, sniffed the Age critic, he left a good deal to be desired in matters of colour. (37)

Bert took the criticism to heart and it generated his first real dissatisfactions with his situation. Now he desperately wanted to enrol at the
Gallery School and study painting. (38) Though Gallery School fees were cheap - two guineas a term in the day school, 10/6 for the evening drawing classes - Bert decided, unhappily, that he couldn't afford them.

It was galling to be denied a proper art education and, in his heart, Tucker may have blamed his father. While, in retrospect, Tucker would extol the value of his slow simmering, self-generated tuition, he must have realised his studies would not only have been swifter but more congenial amid like-minded souls at the Gallery School, rather than slogging it out three nights a week at the VAS and teaching himself to paint, by trial and error, with oils.

Not that the Gallery School managed to keep the many talented artists it attracted - Hester, Nolan, Arthur Boyd and Noel Counihan all left out of frustration. The course was hopelessly academic: students drew dusty, antique casts for three years until they were admitted to the Life School where, gradually, they worked their way up to painting from the nude, though clever students, like Hester, could skip a year by winning a prize. (39)

The Gallery school's subjects and categories were rigidly determined by Bernard Hall and the curriculum had remained unchanged since 1892 - the year that Hall was appointed director of the National Gallery of Victoria and head of the art school. This is not as surprising as it sounds - most of the teachers Hall selected had been trained by him. (40) But an art school does not only provide tuition. There are subtler benefits: connections and entrees to the art world so important to the young artist, a sense of camaraderie, the distinction of being noticed and praised. Out of necessity, Tucker created his networks alone.
So while the idea of art school had to be shelved, training himself as a painter became an immediate concern for Tucker. John had taught Bert some practical skills such as how to fix his shoes with last and leather. Fastidious and methodical, Bert learned all he could about the technical aspects of painting. It wasn't only poverty that motivated Bert's interest in how to mix colours and grounds and how to make his own pigments. He was determined to know more about painting than any art school trained painter. He would master it. He did. Bert studied Max Doerner's *The Materials of the Artist and their Use in Painting*. (41) Later, with the practical generosity typical of Bert in his dealings with fellow artists, he passed it on to Counihan, Boyd and John Perceval. (42)

Defining himself against his situation became both Tucker's strength and weakness. It motivated him, giving him an extraordinary determination to educate himself, to succeed, to triumph over the odds. It also made him inflexible and capable of a ruthless clarity where his own interests were concerned. In the harsh years of his apprenticeship, Bert learned to be shrewd about his own advantage. If no-one was capable of looking out for him, if his father had failed him, he would have to do it for himself. Life was 'a bloody battle-ground'. He was going to survive, whatever it took.

Bert had no close male friends and no admired artists from whom to seek advice. He had met Longstaff but Longstaff was a remote, godlike figure. Much of Bert's time was spent alone: reading, drawing and painting. His days were long. There was a brisk morning walk to Armadale station to get to Vickery's by eight am, then in the evening he would return home for tea. Then it was back into the city, walking from Flinders Street station to the VAS in East Melbourne or to the State Library. Whatever free time he had would be spent painting.
There was no intimacy in his life - except with Clara. His social life was negligible. There were no girlfriends, no experiments with the hot, sweet confusions of dating or sex. He had eyes for Molly O'Dea, the pretty, dark-haired Irish girl whose family were neighbours but, too shy, he didn't dare to reveal his feelings. His temperament and his daunting verbal skills kept the women away. The sensual aspect of his nature seemed innocent to the point of repression.

Bert remained enmeshed with Clara and no woman had dislodged her hold. Bert's ideal of femininity included sweetness, pliability, respect, quietness and uncritical, unconditional love - all of which Clara lavished on him.

Equally, Bert's painting lacked maturity and boldness. The scenes of Gardiner's Creek and Malvern, the terrain of home and family, plus some deftly handled watercolours and his earnest portrait of John comprised the compass of his artistic reach. It was a workmanlike body of work, devoid of the fire of self-knowledge. The foundation of Tucker's art was his skill as draughtsman but his exhibition revealed that, as far as the men of the art world were concerned, he had a lot to learn.
Notes
5. Atyeo proved inspiring to George Johnston who based Sam Burlington, the artist in *My Brother Jack*, on him.

'Sam Burlington adored talking; he handled words with the comic skill of a vaudeville juggler tossing Indian clubs; he loved to play with puns and flowery phrases and ludicrous images; he had that overflowing confidence in words, in verbal sleight-of-hand, which, a few years later, would have been a rich asset had he wanted to be a radio commentator, instead of sinking himself in seclusion and growing roses, the way it finally worked out'. op.cit., pp.95-6.

From the 1950s Atyeo did, in fact, live in the south of France growing roses for the perfume industry in Grasse.
7. ibid.
9. Longstaff was living in London when he was commissioned to paint *The Arrival of Burke and Wills*. Perhaps Longstaff's distance generated the painting's artistic licence: Burke had in fact collapsed in despair on reaching Cooper's Creek leaving Wills and King to dig up the cache - Longstaff shows
Burke the only one standing. Nor was the landscape the dreary wasteland
Longstaff depicted: the party had arrived in a lush season. See also Bernard
Smith, *Australian Painting, 1788-1900*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne,
1974, p.141.
11. ibid.
16. Murphy, taped interview. op.cit.
17. ibid.
18. ibid.
19. ibid.
20. ibid.
21. Hal Porter, "Melbourne in the Thirties", *London Magazine*, vol.5, no.6,
September, 1965, p.36.
22. op.cit.
23. ibid.
24b. ibid.
24c. Mollison and Minchin, op.cit., p.112.
25. Burke, Tucker interview. 5.7.1979, op.cit.
& Unwin, St Leonard's, 1994, p.516.
28. Kershaw, op cit., p.3.
30. Sun. 15.10.1935.
32. ibid.
33. ibid.
34. Arnold Shore, Sun, 15.10.1935.
35. ibid.
37. Age, 15.10.1935.
40. ibid.
41. Haese, Rebels and Precursors, op.cit., p 86.
42. ibid.
Albert Tucker Portrait of the Artist's Father (1933, Private Collection)
3. Making the Break

'All the other boys and youths and young men...were passionately interested in Art...They lived according to some constantly changing creed of noisy controversy'.
George Johnston, My Brother Jack (1)

1937 was a turning-point, a busy, auspicious year when Tucker took his place in the art world. He attracted his first, serious critical attention, began a short-lived art group and enrolled at art school. He also made the break and gave up fulltime work for good. It was the year his paintings became art and resonated with a distinctive individual expression. The focus for this change was himself. In two self portraits from 1937, Tucker defines his interests as an artist: a lucid, meticulous painting style and a vital interest in the individual's psychological life.

In Self Portrait (1937, National Gallery of Australia) Tucker's face looks as beautiful as a flower, fresh, delicate, pure and symmetrical. I was so impressed by his looks I wondered if Bert had perhaps gilded the lily. Maidie McGowan who remembered Tucker's self portrait assured me that he hadn't. 'That was exactly like him'. (2)

But Bert has smoothed away one imperfection: the cartilage of his nose, broken in a schoolyard fight, decisively angled the tip of his nose. In Self Portrait, the nose is balanced and modified so it forms a perfect vertical to the answering horizontals of the brows and mouth.

Emphasized are Bert's eyes, wide, blue, almond-shaped, and a handsomely formed, sensual mouth with a full lower lip, slightly open. It is a romantic
and glamorous portrait of youth, perhaps the young man he would like to be, not a poor, aspiring artist, but a well-dressed university student, so clean he gleams. Tucker's self-absorption is delineated in Self Portrait, his eyes a Narcissus pool where his gaze is absorbed not only with his physical charms but with the drama of the self.

But it was another Self-Portrait (1937, now lost) that caught the attention of Herald critic Basil Burdett, and changed Tucker's fortunes. Burdett championed Bert, as he would champion Danila Vassilieff later the same year. A formidable ally and a fiendishly charming fellow, Basil Burdett had won over the entire Melbourne art world, including an unlikely array of powerbrokers - Sir John Longstaff, Daryl Lindsay and George Bell. (3)

During the 20s, Burdett had combined running Sydney's Macquarie Galleries, together with partner John McDonald, with being associate editor of Art in Australia. In 1933, he travelled through France and Spain as a roving correspondent for the Melbourne Herald. It was a nourishing, extended tour where Burdett educated himself in European modernism, visiting studios, introducing himself to dealers and making a host of contacts. Picasso, Leger, Vlaminck and Marie Laurencin were among the painters he met. (4) Returning to Melbourne at the end of 1935, Burdett became a cogent and informed spokesman for the cause of modern art.

Burdett followed the theories of critic Roger Fry. (5) Fry, instigator of the pioneering post-impressionism exhibition at London's Grafton Galleries in 1910, was modernism's effusive apologist. His soothing interpretation of modern art in Vision and Design was nothing more threatening than 'a return to the ideas of formal design'. (6) It was a diplomatic position that suited Burdett. Indeed Vision and Design is one, long plea for situating modern art as the saviour of 'a whole lost language of form'. (7) Fry taught
Burdett to argue that the experiments of modernism were not a break with the past but thoroughly integrated with history.

Burdett was no idle theoriser. He was friendly with George Bell and hung around the Bell school, always on the look-out for promising young painters. Burdett spent the time he wasn't at the Herald offices touring the Melbourne art world, a memorable figure, 'tallish, bulky-boned, spare-fleshed...giving off...an air at once obdurately ducal and mildly raffish'. (8)

Burdett's reviews were thoughtful, balanced and sensitive. He trod carefully when it came to traditional artists and lavished praise on the talented young moderns. His boss, Sir Keith Murdoch, a trustee of the National Gallery of Victoria, wanted nothing more than for Burdett to be its director when Bernard Hall died in 1935. But it was too daring a choice for the other trustees, and Burdett was passed over, the arch-conservative JS MacDonald finally winning the post. (9)

Burdett singled out Bert's Self Portrait at the 1937 VAS Autumn exhibition as 'turbulent and romantic', showing 'a real command of form' with distortions that were 'justifiable and intelligent'. (9a) Comparing Tucker to George Bell, Burdett reflected that while Tucker's Self Portrait was the 'only other work up to Mr Bell's standard', Tucker's painting was 'much more forceful and waywardly individual'. (10) Burdett not only placed Tucker on a par with Bell but identified an issue that polarised the art world: expressionism versus form. What seemed, on the surface, a disagreement about style came to define differing attitudes towards modernism, politics and art education.

Burdett introduced himself to Bert when he offered to buy Suburban Street from the VAS show, though 'being a poor hard-working journalist', he
couldn't afford the 15 guinea price. (10a) Bert struck a deal and Burdett bought the painting.

Burdett also included Self-Portrait in his 'Exhibition of Outstanding Pictures of 1937' held at the Athenaeum Gallery in March, 1938. Plus it was given a full page reproduction accompanying Burdett's Art in Australia article "Modern Art in Melbourne". (11) Burdett, who commended Peter Purves Smith and Russell Drysdale in the same article, once again bestowed praise on Tucker, describing him as a 'very young painter of unusual promise'. (12) As an artist, as a young man to watch, Tucker had arrived.

Bert's new image of himself, registered in Self Portrait, is confrontational, haunted and passionately self-conscious. The subject of his painting is the force of his personality. His tie is loose, the top buttons of his shirt undone, his gaze, heated and direct. But if the mood of the painting is expressionist, post-impressionism guides Tucker's brush. Juicy, open strokes draw attention to the surface, soft, luminous tones model the face, especially the powerful forehead, while the background billows with light, freely handled areas of paint. The background, in particular, is reminiscent of Arnold Shore's and William Frater's delicate, casually handled paintings from the 30s.

Expressionism encouraged Tucker to elongate the head, particularly the eyes which are enlarged to point of distortion. A modernist iconography of form comes into play where disjunctive planes create the face. Anguish greets the viewer. Under the guidance of expressionism, Tucker has begun to paint his soul. Self Portrait is a watershed for Bert, a painting at odds with itself, where what he is learning about the formal language of modern art shelters and surrounds a deeper emotional pitch.
Self Portrait (1937 now lost)
Albert Tucker *Portrait of Alan Sumner* (1936, Helde MoMA)
Reproductions of modern German paintings were available in some of the books, magazines and reproductions that Tucker scanned at Nibbi's. He also saw reproductions of Max Beckmann and Otto Dix in Carl Einstein's Die Kunst des 20 Jahrhunderts (1926) in the State Librart's Fine Art Room. Beckmann and Dix were Bert's favoured artists, not really 'expressionists' at all but founders of the 'New Objectivity' in German painting, known as Neue Sachlichkeit. (13) Coinciding with the Wiemar Republic (1919-33), the New Objectivity was in fact a gritty kind of magical realism, strongly influenced by de Chirico as well as by the traumatised atmosphere of post-war Germany. (14)

Beckmann could be classed both as an expressionist and a member of Neue Sachlichkeit. (15) His bleak, dramatic and powerful self portraits from the 20s are exercises in cold passion, a forensic and unflinching examination of the self. Dix, a former Dadaist, portrayed an underworld of sexual aberration with uncanny accuracy. Both painters privileged the primacy and potency of the image, together with a meticulous realism. Expressionism, that had celebrated loose paint strokes and ecstatic rhythms, was a fecund liberating force for Beckmann and Dix - but their realism, with its ironic and aberrant subject matter, is congruent with the pessimism of their times.

Tucker's Portrait of Alan Sumner (Heide MoMA, 1936) was also exhibited at the VAS and while it wasn't singled out for praise, it was reproduced in The Studio in January, 1938. Sumner, a part-time student at Bell's during the mid-30s where Tucker met him, was twenty-seven when Tucker painted his portrait.

Tucker has taken each unusual or idiosyncratic aspect of Sumner's appearance and given them an extra twist. Sumner's eyes stare in slightly different directions, and Tucker makes sure Sumner's odd, unbalanced gaze
Albert Tucker *Malvern Street* (1938, Heide MoMA)
is registered. He slants Sumner's ears, forehead and hair away from the lower part of his face, exaggerating them and making Sumner's entire head, especially his nose, undulate. The parted lips, the irregular eyes, the top-heavy forehead and large ears gives Sumner's handsome young face a sensitive, introspective cast. The body and clothes are handled with less interest, the painterly focus resides in the face. Sumner was the kind of young man Tucker responded to because it was the kind of young man he was.

The intensity of the portraits is unmatched by other paintings from the same period. The Railway Bridge (now lost) King's Arcade (1937, National Gallery of Australia) and Malvern Street (1938, Heide MoMA) are Malvern subjects, modernist in intent, enlivened by a stronger sense of structure and a heightened palette but placid by comparison.

Bert might have depicted himself as an angry young man but his Malvern streetscapes reveal a safe, contented world. George Johnston's despairing vision of Malvern as 'this world without boundaries...spread forever flat, and diffuse, monotonous yet inimical, pieced together in a dull geometry of dull houses' was definitely not Tucker's. (16) During the Depression Tucker may have felt he was 'about to be consumed by vast and hostile forces' but it did not surface in his art. (17)

Discomfort is absent from Tucker's suburbia, so is comment or criticism. Poverty, loss, even work itself, is not represented. Perhaps because Malvern was so important to Clara, so much the realm of her indomitable, striving-to-be-middle-class dignity, Tucker was unable, ever, to depict it in other than respectful terms. Paintings like King's Arcade or Malvern Street show Tucker accepted it. Yet such acceptance dulled his art.
But Tucker was not alone in his lack of social comment in 1937. Curiously enough, there was no significant art of the Depression. In Australia between 1929 and 1938 no paintings took as their subject the poverty, despair, evictions, demonstrations and scenes of humiliation and suffering witnessed or experienced by nearly every Australian. It was simply not a subject for either modernist or academic appraisal. An art of outrage arose but it was the province of a small, politically active group whose work appeared mainly in transitory leftwing publications.

The cartoons, prints and watercolours of Jack Maughan, Noel Counihan, James Flett, Nutter Buzzacott, Rembrandt McClintock and Herbert McClintock formed Melbourne's art of the Depression. The socialist artists of the early 30s might have preached only to the converted but they created a turbulent underground force that emerged, at the end of the decade, to challenge the art world. Tucker would deeply register their impact.

In Melbourne's lively, shortlived leftwing journals like Strife (1930), Stream (1931), Masses (1932) and Proletariat (1932), Maughan, Counihan and the McClintock cousins published cartoons and drawings. Their readership was tiny and production sporadic. Strife's editor, the young Jewish writer Judah Waten, began the one and only edition of his journal with a heady manifesto that declared 'STRIFE is another force added to the world wide movement to uproot the existing social order of chaotic and tragic individualism!' (18)

For Strife's cover 'Rem' McClintock drew a heroic male figure struggling against an encroaching circular force. Herbert McClintock contributed a cartoon: a bourgeois man and woman stand in a park where destitute men are asleep on benches and under trees. 'Isn't it disgusting?' says the man.
'They spoil the gardens!' Strife was seized by police as it was handed out. (19)

The Workers Art Club, a forerunner of the Communist Party's Artists' Branch which Tucker would join, was founded late in 1931 by Jack Maughan along with Counihan, Waten and Nutter Buzzacott. (20) At the time, Maughan, Buzzacott and Herbert McClintock were members of the CPA while Counihan was a member of the Young Communist League. 'Art is a Weapon' was the slogan adopted by the WAC and its aim was to take art to the factory floor and to encourage workers to engage in artistic activities. 'Workers, Writers, Artists! We want news from the Class Struggle', declared the editors of the WAC's magazine, Masses. (21)

When Guido Baracchi, one of the founders of the CPA, opened an exhibition of Jack Maughan's at the Workers Art Club, he declared that 'only in a classless society, under Socialism, will art cease to be a weapon and become purely a tool'. (22) Art was propaganda for the proletarian cause and, Baracchi continued, 'our proletarian artists should endeavour to widen as far as possible the field of their art'. (23)

But it was wishful thinking on Baracchi's part. The members of the Workers Art Club, the cosmopolitan Baracchi included, belonged to an intellectual class and a proletarian art could not be imagined, let alone produced, by them. One Party member dismissed the the WAC as 'a pack of petit-bourgeois degenerates.' (24) 'Why can't you draw something beautiful?' one comrade complained to Counihan. (25)

In 1931, Noel Counihan produced his linocut Tycoon (NGA) his classic portrait of an obese, cigar-chomping capitalist. Between them, Maughan, Counihan and the McClintocks created an image of the male worker as a larger-than-life figure, a muscle-bound hero, a labourer who physically
embodied revolutionary change and who crushed the enemy without argument or reflection. Loss, humiliation, conflict and battle are the worker's destiny and the utopia of a workers' paradise is out of reach.

Some years before Andrei Zhadnov gave his famous address to the 1934 Soviet Writers Congress laying down the rules for socialist realism, this small group of Melbourne artists had begun to formulate their own notion of political art. It was fostered by their personal experiences during the Depression, a reading of Marxist theory, CPA attitudes toward art and their close friendship with one another. For these artists, art would remain a weapon. It would also be, for those who chose to toe the Party line, trenchantly anti-modernist.

The imagery of Melbourne's political artists was the product of a condensed and emphatic graphic style. The McClintonck, Counihan and Buzzacott had served apprenticeships and earned their living, like Tucker, as cartoonists, commercial artists and illustrators. They were used to presenting ideas - literally and figuratively - in black and white. Subtlety was not their strong suit and modernism was not their cause. They were also influenced by the enormous body of communist literature pouring into the country hailing the progress of the Soviet Union - 'pages full of the smiling faces of its youth, and the heroic endeavour of men and women labouring in solidarity, radiant with optimism and a faith in socialism'. (26)

But to the like-minded souls in Melbourne and Sydney who were committed to contemporary art in the early 30s modernism meant formalism. George Bell, Arnold Shore, William Frater, Grace Cossington Smith (27), Margaret Preston, Grace Crowley, Dorrirt Black, Rah Fizelle and Frank Hinder did not deal with social ills. Their battle was for the acceptance of modern art, not for social reform through art. They might have felt like
outsiders, fighting the intransigence of the conservatives, but it did not make them political radicals. Far from it. As for Ernest Buckmaster, Harold Herbert or Hans Heysen, the last thing they wanted was for their placid vision of the Australian landscape to be sullied by job queues or ugly riots. Until the late 30s, the subject matter of painting, both contemporary and conservative, was purely for art's sake.

Burdett's heady praise had an immediate effect on Bert, giving him confidence and kindling his ambitions. He was eager for change, for life as a professional artist. For the first time, he had sold paintings - Suburban Street to Burdett and King's Arcade to Bell student Maie Casey. On a grand total of thirty guineas, Tucker decided to quit his fulltime job, cadge part-time work where he could and devote himself to art.

Though the move strengthened his sense of purpose, his part-time income was unreliable. Other Depression art students like Maidie McGowan and Joy Murphy had day jobs which they combined with studying art at night but Clara wouldn't force Bert into that. Distressed at Bert's decision, she was still proud of him. After all, hadn't her son been praised in the Herald as 'forceful and waywardly individual'? Who in the family had ever been mentioned in the paper? The Tuckers would struggle by.

For Bert it was a moment of maturity, a passage out of the security of fulltime employment to the exhilarating freedom of life as an artist. Not that Bert embraced bohemia. Living at home after quitting his job, meant his domestic life continued much as before, in the safe nest of Leeton Court. Meals were prepared for him and his washing was done. John no doubt viewed Bert's resolve with dismay but the Oedipal battle was well and truly over, and Bert had triumphed. John had no power, no command. It is
unlikely Bert would have confided his plans to John, much less asked his advice. By the time Bert had become a man, John was a void, null and silent, before his active, ambitious, incomprehensible son.

'What did your father say?' I asked Bert about that time, about the exhibitions, reviews, art classes, friends and plans.

Bert shrugged. 'I don't know. He said nothing'. (28)

Like many artists, Tucker could be egocentric and self-absorbed. His sense of others' reality was weak, often existing only insofar as it coincided with his own concerns. I found that, in the years I was writing my biography of Joy Hester, Bert never once inquired after my well-being, never said, 'How are you? What have you been doing?' He seemed to take no interest whatever in my personal life or feelings. I have often wondered who he thought I was, a blank face with no history, no biography of my own. Inhibited by his utter lack of regard, I offered nothing of my life, my thoughts or opinions. Our conversations were confined to Joy, himself, the historical facts and his feelings. Bert took up all the room.

I sometimes wonder whether John's ghostly presence was due, in part, to a similar process. Bert simply could not see a use for his father, could not 'see' him at all. John's melancholy, his withdrawal, his 'failure' may have been due in part to Bert's rising energy, his radiant confidence, incandescent in its indifference.

Burdett was one of the older men Bert met during the 30s who offered advice and practical assistance. Not content with championing Bert's painting, Burdett tried to help with money, too, setting up an interview for Bert with Sir Keith Murdoch. (29) As well as being Burdett's staunch supporter, Murdoch was also an advocate of current art.
Tucker was ushered into the great man's office through an elaborately
carved wooden door. Nervously, Bert arranged his drawings on a desk.
Murdoch, big, bluff and high-coloured, barely glanced at them. 'I'd like you
to consider a proposition of mine,' Murdoch announced. 'You can work as an
illustrator on the Herald staff and I'll pay you 12 guineas a week'. (30) Bert
was dumbfounded at the salary. It seemed an enormous amount of money.
But first and foremost, he wanted to be an artist. Perhaps the great man
could employ him part-time. Bert did a rapid calculation in his head.
Plucking up his courage he asked, 'Would you consider half the time for half
the money?' (31)

Sir Keith rose and tossed the drawings aside. The interview was over.
Bert's case wasn't unique. Sir Keith gave Russell Drysdale a far worse time
when Daryl Lindsay suggested Drysdale for a job. Drysdale reminisced,

'I remember a morning years ago when I interviewed Sir Keith Murdoch
in his tycoon-like office in the Melbourne Herald over the matter of a job as
an illustrator and cartoonist. I had with me some sorry examples of my
wretched efforts and I was given to understand that I was lucky indeed to
have reached the sanctuary to make contact with the all-holiest...Sir Keith
could give me five minutes. His succinct measuring in seconds of a man's
importance to his fellow man was not exactly conducive to an imperturbable
attitude of mind in a youth such as I was, nor was the situation in my mind
made better by the fact that Sir Keith took precisely three minutes to
dispose of me, wretched drawings, shattered morale and all.' (32)

Sir Keith remarked of Drysdale 'the boy had not sufficient talent to aspire
to such heights.' (33)
Discussions between Tucker and Colin McGowan had seen the foundation of the New Group. Members included Maidie McGowan together with several other Bell students: Hal Porter, Nairne Butchart and Evelyn Healy. Their exhibition at the Athenaeum Gallery in November caused quite a splash, due again to Burdett.

'The New Group', announced Burdett, 'is refreshingly different from the academicism, impressionistic [sic] and otherwise...current in most of the art shows one sees in Melbourne...These young people have the future in their hands.' (34) Burdett described them as 'moderns' but, aware of how such a term could enflame the conservatives, modified it by adding 'although they seem to me to be doing little more than trying to rescue the eternal verities of form, composition and colour.' (35)

Burdett opened the review describing Tucker as having 'more vitality than any young painter I have seen in Melbourne. That vitality is expressed in a firm and vigorous sense of form, a lively and brilliant sense of colour and in the vibrant textures of his paint...He is one of the few painters here of any age who has a real feeling for paint and whose surfaces are attractive apart from what the paint is expressing...Mr Tucker, if I am not very mistaken, has a future.' (36)

George Bell also praised the show. After all, most of the New Group were his students. In the mid-1930s, George Bell meant modern art in Melbourne. Once again, Tucker led the review. Bell regarded Bert as 'the most sophisticated of the group. His work is outstanding.' (37) 'Strongly designed' was high praise coming from Bell. In July, 1937, Bert had enrolled at Bell's Bourke Street school, probably at the encouragement of Colin McGowan. (38)

A competent academic painter, Bell had not only discarded his traditional style, by 1932 he had become a crusader for modern art. As Bell announced
dramatically, he saw the light. (39) Bell knew exactly what he was up against and, from having been a darling of the establishment, he turned on them - on the Gallery School, on the renowned artists of the day like Sir Arthur Streeton and Ernest Buckmaster, on the placid sunshine and pastoral calm that was the legacy of the Heidelberg School and, finally, on the British traditions of hierarchy and reward that had becalmed Australian painting.

Through his activities as a critic, teacher, painter and organiser, Bell did his best to tear asunder the smug success and hidebound assumptions of the art establishment. He was well fitted for the job. Highly principled, authoritative and eloquent, Bell achieved a quiet revolution in the Melbourne art world, one that eventually overtook and discarded him. Tucker would be part of his downfall.

In 1937, Bell was running the only school in Melbourne that taught the principles of modern art. Housed in the Salisbury Buildings at the corner of Bourke and Queen Streets, the two large top-floor rooms had 'an unstable coke stove to keep the pupils and the occasional model warm and an unstable lift, fortunately circled by a wooden staircase'. (40)

Bell provoked strong feelings and many of his students adored him. The best were a diverse group including Russell Drysdale, Sali Herman, Yvonne Atkinson, David Strachan, Maie Casey and Peter Purves Smith. Paying the fees that Bert had previously been unable to afford indicate just how much attending Bell's school meant to him.

Drysdale, Bell's favourite student, believed that it was Bell's knowledge of abstract composition, derived from Cezanne, together with the technical craft of painting that made him such an inspiring teacher. (41) Bell was critical, detached, tough and bracing. He despised dabblers. The school was a dedicated community of modernists where all shared in the aesthetic
excitement. 'No-one knew the game as thoroughly [as Bell] - others were glorified amateurs.' (42)

Bell's personality, his outspoken writings in the Sun, his avowed commitment to the contemporary cause, the admirable figure that he cut in the art world were some of the elements that attracted Tucker. But the teaching style that stimulated Drysdale had the reverse effect on Bert. Within a short time, Tucker and Bell had fallen out.

In retrospect, Tucker would give Bell ample credit for his leadership abilities, describing him as 'a General de Gaulle in the art scene' but the two men had a personal clash. (43) Tucker declared he 'never had any rapport with George. You could say we were not sympathetic personalities. He was theoretical, intellectual, autocratic.' (44)

Bell wasn't called 'the Boss' for nothing. Even Bell's most admiring students admitted that he could be overbearing. 'He didn't like you to argue or talk back.' (45) Students either 'followed him or went under, with no compromise. "Will you discipline yourself or shall I do it?" Bell asked!'. (46)

Tucker had been training himself as an artist since 1933. He had stood up to Hendrik Arendsen and he wasn't about to be told what to do by Bell. Tucker and Bell were both strongly opinionated, unbending, refusing to countenance opposition. Tucker identified elements in Bell's character that others would find jarring in his own. Tucker was also irritated by the deference shown to Bell. 'They treated him like a god.' (47) There were also differences of sensibility.

A touch of formal exaggeration, deriving from Dix and Beckmann, influenced Tucker's Self Portrait. Bell, essentially a classicist, eschewed the emotive aspects of art, preferring to emphasize volume, form and tone. Bell was not a revolutionary painter. Even after Cézanne's example helped Bell to
control his canvases with the clarity of strong volumes, simplified forms and glowing colour, the sluggishness that marked his academic work remained. As a painter, Bell never rose above the ordinary.

None of that meant Bell had nothing to offer Tucker in 1937. Tucker's time at the Bell School might have been limited to a few sessions but direct teaching is not the only way to pick up currents in art. The Bourke Street studio was hung with the paintings and drawings of Drysdale, Purves Smith and Atkinson. It was Melbourne's liveliest centre for discussions about contemporary art. On the walls, Tucker would have seen the studies of street scenes that Bell set, the exercises in volume and form. Tucker sometimes arrived on a Saturday afternoon, not painting but circling the group, looking, talking, commenting. One young student remembers standing in the street outside the Bell School, first on one leg, then the other, while Tucker treated her to a lecture on the colour spectrum. (48)

King's Arcade (1937, National Gallery of Australia) shown in the New Group exhibition, was painted during Tucker's time at Bell's. King's Arcade was the entrance to the Armadale station where Tucker caught the train each morning. Ironically, his best painting of Malvern was from his point of departure.

Buildings and walls have been flattened into a series of discrete intersecting planes, composed in luscious, high-keyed pinks topped by a swathe of mauve sky, thick as a scarf. Perspective is tipped up so the entrance to the arcade reads as vertical and the brushstrokes are dense and painterly. The perspective is the painting's most accomplished aspect. A shadowy semi-abstraction forms the perspective's vanishing point, a dark, alluring centre to the painting, counterpointed by the black emptiness of the truck's rear. It is an accomplished, if somewhat, stiff work.
There was much to be observed, digested and learned from Bell's talented followers, even if Bell himself proved domineering. Nor did the differences between the two men immediately lead to a break. In 1938 Bert was be caught up in the Bell-lead Contemporary Art Society.
Notes
2. McGowan, interview, op.cit..
7. ibid.
10. ibid.
12. ibid.
15. ibid.
17. Mollison and Bonham, op.cit., p.17.
22. Smith, op.cit. p.73.
23. ibid.
27. Grace Cossington Smith had painted Strike (c.1917, Newcastle Region Art Gallery) but her politics leaned to the right rather than the left.
29. ibid.
30. ibid.
31. ibid.
32. Quoted in Klepac, op.cit, p.15.
33. ibid., Despite his treatment of Drysdale, Sir Keith would go on to become a staunch supporter and a collector of Drysdale's work.
34. Basil Burdett, Herald, 1 November, 1937.
35. ibid.
36. ibid.
37. George Bell, The Sun, November 12, 1937.
38. Colin McGowan had enrolled at the Bell school late in 1936.
40. Maie Casey, "George Bell in Bourke Street", Art and Australia, vol.4, no.2, September, 1966, p.120.


42. ibid.

43. ibid.

44. Burke, Hester, op.cit, p. 37.

45. McGowan, interview, op.cit.

46. Moore, op.cit., p.50.

47. Burke, Tucker interview, 10.11.1997, op.cit.

4. Mentors

Creative art is the art of men...with a power of exuberance in expression beyond the power of men who are merely normal.
Adrian Lawlor (1)

The artist is bound for the sake of his integrity to become thinker and revolutionary.
Christopher Caudwell. (2)

In the late 30s, the influences helping to form Tucker's sense of himself were powerfully and positively male. Though Tucker had already won the attention of Basil Burdett and George Bell, they were part of a constellation of male support. During that time, Tucker got to know the firebrand revolutionary Noel Counihan, the young Jewish-Polish refugee Yosl Bergner, the feckless Gallery School student Sidney Nolan and John Reed, a wealthy Cambridge-educated lawyer with a growing interest in contemporary art. Three other important figures were Danila Vassilieff, Adrian Lawlor and Harry de Hartog.

While some of these contacts proved short-lived, all had the distinction of being inspiring and provocative. From his new friends, Tucker gained the impression that the art world was an exclusively male arena, its modernist component dominated by a group of articulate and idealistic men.

Women were at a distance, professionally and personally. Bert still had no girlfriends and feminine intimacy was Clara's realm, a private, interior, domestic space. Bert's apprenticeship as a young artist was served.
exclusively with men and the engine of these friendships fuelled the
dynamic of art and politics galvanising Melbourne from the late 30s to the
mid 40s.

From a background of masculine 'failure' personified by John and his
unfortunate brother Jack, Bert came to identify his masculinity with a series
of 'heroes' who epitomised the antithesis of his father, choosing men who
were bold, successful, worldly and cultured - and who were prepared to
back him. Not that these friendships, given Tucker's personality, came easily.
Tucker described the problem to James Gleeson.

'I was so emotionally constipated, so unsophisticated, I found it hard to
relax with these men and speak openly, and if I did get on to a theme, I
could only speak aggressively and so naturally they were wary. Who wants
some young punk coming up and screaming and yelling? I found it hard to
get them to accept me on a personal level. George Bell had this, too. He was
wary of me. We never got a rapport going at all. Adrian had that look, too. I
can remember Adrian looking at me, shooting me a certain look'. (3)

The men Tucker selected as his mentors were not the upper class,
establishment figures like Bell or Reed but emigres, outsiders and mavericks.
Danila Vassilieff, Adrian Lawlor and Harry de Hartog were Tucker's elected
father figures, and he was eager to defer to them and learn from them in a
way he had found impossible to do with either his father or Bell.

Lawlor had grown up in England, Vassilieff was originally from Russia and
de Hartog hailed from Rotterdam. By the time they settled in Australia all
were mature men with life experience behind them. Yet it was in Australia,
at mid-life, they realised their artistic ambitions. All three were outspoken,
independent and confident in their opinions, able to turn on a courtly display
of manners, an enchanting blend of charm, wit and sophistication. They were
practical dreamers, too, able to design and build their own homes. Essentially, they were men who could turn their hand to anything. Intelligent, well-read and well-travelled, they carried the potent mystique of 'European authenticity'. (4)

They also offered Tucker models of sexual maturity and licence. While de Hartog was happily married, Lawlor and Vassilieff had rather more complex arrangements: Lawlor had a mistress while Vassilieff was embroiled in a series of turbulent affairs. Interestingly, during 1938 as Bert’s friendship with the three developed, so did his relationship with Joy Hester.

Bert’s first, deep, male friendship was with the flamboyant, sensual, mercurial, itinerant Russian, the Cossack, Danila Vassilieff.

Vassilieff’s life reads like a highly coloured romance, all the more extraordinary because it was true. Born in 1897, the child of Cossacks, he grew up in a village in southern Russia’s River Don basin, a heritage of which he was inordinately proud. (5) After training in a St. Petersburg military academy, Vassilieff fought under a Cossack general during the first world war. (6) Caught up in the counter-revolution, Vassilieff was captured by the Red Army and, after escaping, the years of exile began.

Vassilieff never returned to Russia, a rupture that haunted him and shaped his life. In 1923, after sojourns in India, Persia, Armenia and Shanghai, he landed in far north Queensland and from then until 1929, he worked at labouring jobs in Townsville, Darwin and Katharine. The tropics inspired Vassilieff and, after teaching himself to paint from a child’s paint set, he decided to take his greatest gamble and study art. He set off for Rio to study with fellow Russian, Dmitri Ismailevitch. It was a chastening experience. Ismailevitch instructed Vassilieff in 'time honoured ways',

101
meaning that he made meticulous studies from plaster casts and from still life models. (7)

'I worked like a slave at that', Vassilieff remembered, 'day and night, in every spare moment. And then I realised after two years of nothing but apples and bananas and pumpkins and plaster casts, that it was a waste of time, it was meaningless to me, it was not what I wanted to do at all. That was dead life and I wanted to paint living life, life and nature and people in action and movement'. (8)

The break-through became Vassilieff's code, responsible for the vitality of his rapidly executed street scenes and his attitude towards art education. It also lead to the respect he inspired in young artists.

Vassilieff considered himself a man who could achieve any goal and he was determined to find a home where he could paint to his heart's content and gain recognition. A London exhibition in 1934 brought plaudits. (9) But, after wearing out his welcome with his patrons Doris and Lawrence Oglivie, he departed for Spain. But it proved anathema to Vassilieff and in 1935, he arrived back in Australia. He was thirty-eight years old.

Vassilieff burst onto the Melbourne art scene with his first solo exhibition in September 1937. 'His very presence', Tucker recalled, 'gave me a feeling of confidence'. (10) Younger artists were drawn to him - not only Tucker, but Arthur Boyd, John Perceval, Joy Hester and Lina Bryans. Boyd and Perceval took lessons from him while he was a crucial liberating influence for Hester's drawing style. Vassilieff also caught the eye of those great talent-spotters, George Bell and Basil Burdett, together with the cream of Melbourne's radical intelligentsia - Vance and Nettie Palmer, Sunday and John Reed, Adrian Lawlor and Norman Macgeorge.
Danila Vassiliev
Street scene with graffiti
1938
Private collection, Melbourne
No.2
John Reed opened Vassilieff's exhibition at Riddell's Gallery in stirring terms. 'The work of Mr Vassilieff brings something new and startling to us and for this reason alone the exhibition is the most important which has taken place for some considerable time'. (11)

The Riddell's Gallery exhibition proved an unqualified success. Burdett and Bell accorded it brilliant reviews (12) and, for the only time in his life, Vassilieff sold well. (13) For the shrewd and travel-sore Vassilieff, it was exactly the reception he had been seeking and he decided to make Melbourne his home.

Bert was introduced to Vassilieff at the Riddell's exhibition by Basil Burdett. (14) They soon became friends. In many ways, they were alike. Both were touchy and resolute, ambitious and resourceful, opinionated and serious, two loners who sought company but found its demands taxing. Perhaps Tucker enjoyed the sly way Vassilieff took the mickey out of the autocratic Bell, joking that Bell's canvases were so well prepared they were 'too good to paint'. (15)

Vassilieff had much to teach Tucker. Not only did Vassilieff handle paint fluidly with a light, draughtsmanlike touch but he took as his subjects the streets and lanes of working-class Australia - Surry Hills, Woolloomooloo, Collingwood and Fitzroy, peopling those streets with children at play, a 'message of irrepressible life in the midst of the Depression.' (16) Vassilieff made no social comment: his message was pure joie de vivre. They were not Melbourne's first street scenes - Bell had set similar exercises for his students - but they were startlingly fresh. 'Our painters...are more interested in Nature with a big, impersonal N than in life', Basil Burdett lamented. (17) Tucker's Malvern streetscapes seemed pallid by comparison, mere exercises in tone and perspective.
Tucker was deeply impressed by Vassilieff who 'as a man and a personality was an extraordinary thinker...He'd been a professional artist for many years when I first met him, but he already had this body of work and he was working at his best then...Someone from overseas we'd regard them as you would regard someone who came from Mars'. (18) Vassilieff was 'a messenger from beyond, from this exotic, unbelievable, remote world.' (19)

Though Tucker painted with Vassilieff and learned from the latter's flexibility of method, he had no intention of becoming Vassilieff's pupil or imitating him. He was too independent for that. At first, as Bert continued to toil over his streetscapes, there were no touches a la Vassilieff, no 'drawing with paint', no frisky children, no elan. Vassilieff's method of making a quick pencil sketch over white ground, then a rapid application of turpentine washes and notations of colour, direct from the tube or with the flat of the brush, did not not become Tucker's modus operandi.

Painting was a labour intensive activity for Tucker. Perhaps it came from his slow, solo art education, his need to be a better craftsman than those who could afford art school. Tucker was an artist for whom every aspect of painting, from its application to its subject, was a matter of great intent and the effort he put into his work was painstaking.

But in the twelve months that followed Vassilieff's exhibition, Tucker's brush began to loosen and dance as it described buildings, streets and skylines. Vassilieff's influence was not the only one that led to the animated buildings in Tucker's City (1939, National Gallery of Australia), expressionism played its part, too, but the thick black lines that gird and mark the shapes are inherited from Vassilieff.

How Bert envied Vassilieff's confidence, speed and skill! Vassilieff would 'set up his easel in the street in Fitzroy, ignore the crowds of kids around

104
him and punch out about half a dozen paintings in an afternoon and they would all be spot on'. (20) Vassilieff's desire to paint 'living life' unfettered by the practice or, as he saw it, the encumbrance of academic tuition was, perhaps, the single most valuable piece of advice he offered to Tucker.

Vassilieff heaped scorn on conventional art education, dismissing its advantages for the artist. It had the benefit of turning Tucker's exclusion from art school into a moral victory, one that earned him Vassilieff's respect. But it wasn't only Tucker who was impressed by Vassilieff's attitude towards artmaking. Hester was also bowled over. He was 'a seer', Hester declared. 'Painting for him was a life force - never an intellectual activity. His life and work were continuous explosions'. (21)

Sunday and John Reed were deeply influenced by Vassilieff's contempt for art training and for the 'finished' painting. Vassilieff's precepts of spontaneity of method, speed of execution and vigor of brushstroke guided the choices the Reeds made as patrons of contemporary art. In short, Vassilieff opened up the world to his new friends and changed their ideas about art forever.

One of Vassilieff's most enchanting qualities was his ability to spin stories, to create a sense of self that was romantic, daring and 'other'. In bland, stolidly English, pre-migration Melbourne, Vassilieff was a rare flower. 'With him', John Reed recalled, 'no matter how close the relationship, one was always conscious of another world, another civilization'. (22)

Vassilieff had also done what Tucker longed to do - see first-hand the masterpeices of modernism - and Vassilieff could soliloquise about Picasso, Cezanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh. Listening to Vassilieff, Tucker's sense of himself as an artist expanded. In 1937, Vassilieff was all Tucker longed to be and, importantly, Vassilieff had achieved his credentials on his own terms,
independent from the art schools. He was an original and controversial thinker who refused to subscribe to anyone's views.

There were deeper links, too. Like Tucker, Vassilieff didn't shirk from conflict and, like Tucker, he often managed to find himself in the middle of a stoush. It gave Tucker a particular sympathy for Vassilieff's woes. Vassilieff was one of the few people in the art world with whom Bert enjoyed a real rapport. The 'young punk' who found it so hard to win acceptance from the men he admired, was accepted and understood by the older Russian. Vassilieff could be amusing, light-hearted and festive one moment, then fall into a darker mood where he became savagely ironic and mordant - all strains in Tucker's personality.

After the art world, Vassilieff had another realm to conquer. In 1940, he bought land at Warrandyte, a pretty spot nestling in the hills and gullies of the Yarra Valley, where he proceeded to build his own home. He had been introduced to the area by Clive and Janet Neild who ran Koornong, a local progressive school, where Vassilieff was an art teacher.

Building Stonygrad was an epic task. Vassilieff opened a quarry on his land and by a combination of blasting, picking and splitting, huge rocks were extracted, then rolled down the nearby creek before being hoisted up the slope. Then Vassilieff battered them into place. (23) Tucker's 1944 photograph shows Vassilieff involved in this punishing physical enterprise, every inch the heroic Russian worker with muscles tensed, hammer in hand and a cigarette clamped in his jaw. (24)

Tucker helped to bring up timber from an old gold mine to make Stonygrad's kitchen floor. In the evening Vassilieff and Bert would go fishing for red fin and watch the platypus glide in the Yarra River, or Vassilieff might cook up a stew of lamb chops and potatoes over the fire. 'It was very
good, too', Tucker remembered. (25) Vassilieff acted as a father, teaching Tucker practical skills, passing on his own life experiences and listening to Bert's ambitions.

Vassilieff's *Bert, Joy, Ambrose and Helen* (1944, Heide MoMA) commemorated one visit. It shows Tucker and Hester, along with the Sydney artist Ambrose Hallen and Vassilieff's companion, Helen McDonald, grouped around the piano in Stonygrad's living-room.

For Vassilieff was not alone when he arrived in Melbourne. He had eloped with a young Sydney pianist, Helen McDonald. Poor Helen. Vassilieff’s rugged way of life and jealous rages proved too much for her and finally she fled back to Sydney. Bert and Joy spent weekends staying with Vassilieff in the miserable months after McDonald left.

A string of unsatisfactory affairs followed. Warrandyte neighbour Lottie Schumacher lived with Vassilieff intermittently: it seemed could no-one cope with him fulltime. Then, in 1947, Vassilieff suddenly married writer Elizabeth Hamill. Vassilieff had put Stonygrad on the market, having decided to abandon Australia for South Africa. Hamill bought the house and fell in love with the artist simultaneously, and Vassilieff stayed. But eventually, that marriage faltered, too. It was perhaps in recognition of his difficult nature that Vassilieff wrote,

'Women are more sensible than men, and more enduring. Women are carrying on, bringing everything forward all the time, while men are marching round in circles carrying guns...Everything depends on the women, the mothers and daughters. Men are childish'. (26)

Adrian Lawlor provoked an artistic turning point for Tucker. Precise and pedagogical, Lawlor was another self-taught artist, a man who, like
Vassilieff, transformed himself not once but several times in the course of his life. Like Vassilieff, Tucker met Lawlor in the late 30s, the busiest and most successful period of Lawlor's life. Lawlor had retreated from writing to commit himself to painting.

Born in London in 1889, the son of domestic servants, Lawlor emigrated to Australia in 1910. (27) By 1922, he was reviewing Nietzsche for the Bulletin, describing the German philosopher's writings as 'the bible of my visionary youth'. (28) He supported himself by working as a clerk.

In 1916, Lawlor made a marriage of convenience with Eva Nodrum, a woman twenty years his senior, who had substantial holdings in her family’s tannery business. The impecunious Lawlor's economic freedom was now secured. After an unhappy stint of working in the tannery office, Lawlor set out with the grand ambition to be a voice that mattered in Australian cultural life.

He became a champion for modernism's cause as a painter and a critic, emerging in the Melbourne art world as a literate and cultured commentator on the arts, a witty, ironic and independent writer who eloquently described the battle between the conservatives and the moderns. Lawlor's artistic career charts the history of that battle with military precision.

In a series of spectacular exhibitions between 1930 and 1940, Lawlor produced over five hundred paintings that explored modernism through landscapes, still lifes, portraits and abstracts. If, on the final count, Lawlor's paintings amount less to a satisfying and original oeuvre than to a series of set-pieces on modernism's formal problems, the effort was heroic. Lawlor was forty-one when he began to paint.

Tucker was taken by Lawlor's 'enormous energy...[his] high voltage personality and...rapier kind of intellect, going in and out of every issue at
full speed. An extraordinary looking man and an extraordinarily energetic man, involved with painting and ideas and with everything that was happening in the art world.' (29)

Lawlor's lasting contribution to Australian art was not his paintings but Arquebus (1937), a triumph of wit, editing and showmanship, that documents a war of words about about modern art. Comprised of letters to the editor gleaned mainly from the Herald and the Argus and linked by Lawlor's comments, Arquebus is an ascerbic, hilarious and ingenious polemic.

In April 1937, the attorney-general Robert Menzies had been invited to open the Victorian Artists Society autumn exhibition where, Lawlor noted wickedly, 'an entire wall of the gallery pullulated with pictures in the modern manner'. (30)

Menzies took umbrage. 'The people who call themselves modernists today', he said, 'speak a different language. Great art speaks a language which every intelligent person understands.' (31) Further, Menzies suggested an Australian Academy of Art, structured like the English Royal Academy, which 'set certain standards of art and has served a great purpose in raising the standard of public taste by directing attention to good work'. (32)

Predictably the moderns were furious. 'It is ludicrous for Mr Menzies to lay down what is good art', Bell railed in the Sun. (33) 'If likes and dislikes are to be our criterion', Basil Burdett cautioned, 'we shall not get far with modern art. It has ceased to be an annexe to the pleasure park.' (34)

But while the others involved took the battle in deadly earnest, Lawlor addressed it with puckish humour, representing it as a very human affair, a comedy of manners and of errors. Lawlor was not ingenuous. He perceived the very real threat from reactionary cultural forces underpinning Menzies' words and he also knew a great deal was at stake for the small, if noisy,
group of moderns but he chose to deal with it playfully. In doing so, he made
the conservatives look like clumsy, untutored buffoons. It was a clever
strategy.

Arquebus revels in a lavish, hybrid language where popular phrases
nudge arcane ones. To read Arquebus is to be entertained by the pitch and
resonance of Lawlor's voice, spruiking for the cause of modernism. The
entertainment side of the debate, its comic and theatrical qualities was one
Lawlor especially relished. He was, all too briefly as it transpired, in his
element. Once again, speed was of the essence for Lawlor: the debate took
place and Lawlor produced the book in a matter of months.

Tucker exhibited Self Portrait (1937, now lost) in the VAS show that
Menzies opened and he followed the debate in the press with great interest.
Tucker admired Lawlor's magisterial command of language and his erudition
- like Vassiliev's, hard-won and self-taught. Tucker was also intrigued by
Lawlor's gifts for publicity and promotion, his ability to enter a public debate
and his confidence in assuming, and holding, the spotlight. An incendiary
personality, Lawlor also earned Tucker's respect for 'having an argument
with anyone at the drop of a hat.' (35)

By the time Tucker saw Lawlor's exhibition of abstract paintings in
November, 1938 at Riddell's Gallery, they were friends. Bell praised Lawlor's
show as 'unique...the first to present to Melbourne a show of abstract
painting.' (36)

At Warrandyte Lawlor and Vassiliev were neighbours, though their homes
signified different temperaments. Stonygrad was harsh, organic, rough and
startling as if it had erupted from the earth itself. It carried the scent of
Russia, of wild, strange places, of ancient caves and shelters.
Lawlor's second home at Warrandyte was inspired by geometry, by the cool, clean, machine aesthetic of the Bauhaus. Lawlor had lost Broom Warren, his first home, together with 200 of his paintings on January 13, 1939 when the 'Black Friday' bushfires swept through the area. Lawlor and Eva, his wife, had barely escaped with their lives.

It is a tribute to Lawlor that, almost immediately, he set about designing a new home for the same site. More than that, it was a remarkable home, inspired by Walter Gropius's designs for the residences of the Bauhaus teachers at Dessau, (37) a 'white cubical maisonette planned and carried out to the last particular with a gentle severity of touch'. (38)

Tucker, together with Yosi Bergner, was invited up to celebrate its completion. That day Bert took more than a dozen photographs with his little Foth-Derby camera. He had only recently acquired the secondhand camera, bought for five pounds from a city pawnbroker's. (39) He was using it to create a record of his paintings and, more intimately, of his friends. Tucker recalled,

'I didn't use the camera in a programmatic way but I liked to have the camera with me if I was in any interesting situation, just in case I saw something I wanted to grab because the camera meant you could do something you couldn't do with a sketchbook. I'd keep the camera loaded, the shutter ready to go.' (40)

Few of Tucker's friends had a camera. Lawlor, with his penchant for documentation, probably asked Bert to bring his camera along, to homage the stylish machine a habiter. Tucker's photographs also capture Lawlor's impressive appearance.

The young poet Alister Kershaw, Lawlor's great friend, recalled the older man's 'cavernous cheeks, his improbably high forehead, his [because no
Danila Vassilieff
other word will serve] mesmeric eyes, and an expression which changed as
constantly, as rapidly, as iridescently as the sheen on a patch of oil, moving
unpredictably from an immense melancholy to a bewildering gaiety.' (41)

Bert photographed Lawlor inside Broom Warren with Yosl Bergner (Yosl
Bergner and Adrian Lawlor, 1939). Lawlor appears pensive and withdrawn
as he stands next to the cherubic-faced Bergner who gazes at the camera
with enormous, soulful eyes. Tucker even caught an argument that erupted
between Lawlor and Bergner where Lawlor faces Bergner, his mouth grimly
thin, hands placed aggressively on his hips. (42)

Tucker also posed Lawlor outside in the harsh, late afternoon sun, seated
in some shots, in others standing against Broom Warren’s stark white walls.
The combination of shadow and sunlight compose Lawlor’s face in extreme
patterns of dark and light. His bald pate gleams, his large ears protrude,
deep shadows underscore his eyes, the crooked line of his mouth is etched
against his skin. Against the white background, Lawlor’s face assumes a
luminous, mask-like, abstract strength.

Tucker was captivated by the photographs and soon afterwards, began a
portrait of Lawlor. It was a painting that marked a crucial shift. As Tucker
notes, he did not directly quote one particular photograph. It was a residual
image that produced Portrait of Adrian Lawlor (1939, NGA). He also
remembered ‘doing many drawings of [Adrian] because he had an
extraordinary head, a bald dome that went right up...sunken cheeks and
these intense sort of close eyes...he didn't pose for me. I made drawings after
seeing him. But I found these inadequate...Memory couldn’t give me all the
data I wanted and I took some photographs of Adrian. I painted the portrait
from a compound of the image I’d formed of him, the drawings and the the
photographs I had at the time.’ (43)
13. Yosl Bergner and Adrian Lawlor, Warrandyte, Melbourne, c.1941
Portraits, particularly self portraits, announce change in Tucker's work. A talented portraitist, Tucker experimented in this genre because it was where he exercised the most control. In the 30s, Tucker's portraits and self portraits create a narrative of change and innovation. His earliest oil is the Portrait of the Artist's Father and the first work for which he won public praise is a self portrait. Basil Burdett had singled out Tucker's Self Portrait (1937, now lost) at the 1937 VAS Autumn exhibition as 'turbulent and romantic', showing 'a real command of form'. (44)

Christopher Uhl and Richard Haese both credit the significance of Portrait of Adrian Lawlor. For Uhl, the Lawlor portrait is easily Tucker's most resolved painting to date in terms of handling of paint and composition. (45) More importantly, Tucker's treatment of Lawlor's lips, distorted in an upward angle, signal the first appearance of the crescent mouth, the governing motif of Images of Modern Evil (1943-7). (46)

Inspired by the deep shadows that sculpt Lawlor's face in the Broom Warren photographs, Portrait of Adrian Lawlor is a study in light and shade. The handling of paint is rich and loose, the palette hued from gold to brown with brilliant red touches on cheeks, nose and mouth. Beneath the great, bronze dome of Lawlor's skull, his closed eyes create an image of withdrawal and contemplation, a modern Buddha in meditation. It was the first time that Tucker made a psychological statement about a face other than his own, Lawlor suggesting the 'immense melancholy' Kershaw noted.

To gaze into Lawlor's face is to gaze into an interior darkness, the mood that would permeate Tucker's paintings of the 40s. The mask, heralded in Lawlor's features, is a motif of several 40s paintings, including Mask (1943, now lost) and Battlefield (1943, NGA), where alienation is underscored by a macabre gaiety.
For Tucker, the key to portraiture was to focus on the unusual element, a physical idiosyncracy - ears, nose or eyes - and gently distort it. Other portraits from the 30s like Portrait of Alan Sumner (1936, Heide MoMA) or Portrait of Molly O'Dea (1937, Heide MoMA) do not have the presence of Adrian Lawlor. The former, vividly toned in blues and mauves, suggests little more in terms of personality than a handsome, vaguely troubled young man while the latter is a pretty image of the local girl whom Bert fancied but never dared to ask out. It is as though the maturity Lawlor emanated as a man found its way into Tucker's interpretation of him, giving the painting its authority.

For all that Lawlor represented to Tucker 'enormous energy...a high voltage personality', he chose to depict Lawlor as motionless and contained, his mouth and eyes closed, a personality who is unreachable, perhaps, finally, unfathomable. The portrait suggests the tragedy of intimacy: that even the warmest friendship can contain anxieties about exclusion and misunderstanding, and cannot provide immunity from loss and separation. Tucker may have admired Lawlor but, equally, he felt distant from him, and it is distance that Bert charts in the portrait, not rapport. In the portrait designed to celebrate Tucker's elected father figure can be traced the same withdrawal and remoteness he found in his own father, John.

Harry de Hartog was the last, and youngest, of Tucker's trio of mentors. While de Hartog was a diligent craftsman who taught Tucker useful, money-saving skills, craft was not the only area where de Hartog led by example. Early in 1938, he persuaded Tucker to join the Artists' Branch of the Communist Party. De Hartog himself had been a member of the Party since the 20s. In doing so, de Hartog helped Tucker find his public role.
De Hartog wrote the first article on surrealism to appear in Australia and in 1940, after the coup that saw George Bell ousted from the CAS, he assumed its leadership. (47) He was a quietly authoritative man, reflective, stoic and self-sufficient. While Vassillieff and Lawlor would remain revered figures to Tucker, Bert's friendship with de Hartog ended in a blazing row. (48)

Like Vassillieff, de Hartog arrived in Australia by accident in 1923. Born in Rotterdam in 1902, de Hartog's family experienced terrible poverty and his mother died from malnutrition. (49) His political awareness was awakened during the first world war when he was a conscientious objector. He spent nine months in jail, seven months of that in solitary confinement. He never forgot the size of his cell where he could only take 'five and a half steps' and the pale light from the sole window in the ceiling. (50)

De Hartog's abiding interest was in art but, like Tucker, he was unable to afford art school fees. After travelling in Germany, de Hartog went to Paris and hung around the artists' cafes where he spotted fellow countryman Kees van Dongen - but he was too shy to approach him. (51)

De Hartog decided to emigrate to South Africa but mistakenly joined a ship bound for Australia and jumped ship in Fremantle. In Perth, he joined the Communist Party and Katharine Susannah Pritchard gave him five pounds to start a branch of the CPA in the eastern states. (52) One of the reasons de Hartog felt solidarity with the CPA and the union movement was its unilateral, welcoming attitude towards migrants. He may not have felt at home in Australia, observing it took 'at least eight years before you can manage', but the left provided him with a much needed sense of community. (53)
From the time of his arrival, as de Hartog travelled around Australia, he worked as Vassileff did - with his body. He was a farm labourer, a timber mill hand and an engine driver. In Lithgow, where he became secretary of the Unemployed Union, he also knew the young Jack Blake, later Victorian secretary of the CPA. (54) De Hartog believed 'society should be scientifically regulated, that people should be equal and should not have to suffer any poverty'. (55)

When de Hartog arrived in Melbourne in 1930, the only job the communist could find was as a butler for the Fairbairn family at their grand Toorak house. (56) The hours were long - 14 hours a day for 30/- a week and his keep - but each afternoon from two to four was precious. It was de Hartog's free time and he used it for painting. (57)

He found his way to the Bell School in 1934 while Bell was overseas and Arnold Shore was in charge. The two men became friends though Bell didn't give de Hartog formal lessons. Sunday Reed was a pupil there at the same time. De Hartog was remembered by a fellow pupil as 'a realist to the nth degree - not like the rest of us at all. The sun had to be shining through the window at the right moment before he could take up a painting he'd started. That sort of realism was very different to what we were doing'. (58)

*Rooms to Let* (Heide MoMA, 1940), painted at de Hartog's East Melbourne studio, is an example of meticulous realism so intently rendered that personal idiosyncracy is expunged. 1940 was the year that France fell to the German army and the French flag waving from the house symbolises the sad, faint hopes of freedom. But *Rooms to Let* is not socialist realism by a long shot. It is the painting of a craftsman concerned with the business of assiduously making an object. No wonder de Hartog's fellow students weren't impressed.
Neither was Bert. It was the man himself Tucker liked, not his art. However, de Hartog did have some success: he sold a dozen paintings from his first exhibition to Maie Casey, another Bell student. De Hartog's second marriage to physiotherapist Margaret Green provided security and he was able to paint fulltime. (59)

Scrounging around for cheap materials was a necessity for Depression artists. Tucker had read the 1934 English translation of Max Doerner's *The Materials of the Artist* which gave precise instructions on how to grind colours, and prepare grounds and pigments. (60) Vassilieff knew of Doerner's book, too, and it did the rounds in Melbourne courtesy of Tucker - he told Conunihan and Arthur Boyd about it. (61)

De Hartog shared with Tucker a booklet from commercial chemists and paint manufacturers ICI, providing their range of colours, pigments and mediums. (62) He also researched the quality of spray paint used for cars and found that it was perfectly good to paint with. Together, Tucker and de Hartog made their own colours from powder pigment. (63) They also went off on foraging missions for wood to make frames and to find outlets for cheap paints and supplies.

Years before at Gill's, Arthur Hartney had tried to persuade Bert to join the Party. But Tucker demurred. Now de Hartog suggested he join the newly formed Artists' Branch, of which de Hartog was secretary. This time Tucker agreed - though he was not aware de Hartog was already a Party member. (64) In fact, Tucker was unaware of the status of the Artists' Branch and thought he had joined the CPA, not an affiliate organisation. After all, he paid dues and attended meetings.

De Hartog's invitation didn't come out of the blue. Tucker had already 'got involved with the Young Communist League and there was a life [drawing]
class that I attended. I'd go down to the Yarra Bank, to the meetings down there where Jack Blake gave speeches. (65)

The Artists' Branch was a continuation of the Workers Art Club of the early 30s. Several of the same people were involved including Noel Counihan, Rem McClintock and Nutter Buzzacott. A small group with no more than a dozen members, it was chaired by Rem McClintock and meetings took place on a monthly basis at the Tattersall's Building in George Street or at a studio loft at the New Theatre in Flanagan's Lane. (66)

Tucker's new leftwing circle were not entirely strangers. He knew McClintock from the VAS drawing classes where Malcolm Good was also a student. Though not a member of the Artists' Branch, Good was a CPA member and he was already involved in trade union and youth work. He recalled lending Tucker political pamphlets and books. (67) Gentle and idealistic, Good would stand for state and federal elections in 1940 and 1943 as a CPA candidate, his campaign bankrolled by Sunday and John Reed. (68)

Evelyn Healy, who had exhibited with Tucker and Colin McGowan's short-lived New Group the year before, also joined up. She regarded Tucker as 'very intense and quite articulate' with 'sensible comments to make' about other artists' work. (69) She admired the self portraits Tucker brought to one meeting as 'extraordinary, something new'. (70) Tucker must have have felt comfortable because he invited Clara to along to a meeting. It was obvious to Healy that Clara 'didn't approve...she spoke out of turn a few times' but Bert was merely amused by his mother's comments. (71) Joy Hester also turned up to one or two meetings. (72)

The Artists' Branch had a crowded agenda, aside from assisting the Party in formulating cultural policies. (73) Firstly, several of its members were commercial artists and it aimed to establish a union, which it successfully
did. (74) Next there was the production of banners and posters for leftwing and CPA events. For Counihan and McClintock it was business as usual: they had been producing art for leftwing causes for years. Members, including Tucker, also collaborated on set designs for New Theatre. Thirdly the Artists' Branch was a CPA recruitment ground for left leaning liberals and fourth, it was a Marxist study class.

'We got into theory straightaway', recalled Healy (75) though 'Marx's theory of surplus value needed my perseverance'. (76) For Healy, the Artists' Branch provided a farewell to art for the next decade: she joined the Collingwood branch of the CPA where she believed she would find 'the deep working class experience which would enable me to paint as the Party wanted'. (77) In fact, her Party commitments meant she did not paint at all.

Tucker enjoyed his early contact with the Artists' Branch. He read Marx, Engels, Christopher Caudwell's *Studies in a Dying Culture* and the Sydney-based *Communist Review*. (78) Tucker was impressed by a vision that promised a new world where injustice and inequality would be overcome and poverty and war finished. Further, it was a call to action. 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world differently', Marx wrote, 'the point is to change it'. (79)

For Tucker, reading *The Communist Manifesto* in 1938, was like reading a prophecy. After all, the crises that Marx and Engels argued had defined capitalist society surrounded Tucker and pressed on him - the Great Depression, the rise of fascism, the imminence of war. Marx and Engels depicted a corrupt, bourgeois society on the brink, with its 'uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions', its 'everlasting uncertainty and agitation', its periodic and inevitable 'commercial crises' and finally 'the unholy alliance' of 'all the Powers of old Europe'. (80) Marx and Engels
predicted capitalism's catastrophic demise, an armageddon where 'all that is solid melts into air...and man is at last compelled to face with his sober senses his real conditions of life'. (81)

Marxism helped Tucker become an intellectual, providing him with a revolutionary perspective on history, a rigorous and stimulating framework for his ideas and the prospect of new and challenging subject matter drawn from contemporary life. The tone of Marxist theory - critical, wordy and dogmatic - matched his own. Marxism gave Tucker the confidence he admired in Lawlor - to speak out and be heard. It provided Tucker with his voice, a resolute and aggressive language, well-suited to the art political brawls that developed in the war years. Under the influence of Marxism, Tucker became a writer and a public speaker, contributing papers, essays and reviews to art groups and to the journal *Angry Penguins*.

Further, Marxism legitimised Tucker's concerns about injustice and oppression, simmering inside him for nearly a decade. It also justified his bitter feelings of exclusion from the privileged life he believed was his birthright. Marxism offered a language for his frustrations and, in the next few years, it inspired the artistic form for those feelings. Together with surrealism and TS Eliot's poetry, Marxism helped to generate a content and a style that would be distinctively Tucker's own. For the petit-bourgeois boy from Malvern who was 'walking on air' when he left school, Marxism was Bert's university.

It was also a rite of passage into maturity. For many young men, Marxism was 'the big idea or the "scale of the Gods"', giving them a link to a larger and potent life, a link that cancelled their own insignificance and initiated them into a greater philosophical world. (82) The initiation included social
awareness, a very active public conscience and a high regard for the working class. (83)

De Hartog effected this initiation, himself a Marxist and Tucker's admired, older friend, and the last in a line of father figures. From now on Marxism itself was Tucker's 'father figure' representing, and conferring, authority, order, power, substance, control and rules. His life was not only related to the revolutionary cause, it was transformed by it.

Between 1938 and 1941, Tucker was a Marxist but he was not a Party member. He was never inside the real communist movement, in the thick of its clandestine or open organization. He was, like many progressive intellectuals of the 30s, a fellow-traveller. Tucker remained idealistic rather than pragmatic, interested in aesthetics not propaganda and finally more concerned with his career than in planning the revolution.

Though the Artists' Branch had its roots in the earlier Workers Art Club, the times were vastly different. In 1935, the Comintern had ordered the formation of a Popular Front where the ideology, membership and goals of the Party were broadened to encourage middle-class sympathisers including writers, artists and intellectuals. Internationally, it was an attractive and auspicious move and leftwing liberals of differing persuasions were recruited. It was especially important for the doctrinaire and pragmatic Australian branch of the Communist Party which has been described as the most hardline Party outside Russia. (84)

However, it is worth remembering just how small the membership of the CPA actually was. In 1936 there were 3000 members on the books: the number rose to 4124 in 1937 and remained at that figure for two years. (85) In Victoria in 1937, there were 950 members. (86) Hardly enough to foment revolution.
In the 30s the Popular Front enlivened Australian culture and many of
the best writers were associated with it including Katharine Susannah
Pritchard, Alan Marshall, Nettie and Vance Palmer, Louis Esson, Miles
Franklin, Marjorie Barnard, Flora Eldershaw and John Morrison. Not all were
Party members but all were engaged by the common goal of justice and
change through socialism. In different ways - and with differing forms of
success - they tried to address it in their work.

The Popular Front was a means to draw alert, informed and educated men
and women into the struggle - even if Party stalwarts had their doubts.
Lance Sharkey, editor of the *Worker's Weekly*, exhorted the doubters that
'the Front is applied Marxism and comrades must realise the fact...Lenin
declared that those who wanted a "pure Socialist revolution" would never
live to see it'. (87)

To be a radical young artist in the 30s and *not* to be involved in leftwing
politics would have been unusual. Among those close to Tucker, the Reeds,
Joy Hester, John Perceval and Arthur and Yvonne Boyd were idealistic Party
supporters. Yosl Bergner would become a committed Party member while
Vassilieff was briefly a member.

JB Miles, the charismatic secretary of the central committee of the CPA,
decreed that art was propaganda and the Party must use it as a weapon. (88)
Tucker tried. He produced a series of heroic worker portraits in 1938, that
he later destroyed. (89) The heroic worker had been a staple of the art of
Maughan, Counihan and McClintock since the Workers' Art Club days in the
early 30s. In 1939, Tucker painted a backdrop for the New Theatre's
production of 'Where's that Bomb?' as well as photographing several of its
productions. He also took shots of the 1941 May Day march. On at least one
occasion, he was part of a group of young men acting as a bodyguard for Jack
Blake when Blake spoke at rowdy demonstrations at the Yarra Bank. The crowds were hurling rocks and Tucker remembered he was 'nearly clobbered by a policeman'. (90)

But the expectations of the Artists' Branch - and of the Party - and the direction of Tucker's art, together with his independent and combative personality, meant a clash was inevitable. He would not bow to the Party line and he would not be told what to do. Firstly, Tucker would not paint banners nor would he engage in the hard, unglamorous Party work of delivering leaflets, the kind of work, as he saw it, 'any grocer's assistant could carry out'. (91) He insisted that his work be 'restricted to the cultural sphere'. (92) His fellow members were unimpressed. Next, he wanted the Artists' Branch meetings to focus on cultural issues and last, and most importantly, he would determine his own subject matter. Tucker was a Marxist intellectual, not an obedient cadre.

Tucker struggled with the themes and substance of an 'engaged' art. His heroic worker portraits turned out to offer nothing more than a blind alley. For Counihan and McClintock, as Party members, there was plenty of work on hand as there had been all through the decade: cartoons, posters and banners to produce, and demonstrations and meetings to attend. While Tucker quibbled, they were activists, obeying - well, most of the time - the Party line. The CPA was notoriously philistine and while it attracted the radical intelligentsia, the Party hierarchy was at times at a loss to know exactly how to handle such disorderly, questioning, creative people. In 1942, Counihan was expelled for 'right-wing deviation'. (93)

From an enthusiastic start, Tucker's involvement with the Artists' Branch waned over the next two years. 'I developed theoretical conflicts with them over cultural matters'. (94) Tucker remembers [Rem] McClintock 'getting up
and saying that all artists now should stop bothering with painting pictures and put all their attention into posters, anti-fascist posters. You know, in other words, painting pictures for your own pleasure was a ridiculous luxury at a time like this. So this was the kind of mentality one had to contend with'. (95)

Late in 1941, after falling behind with his dues, Tucker was summoned to a special meeting of the Artists' Branch which Counihan conducted. Evelyn Healy was summoned from the Collingwood branch for 'this big thing about Bert'. (96) Wisely, de Hartog did not attend the meeting. (97) De Hartog had already reprimanded Tucker over his criticisms of the Party which Bert regarded as 'bureaucratic gagging and inquisitions' on Harry's part. (98)

Though the meeting was, ostensibly, to censure Tucker about fees, it was in fact to scold him about his attitude. Bert was furious. Healy remembers 'they ganged up on him. [Bert] stood up for himself. He defended himself well'. (99) Counihan was the 'chief interrogator in this'. (100) A few weeks later, Tucker paid his back dues to de Hartog and 'considered the break complete'. (101)

Healy may have believed Tucker's ideas weren't 'cutting across CPA theory' but hers wasn't the accepted view. (102) 'Socialist realism' as embraced by members of the Artists' Branch, was not Marxism. Whether or not the full import of this doctrine had reached Australia before the war, as has long been debated, is an academic point. (103)

Australian communists took their political cues from the bolsheviks and as socialist realism was a directive from the Comintern, it had enormous prestige and influence among leftwing artists. (104) But the Artists' Branch did not need the Comintern's permission to practice what they had been developing since 1930 and would continue to develop into the 40s.
While Stalin himself never spoke publicly on matters of art and culture, nonetheless he was the chief author of the doctrine of socialist realism and his iron will lay behind all the changes in cultural matters. (105) When Andrel Zhagnov gave his famous speech about socialist realism to the Soviet Writers Congress in 1934, he began by quoting 'Comrade Stalin' who has 'called our writers the engineers of human souls'. (106) It was the death knell for modernism in the Soviet Union.

Tucker's hero, Christopher Caudwell, came closest to articulating an enlightened Marxist theory of art. When Yosl Bergner met Tucker, he was poring over Caudwell in the State Library. When Tucker was asked, years later, to recall one important book from the library, he immediately named Caudwell's Studies in a Dying Culture, where he 'suddenly opened a page and was confronted'. (107)

Caudwell was a bookish young Englishman who died in 1937 fighting the Spanish Civil war in the International Brigade. Studies in a Dying Culture (1938) was published posthumously as were Caudwell's other theoretical writings. (108) Caudwell had been illuminated by Marxism and his manifesto for socialist art was radiantly optimistic.

As Caudwell saw it, 'what is important to art, Marxism and society is the question: What social function is art playing?' (109) But Caudwell didn't expect the artist to be a communal being, aware 'the paradox of art' meant the artist withdrew 'from his fellows into the world of art, only to enter more closely into communion with humanity'. (110) But the art works of any age must be 'a reflection of the social relations of the age'. (111) Bourgeois culture, in its death throes, must be discarded by the socially aware artist. Tucker, impressed by Caudwell's theories, toiled to find an appropriate form for them.
The fracas with the Artists' Branch bruised Tucker but he did not reject Marxism outright. He continued to read, think and ponder how to make a politically alive, modernist art. Nor was there a complete falling out with Counihan at that point. In October, 1941 Tucker wrote,

'The development of the world crisis has led to the formation of a school of politically conscious neo-realists in Melbourne. Its principal exponents are V.Bergner [YosI], Noel Counihan, George Luke and myself.' (112)

Counihan had not started painting in 1938. Known as a cartoonist and caricaturist, he had been refining his ideas about a socially conscious art in line with Party policy. Counihan was a Depression communist, deeply committed and unyielding. He had done it tough, fighting for workers' rights over a decade. Tucker's equivocations about the cultural content of branch meetings did not impress him. Counihan expected Tucker to demonstrate the kind of allegiance he did to the Party, 'the self-sacrificing loyalty and subjection of everything to the cause of the working class and Socialism.' (113) There was probably disappointment on both sides when each man recognised the other's intransigence. Until the showdown at the Artists' Branch, Tucker had had a good deal of fellow feeling for Counihan, a personality as energetic and outspoken as his own.

Counihan's father had tossed him out of home in 1932 as much for his bohemian carousing as his Red sympathies. Counihan's petit-bourgeois background made him not quite fit in with the Party's proletarian membership. With his artistic interests and his wild Irish fondness for partying, Counihan was often at odds with Party leadership. Counihan liked to 'kick over the traces with artists, musicians and writers...I had a tremendous appetite for experience - for sensation.' (114) And for brave, reckless gestures.
In 1933 the police arrested anyone addressing public meetings about the unemployed and the evicted. Counihan stumped the police by addressing a meeting in Sydney Road, Brunswick from an iron cage - actually an old elevator. (115) As Counihan denounced fascism to the assembled crowd, the police battered their way into the cage, before hauling Counihan out and arresting him. It made Counihan a legend.

In the early days of the Artists' Branch de Hartog, too, felt under pressure, 'urged on' to paint posters. (116) He was 'a bit dubious' about a close connection between painting and politics and his painting never carried any overt socialist realist message. 'I don't think your politics should dictate the way you paint'. (117) De Hartog liked and respected Tucker and his work - he certainly had more fellow feeling for Bert than he did for Counihan (118).

The left has always had a tendency to tear itself apart and the showdown at the Artists' Branch is a good example. It was not Tucker's last stoush with Counihan - their final debate would draw in de Hartog, and it would sever Tucker's friendship with him.

Tucker's differences with the Artists' Branch signalled the power struggles that lay ahead in which Tucker, John Reed, de Hartog and Counihan all played their part. But Marxist theory, especially Caudwell's idealistic interpretation, proved an intellectual lightning rod for Tucker and his art.
Notes

8. op. cit., p.81.
12. Basil Burdett, Herald, 15 September 1937; George Bell, Sun, 15 September 1937.
16. Reed, "Vassilieff", op. cit.
18. Burke, Tucker interview. 5.7.1979, op.cit.
19. ibid.
20. ibid.
22. Reed, "Vassilieff", op.cit., p.113.
31. op.cit., p.18.
32. op. cit., p.104.
33. op.cit., p.23.
34. op. cit., p. 26.
35. Burke, Tucker interview, 17.11.1979, op.cit.
38. Fry, op.cit., p.34.
40. op.cit.,p.19.
42. All Tucker's photographs of Lawlor and Broom Warren taken in 1939 were kept by Lawlor and remain in his papers. Adrian Lawlor Papers, La Trobe Library, State Library of Victoria.
43. Mollison and Bonham, op.cit., p.29.
45. Uhl, op. cit., p.15.
49. ibid.
50. Harry den Hartog. Taped interview. Frank Strachan and Andrew Reeve. University of Melbourne Archives. 24.9.1982. I would like to thank Professor Stuart McIntyre for drawing this interview to my attention. A note about names: Harry den Hartog changed his name to Harry de Hartog once in Australia.
51. Dirk and Lesley den Hartog, interview, op.cit.
52. ibid.
53. ibid.
54. Strachan, den Hartog interview, op. cit.
55. ibid.
56. ibid.
57. ibid.

58. Eagle and Minchin, op.cit., p.178.

59. Dirk and Lesley den Hartog, interview. op.cit.


63. ibid.

64. ibid.

65. Blackman, Tucker interview, op.cit.


67. Good, interview, op.cit.

68. Haese, *Rebels*, op.cit. p.67. Good stood as the CPA candidate for the seat of Fawkner in Melbourne in the 1943 Federal election which saw a sweeping Labor victory. Good was not elected.


70. ibid.

71. ibid.

72. ibid.


75. Healy, interview, op.cit.


81. ibid.
83. ibid.
85. McIntyre, op.cit., p.351.
86. ibid.
88. Healy, interview, op.cit.
89. Uhl, op.cit., p.18.
92. ibid.
94. Blackman, Tucker interview, op.cit.
95. ibid.
96. Healy, interview, op. cit.
97. Though Bernard Smith writes that the meeting took place at Harry de Hartog's studio in Grosvenor Chambers (*Counihan*, op.cit., p.183) Albert Tucker and Evelyn Healy are clear that de Hartog did not attend the meeting
and it is unlikely it was at his studio. Cf. Albert Tucker, "The Flea and the Elephant", *Angry Penguins*, Autumn, 1944, p.57.


100. Smith, *Counihan*, op.cit., p.183.


102. Healy interview, op. cit.


104. Hovey, op.cit., p.12.


106. Ibid.


110. Solomon, op.cit., p.322.

110. Ibid.


115. Ibid.

116. Strachan, den Hartog interview. op.cit.

117. Ibid.

118. Dirk and Lesley den Hartog interview, op.cit.
5. In Love

As I press my heart
no-one is watching
no-one can tell
love is a sword
that scrapes the soul.
Joy Hester (1)

The story has been told before. Joy Hester was a 17 year-old Gallery School student. Blond-haired and blue-eyed, she was strikingly attractive. Tucker had invited her to the studio he leased from accountant George Blay in Motherwell's Gateway, just next door to John Vickery's. Tucker had met Hester a few times before plucking up the courage to ask her to sit for a portrait. Merely a pretext.

When Joy knocked at the door, Bert leaned out from the upstairs window to find her smiling up at him from the bluestone-flagged lane below. She was right on time. (2) It was a chilly day in the first half of the year and Joy was dressed in her best clothes, a well-cut white coat and a vivid green blouse. She was bare-legged because she couldn't afford stockings. Hester was already an accomplished model, posing for portrait classes at Melbourne Institute of Technology where 'after every session of rest, [she] would recheck her line of mien without really being asked but as if prompted by an inner perfection'.(3)

After inviting Hester in, Tucker asked to her to sit and he began sketching. He was tense, excited. He made a pass, a clumsy, passionate overture that
she rejected. She liked him but she was cool. She was seeing another man, after all. He wasn't the only one.

That is the third version of the story. I've published two others, both slightly different. (4) Tucker's memory of the event altered subtly each time he recalled it and each time he recalled it, I adjusted the facts to match. He didn't actually remember where he met Joy though there was a chance encounter in the streets near the Gallery School with a group of her friends. He once told me 'I chased her round the studio that day and caught her. You see, I was in my prime'. I assumed he meant they made love, that their ten year relationship started then.

More recently, regretfully, Tucker told me it wasn't so. He remembered the other man, the wealthy businessman's son from Toorak whom Joy was also seeing. Not that Tucker knew. For months Hester didn't tell him. Then, after Tucker was apprised of the facts, he had to wait for Hester to make up her mind, to choose between the two of them. Around Christmas of 1938 the situation came to a head when Hester failed to turn up for a date. Tucker arrived at the Toorak mansion in a fury, ready to 'dong' the other fellow. Hester was there and so was the other man, who, deciding discretion was definitely the better part of valour, didn't appear. Bert demanded Joy come with him and she acquiesced. (4a)

Earlier that year Hester had fallen pregnant to the same man whose father ran Melbourne's best-known chain of cake shops. Joy told her friends all about him. He had shown Joy a taste of the high-life, whisking her away in his sports car for weekends at Portsea, the beach playground of Melbourne's rich. (4b) When Hester got pregnant, he paid for the abortion. Joy made jokes about it to share with her girlfriends, cousin Marie Bracher and Joy Murphy. (5) Hester swore that all the girls in the waiting room were pregnant to him
and he was footing the bill for the lot. 'The signature on all the cheques was the same. That was the biggest laugh'. (6) By year's end, Hester had made her choice. She ran away from home to live with Bert.

Joy grew up in the bayside suburb of Elwood. Dawson Avenue ended at the beach and the Hester home was a roomy, Californian bungalow with a large, well-kept garden. But, rather like Tucker's home, it hid tensions and sadness. Hester's father died when she was twelve. In 1930, Ferdinand Hester's thirty year career as a bank manager had ended in ignominy when he was sacked for alcoholism. (7) He died from a heart attack two years later. At the height of the Depression, Louise was left to rear Joy - her son Neville was eleven years older - and start her own business, a real estate agency in nearby Gardenvale.

Joy was certainly a handful but Louise's method of dealing with her was to lay down the law. Even Tucker found Louise daunting. She was 'a very intense and rather violent sort of woman, not physically violent, but a very intense and domineering woman and a very strong character. You know, one of those people who comes into the room and everything would go black'. (8)

Conflict was inevitable and Joy's adolescence became one long battle with Louise. To Marie Bracher, the confidante of Joy's strife with her mother, Louise seemed like 'a businesswoman playing mother...She was very tough, very materialistic'. (9) Marie's mother begged Louise to be a little more generous with Joy who often arrived at the Brachers wearing old, ill-fitting clothes. Joy didn't get on with Neville, either, and felt he lorded it over her. She also felt Neville was the favoured child.

Joy pleaded with her mother to be allowed to attend art school but Louise refused until George, her brother, impressed by Joy's talent, talked Louise into it. (10) When Joy had her abortion, she knew couldn't tell her mother.
So, to disguise the smell of chloroform, she doused her clothes with dry-cleaning fluid. (11) While it was another tale of reckless bravado to be shared with Marie and Joy Murphy it is, in fact, a miserable story.

Joy would have been bleeding heavily and in discomfort, if not pain, after the abortion. To convince her mother all was well, let alone getting her hands on the dry-cleaning fluid, was a sustained and complicated exercise in deception. She couldn't turn to her girlfriends for practical help - they were too young and innocent to know what to do. The only person Joy felt she could rely on was herself. It set a pattern for her to act alone, making the big decisions and consulting none in the process. Confrontation, with its implications of openness, discussion and self-assurance, was not Joy's forte.

When Joy ran away from home, Louise found her carefully hoarded collection of art postcards and tore them to shreds. But it didn't end there. As far as Louise was concerned, Tucker was 'one of these mad artists' and she was determined to break up the relationship by any means she could. (12) 'Oh, yes, the mother was very resentful and hostile...She couldn't stand the sight of me and completely opposed our relationship and our marriage'. (13)

Louise was not the only mother upset by Bert and Joy's relationship. Clara was dismayed by Bert's decision, early in 1939, to leave Malvern to make a home for himself and Joy. He set himself up in a tiny studio-flat at 26 Little Collins Street, the hub of the inner city world of galleries, bookshops and cafes he had come to know so well.

The great bond between mother and son was sundered and Clara was no longer the centre of Tucker's emotional life. Also he had chosen a woman who was everything his mother was not: daring, beautiful and artistic. If Tucker wanted to break down his 'narrow, rigid upbringing', he couldn't have chosen better than Joy. One can only imagine the genteel Clara's
reaction to Joy, and to Bert's decision to take the bohemian path and live with Joy, rather than marry her.

At 56, Clara's dreams of the good life were well and truly over. When John died two years later, Clara would be forced to move in with her daughter Ida. There had always been friction between the two women and Clara resisted the idea to the last. Clara did not approve of Hester - which she told Bert only after Joy had left him - but she kept her peace, even when Bert and Joy were married in 1941.

Hester's effect on the older generation tended to be disturbing. Joyce Good, a friend from the VAS, brought Hester home to visit. Hester with 'bright red lipstick and bottle-blond hair...swept through the house' as Good's mother muttered, 'Brassy tart!' (14)

But Tucker was besotted. 'The little peroxide blonde hoyden' that John Reed remembers plays no place in Bert's memory. (15) He seemed blind to Joy's radiant, provocative sensuality that had the boys at the George Bell school doing 'handsprings at the sight of her.' (16) Blind also to how outspoken and rebellious Hester appeared to many of her contemporaries, men and women alike.

George Browning, a fellow student at the Gallery School in 1937, was taken by Hester's beauty. 'Any artist contemplating a religious subject, and requiring to depict an angel, would have found her a very suitable model'. (17) But 'as one got to know her, she began to evince a temperament tough, wilful and sardonic...She disconcerted and dismayed the older ladies...I sensed a kind of explosiveness about Joy...I knew she was not my kind of girl'. (18)

To Joy Murphy and Marie Bracher, Hester was a role model, not only high-spirited and daring but talented, too. 'We'd go down to Elwood beach and Joy
Albert Tucker *Joy Hester* (1938, now lost)
would do cartwheels, over and over, in the sand. Wherever she went, she would create a fuss. She was quite beautiful'. (19) Yvonne Lennie, who would marry Arthur Boyd in 1944, thought Hester 'looked fantastic. It was fairly unusual to have such artificially blond hair. Tremendous make-up, red lips and big, blue eyes. Joy used to stride up and down the Gallery School as if she owned the place'. (19a) Even Alannah Coleman, a more sophisticated friend, regarded Joy as 'wonderful, free-speaking...she used language I dared not use'. (20) Noel Counihan, with an eye for an attractive girl, described Joy as 'uninhibited...warm and earthy'. (21)

George Bell, who had clearly observed Hester's effect on his male students, took Bert aside a few months after the relationship began. That day Tucker had arrived at the Bell School to discuss Contemporary Art Society business. James Quinn, president of the VAS, was also present. In no uncertain terms, Bell told Bert that Hester was not a suitable companion for him and he should break it off with her. (22) Tucker was outraged, not only because of his feelings for Joy, but because he resented Bell's paternalism. As far as Bell was concerned, Joy Hester spelt trouble.

Tucker's first impressions of Hester are best captured in Portrait of Joy Hester (1938, now lost). Interestingly, Tucker struggles, and fails, to place Hester within the ambitious language of modernism, with its painterly concerns and formal imperatives. Joy Hester verges on the vulgar. It has none of the latent expressionism and vigorous brushstrokes that enliven the surfaces of Portrait of Alan Sumner (1936, MoMA at Heide) or Portrait of Laurie Veal (1939, NGA) nor the cool, Modigliani-like geometry of Portrait of a Girl (1939, NGA).

By giving weight to Hester's full, pink lips and heavy jaw, Tucker creates a handsome rather than a beautiful face. He slants her eyes upwards, giving
her an expression of dreamy, pensive, sensual repose. She looks away from him. Hers is the closed, remote face of an exquisite object of desire, an object that, at the time of the sitting, he had not made his. Bert's yearning and frustration make impossible the detachment necessary to control the subject through formal means. Joy Hester is a moving and ungainly painting, a mirror of Tucker's hope and longing coalesced in Hester's still, powerful, mask-like face. He represents her as a woman, not a girl, one who is cool, self-contained and glamorous.

In Tucker's oeuvre lips, their shape and symbolism, are a transforming feature. Lawlor's crooked grin in Portrait of Adrian Lawlor (1939, NGA) is a harbinger of the crescent shape, the gruesome, scarlet-lipped grin that determines Images of Modern Evil (1943-47). Hester's mouth is exaggerated, too. Pouting, nearly sulky, her lips are shut, perhaps another signal of her deliberate and measured unavailability. For Tucker, already smitten, the provocative sexual symbolism of her closed, pink lips was as intense as it was unconscious.

Joy Hester is also quintessentially Tucker's image of Joy. It is not the bright, bubbly chatterbox whom Hester's friends cherished, the one who 'voiced everything she thought' (23) who regaled them with stories that were 'hare-brained and hot-blooded' (24) who was dubbed 'Happiness' because she was always 'giggling and laughing'. (25) It is the withdrawn, reflective young woman that Tucker perceived.

Joy Hester was a prized work for Tucker, and one he never wished to part with. It was also a painting he never quite 'finished', touching up sections over the years, as though Hester's image was never complete, never done with. Sadly, the work disappeared from Tucker's possession, believed stolen, and, to this date, has not been found. (26)
Claire, Tucker's niece
There was another reason Tucker may have found Hester's looks strangely appealing. In March 1938, Claire, his six-year-old niece, Ida's daughter, had died. Bert worshipped the pretty, vivacious little girl. The resemblance between Claire and Joy is uncanny. Both have the same strong jaw, olive skin, platinum blond hair, large, blue eyes, radiant smile and vitality. Photographs of Claire look exactly like Joy as a child.

Claire's death was slow and hideous. She contracted a sterno-mastoid infection which turned into meningitis. Bert would visit her at the Royal Children's Hospital. 'It was in summer time...and the poor little girl was there with her head all bound up and tubes in her neck. And I was sitting there in despair, just fanning because there was no such thing as air-conditioning and it's about a hundred and five degrees outside, so I was standing there, perspiration pouring off me, in total despair and depression and fanning and fanning...And I still remember the nurses coming off duty for a cup of tea and their kitchen was nearby...and there was the tinkling of crockery, the girls chatting and laughing and I got this awful contrast to my state of mind and this casual, relaxed sort of thing going on in the kitchen'. (27)

A few days later, Claire died. Bert had a dream where a 'young Chinaman was standing on the front porch...and there was a tiny coffin about eighteen inches long on his hands. My mother said, "It's Claire" and then the coffin just grew like that, to her size, the size of a small girl, and then as we were standing there looking at it...there was a loud thumping on the door and I woke up out of the dream. It was my brother-in-law coming to tell us she had just died'. (28)

At 23, Bert lost his virginity to Joy. Not only was she the first woman he had made love to, she was the first girl he had kissed. As a young woman Joy
was - and remained while she was with Tucker - sexually independent. He was obsessed with her while she was less deeply involved with him.

Joy Murphy remembers that Hester had plenty of men to choose from. Uninhibited and outgoing, Hester was playing the field and enjoying herself. 'She was heavily into the big copulating'. (29) When Hester stayed with Murphy at Murphy's parents' home in Gardenvale, the two girls would lie in bed having whispered, late night conversations about 'love and men and sex'. (30) Murphy, a virgin, nervously asked Hester, 'What was it like?' Hester thought for a moment. 'It's beaut', she replied confidently but advised Murphy, already seeing John, her future husband, to wait. 'You might get pregnant and your family will be upset'. (31)

Murphy's parents were nervous about the influence Hester might be having on their daughter. Hester had been a rebel at school, constantly in trouble, earning detentions and bad conducts marks, and playing truant. (32) She told friends she was expelled but that was another tall tale. In the back room of Murphy's father's chemist shop, Hester peroxided her hair platinum blond. 'She used buckets of it', Murphy recalls. 'It's a wonder her hair didn't drop out'. (33)

In the early months of her relationship with Tucker, Hester instigated a pattern that would continue for the next ten years: she would appear to be faithful while secretly pursuing other affairs.

Tucker was an innocent, immature young man. Romance and flirting, the games of love, did not come easily to him. His relations with women were strained. Zelie Pimlott, Noel Counihan's girlfriend, remembered Bert from those years as a 'tall, undernourished, angular, and rather unapproachable chap...I don't think he liked women much. Perhaps he was afraid of them'.
(34) Joan Currie, a young painter whose studio was opposite Tucker's in Little Collins Street, remembered Bert as 'terrifying'. (35)

From the time of the showdown at Toorak, Hester learned to keep her affairs quiet, deciding it was better if Tucker found out nothing. Tucker, adamantly faithful, never doubted her. It partly explains his inability to get over their split in 1947. As far as Tucker was concerned no matter what betrayals, disappointments and reversals emerged in a marriage, it must continue. He did not countenance divorce and viewed the divorce rate with alarm as an insidious contemporary malaise. For him, in marriage, as in so many other areas of conviction, there were no variations, no grey areas. The lines were drawn. Till death us do part.

Love teaches us fear - fear of loneliness, fear of loss - and Hester honed Tucker's need and fear of women. To keep Joy, in those first months, Bert had to wait until the moment of explosion where he arrived at the Toorak mansion and carried her off. He acted 'like a man', resolute and aggressive. Because if life was a battle, then so were the relations between the sexes. Lust and dependence, sexual bargains and deceits were visualised as powerful symbolic forms in Tucker's paintings in the 1940s and, subsequently, in the narrative he constructed of his own life.

Tucker once told an interviewer, 'You women have an insidious power to invade the male psyche and take it over and manipulate it this way and that. One must be aware of that. Of course, you're well aware of that but we're not supposed to be'. (36) His resentment may have begun in the months of waiting for Joy to make up her mind, the months of being the kind of man he did not want to be, passive, like his father. For all Bert's adoration of Clara, he must have been unnerved by the way she emasculated John, the way she scorned, pitied and censured him, the way she made him feel weak, small, a
failure. It may have been at home, listening to Clara’s diatribes about John, that Tucker learned both to fear women and to recognise his enormous need of them.

An atmosphere of self-disgust prevailed in the Tucker household. John loathed his own failures. How could he not register them? Clara was ready to remind him. A bright, goodlooking young woman, Clara probably had other proposals, better opportunities that she brooded over in the long, discontented years of her marriage.

Despite the ugliness he saw in his parents’ union, Tucker’s fear of abandonment was greater than any compromise a bad marriage offered. He believed, ‘If the mother leaves, everything falls apart. The mother has utter centrality’. (37) That kind of dependence made his commitment to Hester final and complete. Intensely proprietorial, he could not imagine, after the scene at Toorak, that she could be unfaithful, that there could be anyone else in her life.

Tucker’s photographs show how brutally uncomfortable the Little Collins Street flat was. Yvonne Lennie, who sub-leased it from Tucker after he left, remembered ‘it was quite marvellously decrepit. How they lived there, I don’t know’. (38) Hal Porter wrote that ‘the attics and back rooms of Little Collins, Collins Street, and western Bourke Street are rented by young artists of every sort who use the places as studios, love-nests, pieds-a-terre away from mum and dad or merely as settings for booze-ups’. (38a)

The central room - Tucker’s studio - measured about twenty feet square while a smaller adjoining room served as a kitchen-cum-livingroom and bedroom. The studio was crowded with Tucker’s paintings and books while
postcard and poster reproductions, bought from Nibbi’s, festooned the wall above the bed.

Furniture was minimal. There was a desk where Tucker completed his commercial art jobs plus a few chairs. One low table was crowded with paints, brushes and pencils while another was piled with art magazines. An easel occupied the space near the window. The large open fireplace was, to Tucker’s memory, rarely used. Anyway, they couldn’t afford firewood.

There was no toilet in the flat, no bathroom or running water. To fill a kettle or to use the toilet involved a trek downstairs and around the corner into a lane to find the tap and an outside lavatory. Water for washing and cooking was brought up and stored in cans. Tucker and Hester slept on a narrow divan and, in the colder months, Joy needed not only a nightdress but socks and a jumper to keep warm.

The studio’s front, south-facing windows overlooked Little Collins Street while at the back, accessible through a window, was a small, north-facing rooftop balcony, a precious slice of space and sunshine in the middle of town. Tucker photographed Hester there several times as well as Yosl Bergner who stripped off his shirt to catch the sun. The little balcony overlooked a cityscape of tiled roofs and buildings that Tucker commemorated in his lively, vividly-coloured painting City (1939, NGA).

The studio cost five shillings a week and Tucker had rented it from Ian Robertson, a tubercular young artist who was helping build Justus Jorgensen’s Montsalvat at Eltham. But the lease for the loft originally belonged to the stylish Alannah Coleman, a friend of both Bert and Joy’s. Alannah’s own studio was nearly opposite number 26 and she shared it with two Gallery School friends, Joan Currie and Joan Malcolm.
Alannah remembered 'dear Bert' affectionately from those years, one of Tucker's few female contemporaries to see beyond his daunting manner. (39) In London, in the 1950s and 60s, Alannah actively promoted Australian art, showing Tucker's work, along with Arthur Boyd and Sidney Nolan. (40) In 1939, Little Collins Street was a busy place. Directly opposite Tucker and Hester was the Precision Engraving Company while a multitude of small businesses and artisans filled the rest of the block - printers, hatters, sewing machine repairers, cobblers and die-sinkers. The sprawling Eastern Market stood on the corner of Little Collins and Exhibition Streets, the site of the present Southern Cross Hotel, where Tucker and Hester shopped for fruit, vegetables and meat. In the market's wine cellar, flagons of rough red could be had for two shillings and other stalls hawked cheap clothes and shoes. On the mezzanine balcony, tattooists and chiropodists filled their windows with pictures of corns, bunions and tattoos.

Ironically, it was also the posh end of town. Around the corner in Spring Street was the gracious Windsor Hotel which faced Parliament House and the government offices. Next to Parliament House was the green sweep of the Treasury Gardens. The elite Melbourne Club was at the top of Collins Street, the same area where Melbourne's specialists had their rooms.

Friends rented studios nearby. No-one had any money and everyone scraped a living from odd jobs. Downstairs from Alannah, Joan Currie's boyfriend, promising Gallery student Howard Matthews, had his studio. In the same Little Collins Street block, Ian Robertson ran a shop where he sold handmade ceramic light bases. At Alcaston House around the corner in Collins Street, Basil Burdett and Maie Casey had apartments. Sidney Nolan and Noel Counihan were sharing a studio in a tenement opposite the State
Museum in Russell Street where jazz musician Graeme Bell and his friends had 'many a boisterous jam session'. (41)

Yosl Bergner often arrived for breakfast. At nineteen, Bergner was destined to have a similar effect on Melbourne's young painters as VassiliEFF. Tucker felt 'fluently engaged with him immediately'. (42) They met at the State Library.

'This young fellow came up behind me and introduced himself and said, "My name is Yosl Bergner. I am a Polish Jew and I'm a painter and I would like to meet other Melbourne painters".' (43) Bert invited Yosl to the flat and he turned up promptly the next morning. Since arriving from Warsaw in 1937, Bergner had survived by slaving in Carlton sweatshops and at the Victoria Market. He was barely getting enough to eat and, gratefully, he shared Tucker and Hester's basic meal of tea, toast and Weeties. Often it was Yosl's only meal of the day.

'Bert was good to me,' Bergner recalls, 'very good...like a father.' (44) One morning Guy Reynolds, a psychiatrist and a fledging collector of modern art, called past the studio just as Bergner was leaving. 'Do you know that fellow's starving?' Reynolds asked Tucker with alarm. 'He's got all the signs of malnutrition.' (45) Reynolds insisted on giving Bert iron tablets to pass on to Bergner.

Sometimes Noel Counihan dropped by, so did Harry de Hartog and Joy Murphy. Tucker's paintings, including several self-portraits, were on display and they were much admired by the visitors - though not, apparently, by Counihan. (46) Myra Gould, a Bell student, had a studio in Pink Alley, just off Little Collins Street, where she met her future husband Matcham Skipper, one of the Montsalvat clan. (47) Both Myra and Matcham became friends of Bert and Joy's.
There was a constant to-ing and fro-ing between the inner city's studios, bookshops, galleries and cheap restaurants in which Tucker, with Hester at his side, now fully took part. Many cafes had ingenious ways of getting around the liquor laws. At the Greek restaurants in Lonsdale Street, vermouth was served in coffee cups at threepence a cup while Bourke Street's Chinatown restaurant's served beer in mugs. (48)

But Bert and Joy definitely weren't 'pub people', Tucker said. 'I couldn't stand the pub atmosphere because to me it was an atmosphere of violence, hatred and mayhem and you couldn't be there ten minutes before some clown [was] coming up trying to make trouble of some sort. You know, the big Jack Hemingway performance and every time it was always some low grade moron there looking for a way to get rid of his frustrations...Bars were very nasty places'. (49)

Wherever the young artists congregated there was talk - discussions and arguments about galleries and reviews, art world figures and art schools, books, poetry, politics and the daily grind of financial survival. Uniting everyone was the fear, the terrible, imminent possibility of another major European war.

Early 1939 should have been a happy period where Tucker and Hester settled into their new life but Louise Hester decided to create havoc. It meant Hester could not stay with Tucker for long at the Little Collins Street studio. Louise, determined to bring her wayward daughter home, chased Joy from her other hide-outs, too, the East Melbourne boarding houses and the homes of her friends, one after another. Louise sent the police after Joy, had a screaming row with Clara Tucker at Leeton Court and generally made as
much trouble as she could. She even dobbed Tucker into the military police. Effectively, it kept Hester on the run.

In a letter to her mother written at Christmas 1941, where Joy enumerates Louise's campaign of hostilities, she ends wearily, 'In the above mentioned facts, I cannot see one act of motherly understanding. About the only thing I have done to you is ignore. And I don't know I'm not quite justified!' (50)

Perhaps it was a situation that simply got out of hand. Louise, middle-class and respectable, was horrified by her unstoppable, free-spirited daughter. She sought to curtail her and earned Joy's fear and hatred. 'There's only one sort of reply I'll ever know to that woman', Hester wrote to Sunday Reed, 'and that is deep and narrow and covered with earth - sounds callous but I think God will give her a second chance in the form of a speechless, underground animal of some sort'. (51) Unlike Clara, Louise did not learn to keep quiet about her child's confusing new lifestyle and unlike Clara, she lost her child's respect and love.

Given Hester's background, it is obvious what drew her to Tucker. Organised, practical and ambitious, he represented a father figure. After all, he was nearly seven years older than she. He was a practising professional artist, already noted by Burdett and Bell as a young man to watch. In the months when Hester first got to know him, Tucker played a role in the formation of the Contemporary Art Society and was elected to its council. He introduced her to wider circles in the art world, important new friends that included Sunday and John Reed. Finally, Hester was profoundly admiring of his talent. 'He's a genius', she declared to her friend Pauline McCarthy. (52)

Tucker recalls Hester 'always did defer to me.' (53) He also felt that Hester 'had a very strong inferiority complex'. (54) 'I think she felt very much the
younger, junior member of the group and she felt that all of us were ahead of her, which we were, of course, because we were much older and also working in a more substantial sort of assault on materials. We had more male analytical minds which she didn't have and which I think she felt. I think she had quite a sense of inferiority on several grounds during that period'. (55)

In a sense, Joy was Bert's student. She was gifted and she badly wanted to learn. Despite her rather erratic attendance at the Gallery School, she had won a drawing prize in 1937 which meant she could skip a year. But the Gallery School limited her and after she met Tucker and her other mentor, Danila Vassilieff, she recognised it. But their differing status set the tone of the relationship: Tucker was the boss and Hester, the junior member.

In Susan Rubin Suleiman's essay on Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst, she notes 'it is important to acknowledge the positive consequences of recognition by an established, male "authority" before dwelling on the disadvantages'. (56) Ernst, the older, distinguished member of the surrealist circle, brought Carrington, the young English artist, 'into a new life'. (57) Tucker did the same for Hester. She was on the margins of the art world before meeting him and, in his company, moved into a central group, an alliance with the Reeds and Nolan.

Hester's talent was one of the reasons she had chosen Tucker. She'd had to fight to attend art school and she had run away from home - not just to live with Tucker but to live the life of an artist. Bert was her ticket out of suburbia and away from Louise. In Hester's family, it was felt that 'Joy ran off with him. She was the black sheep, she brought shame to the family'. (58) Marie Bracher, a student at Swinburne Technical School, was impressed by
Plate 14
*Nude Study* (c. 1939–41)
Brush and ink and pen
38.1 × 26 cm
*Albert Tucker, Melbourne*

Joy Hester *Nude Study* (c. 1939-41, Private Collection)
Hester's dedication as a young artist. 'I used to think, gosh, I wish I could be as determined as she is.' (59)

Tucker, proficient as both painter and draughtsman, was an exemplary role model. By the end of 1938, Hester had quit the Gallery School and began attending classes at the VAS. Head of a Woman (c.1938, NGA), produced at the Gallery School, indicates Hester's ability to render form in a realistic, detailed, highly modelled and academic manner. Tucker's remembers Hester's early drawings as 'very, very ordinary'. (60) But once she started at the VAS, where Tucker was class monitor, her drawings matured rapidly and she gained a distinctive, fluid, expressionist style. 'I thought, she's really got something there'. (61)

Soon Hester emerged as a confident draughtswoman, a response to the stimulating creative freedom that life with Tucker provided.

Female Nude (c.1939, NGV), Male Nude (c.1939, Private Collection) and Nude Study (c.1939, NGA) are studies in contradictions. Their massive proportions do not earth them but are drawn so loosely that the bodies seem light, as if they could fly away like a kite on a breeze. Flesh dominates but, at the same time, the nudes are not sexy or even sensual. The expression on their diminutive faces is withdrawn and self-contained, as if the flesh is a burden, a separate realm to the life of the mind.

Perhaps to Hester the desires of the flesh were mindless and to be overwhelmed by them meant to have a brain no bigger than a pin. It symbolised the split between her secret affairs and her relationship with Tucker. The former were not to be taken seriously, not allowed to interfere with the central commitment. 'I'll always go back to Tucker', Hester declared to Yvonne and Arthur Boyd. (61a) Hester was quite capable of managing
contradictions and her history with Louise had made secrecy a matter of necessity, as well as a source of power.

At the same time, Hester developed a distinctive work method where she would sit 'on the floor with a bottle of Quink [ink] and a lot of paper and just produce all these drawings, quick, quick, quick and produce twenty, thirty, forty in two or three days'. (62) Tucker, the painstaking, meticulous draughtsman, watched in amazement. It was a modus operandi in complete contrast to his. 'I don't recall her ever sitting at the table or using anything else. It was always straight down on the floor'. (63)

When she painted, Hester ignored her surroundings, Tucker included. 'I would be sitting in the room reading or working myself...She would get the fit coming on and I wasn't any obstacle to it, no matter where I was or what I was doing. And I had the good instinct to leave it like that. I never attempted to direct or pressure or do anything like this with her'. (64)

But while Tucker acknowledged Hester's skill was 'quick and delicate and perceptive' he felt she 'didn't have the discipline, she didn't have the inquiring mind into the materials, she had not the patience with overcoming the resistance of materials'. (65) 'She was a bad manager of herself'. (66)

Tucker was also Hester's conservator. 'Joy would do a batch of drawings and then walk away and leave them and the thing [that] I developed when I saw that there was something, you know, quite important going on in her work [was that] I collected it up. You know, there'd be all these drawings over the floor, I'd pick them up and I had a cardboard box that I threw them all in'. (67)

Luckily for my research that Tucker did pick them up for without his assiduous collection of Hester's drawings, her early work as an artist would
have been unknown to me. It would also have been much harder to trace her development, her choices, changes and experiments.

Hester was not directly influenced by Tucker, even as a young artist, though both valued the primacy of drawing. Hester's whole career was devoted to drawing. How much she must have admired Tucker's solid, patient years of training, his expert life drawings and the preparatory watercolour studies for paintings like *The Philosopher* (1939, NGA), so superbly finished they are little artworks in themselves. Tucker was better for Hester as a young artist than anything the Gallery or any other art school could offer. Evelyn Healy was impressed by the 'sensible' things Tucker had to say about painting. Hester was, too.

Hester needed and depended on Tucker, telling Michael Keon in 1942 that she was worried by her lack of formal training and that Tucker was 'the only person' who could make her train formally. (68) There were deeper needs. Her 'great terror' was that if she and Tucker split up, then 'she wouldn't be able to survive. She needed Tucker as a stable prop and a framework to keep her life together...Without Bert she feared a personal disintegration'. (69)

Hester rarely used oil paints, preferring the freedom and speed of brush and ink, but she one day she broke into Tucker's careful hoard of paints. 'God, I nearly fainted. She had the paint plastered on with palette knives, you know, trowelled on. It was a way I couldn't afford to paint myself and I nearly went berserk. I had quite a row with her. Of course it was silly but when you're in this situation of need, it isn't silly...So I quickly hid what paint I had there and issued very, very stern orders to leave that bloody stuff alone. If you want to paint, go out and get your own.' (70)
Mischievous and reckless, Hester's behaviour was that of a child who takes the very thing it knows it is forbidden and will earn the parent's wrath. Of course, Hester was aware of exactly how precious Tucker's paints were to him. They had a symbolic function, aside from the practical one, as a source of professionalism, frugality and pride. Hester's intent in wrecking them was subversive, taking and using for own art the very objects that helped Tucker define himself as an artist. Hester wanted what Tucker had - the sense of endeavour and commitment - and she tried to 'steal' those characteristics by stealing his paints. Hester admired Tucker but she wanted to poke fun at him, too, at his high seriousness, at his self-regard. She did not dare mock him to his face but she pilfered and destroyed what was valuable to him and what would cause the most alarm.

Tucker set the rules. He would not allow Hester to have raging arguments with him of the kind she was used to having with Louise. In one early row, Joy gave Bert a kick in the shins. Bert made sure, with the tongue-lashing that followed, Joy never behaved that way again. (70a) Tucker established a very different emotional order with Hester than existed in his home. He was not going to be hen-pecked like John, the subject of Clara's incessant complaint. Tucker took on the role of the assertive and dominant male. He 'out-fathered' his father, he ruled the roost. Yet Hester's infidelity indicates how hollow that dominance was, and how transparent she found it to be.

Negotiating a union between two such strong-willed, creative people was never going to be easy. Firstly, contemporary attitudes to women artists were appalling. George Bell may have had among his women students some of Melbourne's best artists but he 'saved his finer efforts for the men'. (71) Myra Skipper remembered how 'the men used to sit around arguing that the women's role was to support the male artist. Women were incapable of
really achieving anything'. (72) Margaret Preston, Australia's best known and successful woman modernist, belonged to an older, Sydney generation. There was no similar woman artist in Melbourne on whom Hester could model herself.

Tucker did not take Hester seriously as an artist but he blamed her for this: another secret she kept from him. 'She concealed the size of her ambition from me', he told me. 'That I knew nothing about. I took it that she was simply in a sense almost a hobbyist. She would just relieve her feelings every now and then by banging out a few drawings and I would often be astonished at how good they were. But she never confessed to me any ambition to be an artist or to be recognised or to do any of these things'. (73)

Did Hester 'conceal' her ambitions or did Tucker exclude that from his vision of her, just as he excluded that other problematic feature, her radiant sensuality?

Tucker often described himself as 'Victorian' and if that means repressive and authoritarian, it is a guide to his complex attitude toward Hester. Once their relationship was established, Tucker was very possessive. Perhaps winning her affection had been such an arduous task that Tucker was less delighted and proud than wounded and dismayed he had been put through such an ordeal. After all, it was months before she had told him about her other boyfriend. He had been deceived by her, something a man as proud as Tucker would not take lightly. If he had idealised her, it was a galling lesson and if he had thought that in Hester he would find the pliant model of womanhood he admired in his mother, then it was a rude awakening.

Tucker's was a loud, controlling presence. His stories, his needs came first and Hester, herself a great story-teller and mimic, restrained herself and allowed Tucker to take centre stage. She was not crushed by him, she was
too hardy and ebullient for that, but his was the commanding voice. Equally it was her choice. Hester liked tough men to administer the curbs she felt she could not provide for herself. Gray Smith, her second husband, also had a robust personality. Hester sought out men who created boundaries for her. The model of masculinity she chose was strong to the point of severity: the man provided discipline, edges, rules, dominance, even a kind of bondage.

To their friends, Joy and Bert didn’t seem 'lovey-dovey' and Bert 'didn't show affection.' (74) Pauline McCarthy observed that Bert ‘made Joy nervous...She used to drop things, break things.’ (75) Marie Bracher felt that 'Joy was frightened of him. Also fascinated by him. He was very possessive. He spoke in a be-my-servant type of tone. It was very degrading, very humiliating...Women especially had no brains but they were suffered. No-one but he had any brains...She was petrified of leaving him.’ (76) But, Bracher concedes, 'my knowledge was when she was down about it.' (77) To Yvonne Lennie, Bert and Joy seemed 'very united, very fond of one another. Joy was as bold as brass. That was her persona...Joy was more scary than Bert in fact'. (77a)

Hester, unused to intimacy of a sentimental kind, perhaps did not expect anything 'lovey-dovey' from Bert. Observing Martin and Rosemary Smith, she wrote to Sunday Reed, 'They seem like lovers, they hold hands and goo at each other - it embarrasses me even - I suppose that is love. I don't know, I haven't loved like that.' (78) There was a toughness in Hester that enabled her to stand up to Tucker, to his imperious personality. She had learned her emotional independence at home. Louise was cold and harsh, her father was dead and her older brother a distant, difficult figure.

It seems that only with her girlfriends Hester felt secure enough to display honesty, warmth and affection. Hester showed extraordinary
bravado in turning the trauma of her abortion into a joke but at least she shared it with Murphy and Bracher. For all that Hester seemed a beguiling chatterbox who 'voiced everything she thought' she was, in fact, secretive and watchful. (79) Fear and watchfulness are qualities apparent in works like Mad Girl (Private Collection, 1942), Two Women In a Room (Janine Burke, c.1942) and the Lovers series (1955-6). It is an aura that permeates her entire oeuvre.

Hester's secret sexual life was equally a manifestation of her need for independence from Bert, a separate territory of desire and freedom. It also indicated that, perhaps for her, the relationship was not sexually satisfying. Perhaps another reason that it took her most of 1938 to make up her mind about him. Unusually for a woman, Hester adopted the pragmatic European model of marriage: one shares the home and public life with the marriage partner while keeping a lover. If all agree to the arrangement, then balance is reached and the menage-a-trois is maintained. Tucker, of course, would have been outraged - if he knew. At that time, such arrangements were not part of his moral and emotional landscape.

Tucker's blindness to Hester's erotic power and autonomy was a delusion for which he would pay dearly. It was a tragic flaw in him, as much to do with his self-absorption as with the particular kind of obsession he had with Hester. It was as though he saw Hester through a narrow prism, the single perspective of his image of her, and he was unable to enlarge his focus to view the complicated young woman she actually was. Nor did his view of her change in the ten years they were together. Fatally, and in his conscious mind at least, Tucker excluded Hester's radiant sexuality from his picture of her.
Paradoxically, the photographs Tucker took of Hester with his little Foth-Derby camera reveal, in their diversity, much more of who Hester was. Towards the end of 1939, Tucker had bought the camera at a secondhand shop in Russell Street. (80) The first photographs he took were of Joy. She is the muse of his camera, its central, compelling subject. Hester rarely looks the same from one photograph to the next and her variation is so great, it is often difficult to identify her. As Walter Benjamin observed 'the camera introduces us to unconscious optics as psychoanalysis does to unconscious impulses'. (81)

She is dark-haired and serious in Two studies of Joy Hester (1939), vivacious, sun-tanned and platinum-blond in Joy Hester doing a hand stand (c.1940) dramatically beautiful and severe in Portrait of Joy Hester (c.1943) and fleshy and coquettish in Joy Hester at St.Kilda beach (1945). There are also intimate snaps of her at the Little Collins Street loft. In one she sits on the floor, having just woken up, wearing bed socks and a nightie, still befuddled with sleep and in another she vomits into a bucket after a night on the town.

Tucker's camera is a diary of her body, her moods and expressions, her weight gains and losses, her hair colour, make-up, clothes and hairstyles. Despite this fetishistic attention to detail, Tucker was unable to calculate what these images, what Hester's extraordinary personal diversity, might mean. It is as though with his camera Tucker tried and failed, time and again, to capture and understand her.

Hester played the role of Tucker's anima, the inspiring, seductive feminine that aroused his cerebral, virginal masculinity. Eric Neumann describes the anima as 'the mover, the instigator of change' who 'drives, lures and encourages the male to all the adventures of the soul and spirit, of
action and creation in the inner and the outward world'. (82) To Emma Jung, the anima is the eros principle, 'the mediator between consciousness and the unconscious'. (83) Jung notes 'in the creative man, especially, this feminine attitude plays an important role'. (84)

Tucker and Hester were apparent opposites: she seemed sunny, casual and extrovert, he was harsh, critical and fastidious. But they shared a temperament - anxious, excitable, intense and melancholic - that surfaced in their work as they matured as artists. Anxiety stretched to the point of terror, alienation and paranoia shapes and defines Tucker's and Illester's work of the war years. While Melbourne's wartime atmosphere induced such high-voltage emotions, anxiety, a trait Bert and Joy shared, probably attracted them to one another.

There was instability and unhappiness in both their backgrounds, a sense that survival was both hard-won and fragile and that gains could be randomly and cruelly transformed into losses. They sought in each other the fulfillment of the emotional absences and deprivations each had encountered in their families, an ideal balance that would create harmony. Both came to the relationship with high hopes. But Hester, flexible and unromantic, entertained more realistic expectations while Tucker, obsessive and uncompromising, seemed unable to grasp, until the marriage was long over, exactly who Hester was and what she had meant to him.

Romantic love is synonymous with delusion and Tucker cast Hester as the woman he desired her to be and not as the one she was. In this sense, Hester truly acted as Tucker's anima: she was absorbed into his unconscious while Tucker denied and minimised her conscious role. Tucker's inability to 'recognise' Hester, to see and accept her as she was, created schisms in their relationship, an atmosphere of disparity and incongruity where ignorance
and deceit flourished. Tucker's lack of perception was matched by Hester's
duplicitv, and secrets and misunderstandings abounded leading ultimately to
their break-up. The chronically unfaithful partner must also be a chronic
liar. In that sense, their relationship was doomed from the start. At the same
time, their effect on one another's art was profound as it was positive.

Within a year of meeting Hester, Tucker embraced surrealism. His
painting changed dramatically, admitting a dark tide of deep, subversive
elements. Surrealist imagery of the night, the dream, the unconscious and
the irrational, all symbolically the province of the feminine, emerged.
Surrealist theories concerning automatism and the unconscious, surrealist
debates about the troubled relations between art and communism and the
provocative content of surrealist poetry all intrigued and engaged Tucker.
The stance of the surrealist - political, romantic, anarchic and literary -
would be Tucker's own.

Surrealism offered Tucker a journey into the interior of the self where he
discovered strange new landscapes, fabulous and terrifying perspectives, a
hell he made his own special province. Hester provoked Tucker's voyage into
artistic maturity.

Joy also awoke Bert to a new sexual and emotional life. His sexuality was
dormant through the early years of his manhood, not surprising for a nicely
brought up boy in the 1930s. Like Bernard Smith and like David Meredith,
the protagonist of My Brother Jack, Bert lost his virginity at twenty-three.
Also common to this trio of young men was finding sexually experienced
girls to guide them.

After being seduced by the maid at his Sydney boarding house, Smith 'lay
on his bed...radiating a glow of contentment and fulfillment...It turned out so
much better than he had expected. How he admired [the maid's] frankness
and fearlessness, the very purity of her lust. She had known what she wanted and had come to claim it. Had she sensed how much he wanted to be relieved of the burden of his virginity? (85)

For Meredith, it was 'a wonderful and fearful experience, that first physical communion with a woman...the feverish fumbling, the sad inexperienced groping for those complex and eternal mysteries that are harboured in a woman's body...No matter how many women we may enjoy later nor how adept we become in the practices of sex there is probably no other moment in life that ever repeats itself with such an excitingly exact mixture of alarm and ecstasy; fear and frenzy; doubt and intoxication; delight and dread.' (86)

Tucker did not remember his first time with Hester. He had no recollection - or perhaps could not put into words - what it was like to make love to her. Perhaps it was less 'wonderful' than 'feverish', less ecstatic than fraught with 'inexperienced groping'. Tucker was a cerebral young man. His 'Victorian' attitudes may have meant that sex signalled a disturbing passage of loss and dislocation, as well as pleasure. After longing for Hester, and for sex, the dream may have been lovelier than the act. Masturbation is complicit with fantasy, not reality. Horror of the flesh, of its demands and bargains, provides the power-house for Images of Modern Evil and that energy may have been unlocked in his early sexual experiences.

In classical mythology, the myth of Persephone charts Tucker's journey of sexual initiation and self-knowledge. Persephone is innocently gathering flowers when the earth opens and the god of the underworld snatches her away. Trapped and powerless, Persephone is despondent until, at the request of her mother Demeter, Zeus sends Hermes to release Persephone. But after Persephone unwittingly eats the pomegranate seeds Hades offers
her, she is forced to return to the underworld for a third of each year. In her absence from the earth, it is winter.

While Persephone's story symbolically explains seasonal change, it also suggests that sexual initiation, 'deflowerment', can be an unwilling journey to the depths, literally to hell. When Persephone is released, she has eaten the seeds of knowledge and now belongs to two worlds, to the darkness and to the light, to a new, deep, confusing realm where personal transformation takes place, and to a former life on the surface of things. But through seduction and betrayal, metamorphosis and bitter wisdom are gained, and Persephone becomes a powerful deity, mistress of death, queen of the underworld.

In 1939, Tucker began to paint a dark and paradoxical world, ruled by the feminine aspect of the moon and by the sirens of his inner disquiet.
Notes


2. Burke, Tucker interview, 5.7.1979, op.cit.


5. ibid.


11. ibid.

12. Burke, Tucker interview. 5.7.1979, op.cit.

13. ibid.


18. ibid.


19a. Yvonne Boyd. Taped interview. 7.7.00. Elwood.


23. Kullifay interview, op.cit.


26. On April 7, 1998 after a trial lasting a month in the Melbourne County Court, Max Joffe, a friend of Tucker's and an art dealer, was convicted of twenty four charges of theft of Tucker's art collection. He was sentenced to three years jail and served eighteen months. Joffe was not convicted of the theft of *Joy Hester*.

27. Blackman, Tucker interview, op.cit.

28. ibid.

29. Murphy interview, op.cit.

30. ibid.

31. ibid.


33. Murphy. interview. op.cit.

34. Smith, *Counihan* op.cit. p.135.


38. Boyd interview, op.cit.


42. Blackman, Tucker interview, op. cit.

43. ibid.


45. Tucker interview, 5.7.1979, op.cit.


48. ibid.

49. Tucker interview. 5.7.1979, op.cit.

50. Burke, Hester, op.cit. pp.36.

51. ibid.


54. ibid.


57. ibid.


59. Kulilfay interview, op.cit.

60. Burke, Tucker interview, 5.7.1979, op.cit.

61. ibid.
61a. Boyd interview. op.cit.
63. ibid.
64. ibid.
65. ibid.
66. ibid.
69. ibid.
70. Burke, Tucker interview, 5.7.1979, op.cit.
70a. ibid.
71. Eagle and Minchin, op.cit., p.43
72. Skipper interview, op.cit.
74. Murphy interview, op.cit.
75. McCarthy interview, op.cit.
76. Kullifay interview, op.cit.
77. ibid.
77a. Boyd interview, op.cit.
78. Burke, Dear Sun, op.cit., pp.204-5.
79. Kullifay interview, op.cit.
61a. Boyd interview. op.cit.
63. ibid.
64. ibid.
65. ibid.
66. ibid.
69. ibid.
70. Burke, Tucker interview, 5.7.1979, op.cit.
70a. ibid.
71. Eagle and Minchin, op.cit., p.43
72. Skipper interview, op.cit.
74. Murphy interview, op.cit.
75. McCarthy interview, op.cit.
76. Kullifay interview, op.cit.
77. ibid.
77a. Boyd interview, op.cit.
78. Burke, Dear Sun, op.cit., pp.204-5.
79. Kullifay interview, op.cit.

84. ibid.


6. Dreams and Realities

I believe in the future resolution of these two states, of dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, *surreality*...It is in this quest of surreality that I am going.
Andre Breton (1)

In surrealism, the fire of art and the ice of science have met, and from the synthesis mankind has been endowed with a powerful new weapon for its combat against darkness and evil.
James Gleeson (2)

Surrealism cannot be separated from its time.
Louis Aragon (3)

In June 1939, Tucker exhibited *The Philosopher* (1939, NGA) at the Contemporary Art Society's inaugural show while James Gleeson showed *The Attitude of Lightning towards a Lady-Mountain* (1939, Private Collection), a Dali-influenced painting that proved the exhibition's *succès de scandale*. Tucker also showed an accomplished, glowing *Self-Portrait* (1939, Heide MoMA) and *Abstract* (now lost).

The first CAS exhibition was a major showcase for all the up and coming modernists in Melbourne and Sydney. At the prestigious venue of the National Gallery of Victoria, it was an opportunity for Tucker to show what he was made of an artist.
Just four months before the Herald exhibition of French and British Painting delivered European modernism's full impact to an Australian audience, Tucker and Gleeson appeared as surrealism's advance guard. Both had turned to surrealism without knowing one another and, more importantly, without the advantage of seeing surrealist painting firsthand. Gleeson, Australian surrealism's most eloquent spokesman and devoted partisan, declared, 'I was born a Surrealist'. (4)

Tucker certainly wasn't but he found in surrealism elements that would challenge the earnest craftsman in him and open him to the realm of the marvellous.

Surrealism itself was a highly visible movement, provocative, political, self-consciously modern and international and, even in the backwater of Australia, it was almost impossible to avoid. There was no Australian 'surrealist circle' but Russell Drysdale, Bernard Smith, James Cant, Eric Thake, Vic O'Connor, Peter Purves Smith, Arthur Boyd, John Perceval, Ailsa O'Connor, Herbert McClintock, Jeffrey Smart, Sidney Nolan and Joy Hester all felt its lure and responded in brief, idiosyncratic ways.

But for Tucker, the attraction to surrealism went deeper not only because its declared intent was to plunge 'into the life of this period' (5), charting 'a new consciousness of life common to all' (6) but because it offered, in André Breton's inspiring words, an approach to 'the fantastic...a point where human reason loses control', where 'the most profound emotion of the individual has the fullest opportunity to express itself'. (7)

Surrealism was Tucker's gateway to becoming an artist. Until the impact of surrealism, he had no subject matter, nothing that was unique, personal, sophisticated or authentic. The Self Portrait that Basil Burdett had admired, signalled a turbulent inner world, but one Tucker had found no vehicle to
express. He had been a diligent student, painstakingly educating himself in the craft of painting and in draughtsmanship but the cold fire of his fierce, cerebral character had not emerged in his work. Nor had his political beliefs. Surrealism gave Tucker the confidence to 'lose control'.

If Tucker's early essays in surrealism are not always successful, surrealism also had an underground advantage. It stayed with him, not always directly evident, but always there, making possible an imaginary and symbolic latitude and richness that would lead him towards *Images of Modern Evil*. Surrealism helped Tucker invent himself as an artist.

Surrealism had been inspiring art and debate in Australia since 1932, the year that Sam Atyeo painted *Surrealist Head* (now lost). The following year Alleyne Zander, publicity officer for London's Royal Academy, commented that 'the younger generation of Australians appears to be interested in such abstract ideas as the principles of surrealism'.

The Bell School was a receptive environment for modernism, surrealism included, and Tucker observed its currents both as a regular visitor to the school and a short term student.

Peter Purves Smith and Russell Drysdale were students there in 1937 and Tucker would have seen their paintings, sketches and studies pinned up on the walls. Purves Smith had visited the International Surrealist exhibition in London in June, 1936. The distortions of the figures in his painting *French cafe* (Lady Drysdale, 1936) and the eerie space, unnaturalistic colour and elongated forms of *Rickett's Point* (Art Gallery of South Australia, 1937) make these paintings tentative but intelligent explorations in the formal exaggerations, ironies and wonderful strangeness of the surrealist
vocabulary. Surrealism conditioned Drysdale's work later, when, in 1947, he fused surrealism with his bare-as-bones vision of the Australian outback.

There was plenty of surrealist theory available, too. Herbert Read became an intellectual mentor to Tucker, a guiding light in philosophy and politics. More accessible to an Australian audience than Andre Breton, Read was an effusive and learned English poet and critic who promoted surrealism, firstly in Art Now (1934) and then in Surrealism which celebrated London's 1936 Surrealist exhibition. His writings combined art criticism with a rich mix of poetry, literary criticism and psychology.

'Yes, we all read Herbert Read', Tucker recalled, 'because he was the sort of man who was a populariser in one way but a fairly solid thinker in other ways. In the world of theory, he was one of the main figures...though the theory took very much second place'. (10)

Tucker adopted a central idea of Read's. 'Internal necessity is perhaps the key phrase of our time'. (11) First flagged in Art Now, internal necessity was the individual and romantic impulse that motivated and compelled artistic production. To Tucker it was 'not only my own view but probably the view of all my peer group, that people did something out of an inner compulsion, an inner need and unless you had that inner compulsion or inner need then it's not worth doing. And you can't have some teacher from outside saying do this and do it this way'. (12)

Read posited surrealism as 'the romantic principle in art' (13) 'the fullest possible liberation of the impulses' (14) and, following Breton's lead, he emphasised its social role. 'Surrealism, like Communism, does not call upon artists to surrender their individuality but it does insist that artists have common problems to solve and common dangers to avoid.' (15)
Under Breton's guidance, the surrealists had set themselves a bold plan whose goal was not only to redefine art but with it the role of the twentieth century artist. Firstly, they would raise the dream and the unconscious to the highest level of creative expression, next they were idealists who disdained fame or financial reward and finally they were revolutionaries, committed to radical social change. They did not want to be marginal figures in a bourgeois society but active, responsible contributors to a new world. It made surrealism extremely attractive to a young artist like Tucker because it located itself at the heart of progressive political and artistic change.

To the surrealist, dreams and free association were revolutionary methods of liberating creativity. Freud's theory that 'unconscious processes only become cognizable by us under the conditions of dreaming and of neurosis' was seized on by the surrealists as the imprimatur for automatic writing and for the primacy of dreams as a conduit for the repressed and the fantastic. (16) Freud was honoured as surrealism's father figure. Not that Freud was thrilled. Breton had made a pilgrimage to Vienna to see Freud though the meeting was, for Freud, an utterly fruitless encounter. (17) He confessed to complete bewilderment at surrealism's project and believed the analyst's couch was the only place for the discourse of dreams.

In the late 30s, Tucker was reading Freud's most popular book, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901). (18) Freud chronicled the forgetting of names, bungled actions and a host of small, seemingly insignificant mistakes of the tongue and pen which he believed were motivated by repression. (18a) These are commonly known as 'Freudian slips'. While Freud admitted the theory 'contributed towards circumscribing...mental free will', it nonetheless supplied ample evidence for the way in which the unconscious rippled beneath the surface of everyday
life. (19) It appealed to Tucker both as a budding surrealist eager to explore art's psychological dimensions and as an anxious and sensitive man, alive to contradictions and idiosyncracy in human behaviour.

The 1936 International Surrealist exhibition in London resounded in Australia and was reported in nearly every major newspaper in the country. It displayed the talents of the French surrealist circle - Max Ernst, Salvador Dali, Yves Tanguy, Joan Miro and Andre Masson - and to prove its global credentials, a total of fourteen nations was represented. Dali stole the limelight when he gave a lecture inside a diver's suit and nearly suffocated in the process. (20)

Debate about surrealism in Australia had been flagged by Harry de Hartog's 1935 article "Super-Realism", illustrated with paintings by Dali and Masson. (21) As Tucker's friend and mentor, de Hartog gave Bert his essay to read. Curiously, when Tucker came to write a paper on surrealism in 1940, his summation would be similar to de Hartog's.

Apart from "Super-Realism", de Hartog wrote only one other major article. "Fascism in the Making", published in Angry Penguins in 1943, was a vitriolic attack on Tucker. Both essays were shaped by international cultural and political debates in which de Hartog felt it imperative to participate as a Marxist intellectual.

At the 1934 Soviet Writers Congress, Stalinist cultural policy in the guise of the doctrine of socialist realism was spelled out. Nikolai Bukharin hailed socialist realism as 'the enemy of everything supernatural and mystic, all other worldly idealism' (22) while Maxim Gorky dismissed 'the irrational, the unconscious and the subconscious' as valid expressions for artistic endeavour. (23)
They were taking a direct swipe at the surrealists, several of whom, led by Andre Breton, had recently joined the Party and were anxiously awaiting Party approval for their revolutionary art. They never received it, and Breton's battle with the Party's intransigence and philistinism mirrored Tucker's with uncanny, and painful, accuracy. Both Breton and Tucker entered the fray with the same hopes and ideals and both suffered the same criticism, rebuffs and disappointments.

De Hartog realised the quandary in which both the Surrealists and the Party found themselves. It was one he laboured with in "Super-Realism", signalling the split between the conscious drive for Party unity against the untrammelled freedom of creative expression proposed by surrealism. It was the same quandary that Tucker found himself in, between the conscious [and therefore the political aspects of art] and the unconscious [and therefore apolitical]. It lead to his controversial 1943 essay "Art, Myth and Society". De Hartog insisted that 'the copying of hallucinations or dream-like appearances, however competently done' can never 'be considered as art'. (24) Nor did 'scribbles on paper and canvas' add up to 'symbols of universal validity...If the painter wishes to communicate his own definite emotion he must use symbols which possess a universal validity, symbols which...affect everyone in a similar manner'. (25)

While de Hartog began his essay in a spirit of genuine inquiry, he ended by sneering at surrealism's exuberance and daring. (26) It is as though de Hartog, like the Party itself, was initially intrigued by surrealism's claims and was prepared, up to a point, to take those claims quite seriously. But once surrealism's project revealed itself as 'complete insubordination...the systematic illumination of hidden places, the perpetual excursion into the midst of forbidden territory', there was no response but condemnation. (27)
For Tucker, surrealism opened a door that led away from Marxism and the Communist Party. It also signalled the split within him between the cerebral, analytical, political thinker and the intuitive, romantic artist.

The Philosopher's debt to Giorgio de Chirico is obvious. The moon-drenched landscape with its long shadows, the shallow theatrical space, the geometric shapes placed in an empty, arid landscape and the large, seated, mannikin-like figure are direct quotations from de Chirico's 'metaphysical' paintings of 1911-1918.

Technically speaking, de Chirico is not a surrealist. In those years, de Chirico was a loner, in touch with no group, just his own magical imagination. Later, de Chirico angrily insisted he had nothing but contempt for his early works and that the surrealists had misunderstood him. (28) But Breton rightly claimed de Chirico's paintings as one of surrealism's fecund influences.

De Chirico's is an art of melancholy, of fragments, anomalies, memories, loss and loneliness. An atmosphere of uncertainty is projected by multiple and conflicting vanishing points and the virtually ungraduated modelling of his figures renders them flat and spectral. (29) Deeply poetic, de Chirico's imagery would tap into Tucker's sense of loss and alienation, too, inciting him to create dream landscapes replete with disconnected objects that produce narratives of tension and dislocation.

When Tucker first tackled surrealism, he swallowed de Chirico whole. It was the first time he had been directly influenced by an artist and his embrace of surrealism was so ecstatic, he quoted another artist's vocabulary in a way he had not done before and never would again. Tucker chose surrealism's father figure as his model, not Max Ernst or Rene Magritte, the heirs of de
Chirico's theatrical spaces and eerie juxtapositions. Unlike Gleeson, for whom Dali's nightmare imagery and meticulous realism became a template, Tucker, after *The Philosopher*, abandoned further reference to de Chirico.

De Chirico's work was known in Australia. Nibbi had a de Chirico in his collection, *Horses on the Beach*, but it was from his later period and not a good picture, but it had been a personal gift from the artist. (30) With a fine flourish, Nibbi described de Chirico's 'shadowy mannequins with fragments of ruins and memories of buildings on their knees' as representing 'the impotence of men of spirit crushed beneath the debris of the past...(De Chirico) is a cold satyr, full of significance. Before him we feel suffocated, and long for the open air'. (31)

In Tucker's preliminary watercolour study for *The Philosopher*, (1939, NGA) there is no figure, no 'philosopher', though all the other elements of the composition are in place. Tucker recognised that, lacking a human element, the landscape was too empty, too severe and he turned to Picasso for inspiration. The monumental figure of the watcher in Picasso's *Young Acrobat on a Ball*, (1905) provided physical and symbolic weight for Tucker's composition. (32) But Tucker transformed Picasso's big, tender circus performer into one of de Chirico's faceless mannekins. *The Philosopher* is also Tucker's first modernist landscape.

Now the scene was complete. Drenched in cool blue-greens, a pale, naked, meditative figure faces a full moon and the undulating curves of arid hills. He is surrounded by sharp, geometric objects, beneath his feet are stones and a thick, black boundary line separates him from the landscape. The philosopher contemplates two spheres: the man-made and the natural. Before him is the 'feminine' realm of the night and nature while around him is the 'masculine' domain of constructed, hard-edged shapes. The picket
fence offers no protection, nor do the clear edges of his philosophy. Moonlight and the night form the painting's true subject and saturating atmosphere.

In pagan societies, the full moon is a time for worship, ritual and magic when the secret, fertile power of the moon is at its fullest. Mistress of tides and of menstrual cycles, the moon has been worshipped in many civilisations as an archetypal female deity: Isis to the Egyptians, Astarte to the Phoenicians, Ishtar to the Assyrians, Artemis and Selene to the Greeks and Diana to the Romans. In Robert Graves' poetic treatise *The White Goddess*, the moon is the triple goddess in her three phases: maiden at the waxing moon, mother at the full moon and crone at the waning moon. (33) Graves venerates the moon as the Muse, the inspiration and source of poetic truth.

The philosopher can be read as a self portrait of Tucker, a male presence bewitched by moonlight, held silent and still before the radiance of a larger, commanding female force. For the first time, and certainly not the last, Tucker's male subject is a voyeur to the spectacle of femininity.

A year after his relationship with Hester began, Tucker honours the feminine as a source of wonder and mystery, disturbing and alluring but distant and cool. The feminine dominates the philosopher's world, offering moonlight instead of sunlight, full moon 'madness' for the daylight of 'reason'. Tantalising and seductive, it is a force that cannot be subdued with the philosopher's hard-edged equations, as, facing the moon, he ignores the geometric shapes surrounding him.

*The Philosopher* registers the male-female duality Tucker experienced in his life with Hester, introducing it for the first time as one of the major themes in his art. In *The Philosopher*, the feminine is homaged as a potent and profound source of inspiration whose benefits, like surrealism's, were
gained by abandoning the formal rules of art. Surrealism, with its emphasis on the feminine, assisted Tucker in rejecting the 'scientific' analysis of Marxism, opening him to the pictorial language of the unconscious.

Tucker's philosopher contemplates the conundrum of male and female relations. How should he deal with love, with woman's sensual force? How to represent male and female difference? His answer, in The Philosopher, is to gaze in awe, to find wisdom through respect and strength tempered by gentleness. But it was not a reply that satisfied Tucker and by the time he painted Pick-Up (NGA) two years later, his disquiet at the sexual tensions between men and women was irritable as a sore. In The Philosopher, Tucker seemed at peace with himself, and with Hester, and balance with otherness was briefly reached.

The Philosopher is an impressive painting, both powerful and clumsy, because Tucker is attempting to cram so much into its small scale - so much change, so much seriousness, so much symbolism. By borrowing de Chirico's formal language, he is also developing his own language of myth and symbol.

Painted in the first half of 1939, The Philosopher was one of the first works Bert completed 'away from home' at the Little Collins Street studio, the locus of his new life with Hester. Bert's freshly won independence, symbolised by the shift from Malvern, may have encouraged him to try what he dared not at Leeton Court. The Philosopher was also one of his first paintings produced under Joy's admiring gaze.

In his review of the CAS exhibition, George Bell responded favourably to The Philosopher, deciding it 'called for commendation' though it was Gleeson, not Tucker, whom Bell described as a surrealist. (34) At the Herald, Noel Wood was filling in for Burdett who was overseas putting the final touches to the Herald show. Wood grouped Tucker with the 'Surrealist element' which
included Gleeson's 'frightening' paintings and Rupert Bunny's 'appalling' Laocoon. (35) 'Curiously powerful and rather reminiscent of Chirico [sic]' was Wood's summary of The Philosopher. (36) Gino Nibbi was more circumspect. In Art in Australia, Nibbi felt that Gleeson 'appeared to follow, perhaps too closely, the vision...of Salvador Dali' and he didn't mention The Philosopher. (37)

Though Tucker and Gleeson would meet in Sydney the following year, they never discussed surrealism. But Tucker was, as far as Gleeson was concerned, 'absolutely a surrealists.' (38)

Gleeson garnered popular and critical attention for The Attitude of Lightning towards a Lady-Mountain. It was reproduced in the Herald and the Sun, in the latter accompanied by Gleeson's words - 'the artist shuts his eyes to reality and paints creations of his subconscious mind'. (39) An 'Inquiring Lady' wrote to the Herald advising Gleeson to take 'his picture to a psychiatrist'. (40)

Tucker's first excursion into surrealism captured no similar interest. It was Tucker's Self Portrait that was reproduced in The Argus, not The Philosopher. Self Portrait indicates what an accomplished modernist portraitist Tucker had become and, equally, how dissatisfied he was with that accomplishment. Tucker depicts himself as confident and handsome. His face is cleanly and elegantly contoured, his huge, elongated, blue eyes gaze calmly at the viewer, his lips are full, sensual and red beneath the shadow of a moustache, his chin is dimpled. With his big, dark jacket, his loosened, scarlet tie and hair neatly coiffed, Tucker represents himself as a thoroughly gorgeous young man.

Behind him, at an angle to the tilt of his body, is a Cezanne-Bell style background: loosely painted planes of light and shade in greens and umbers.
flatten space while an expertly positioned vivid yellow square to the left anchors the whole composition in terms of palette and structure. The painting glows with strength and serenity, the only note of tension are the worry lines between Tucker's brows but even they are modulated, as if any hint of stress has been smoothed away.

**Self Portrait** is a proficient painting, the kind of work to gain Tucker plaudits for both his draughtsmanship and his painterly abilities. It also shows a lively and subtle grasp of personality, of exactly which features to emphasize and which to abbreviate to create 'character'. Tucker is quite capable of gilding the lily, of using modernist distortions 'tastefully' - enlarging the eyes, elongating the face - to produce an appealing result. On the basis of **Self Portrait**, Tucker could have made a reputation, and a living, from being that rare breed, a modernist portraitist. I imagine George Bell would have encouraged him to do exactly that.

Tucker despised doing commercial art and constantly sought an escape from it. He was also practical and canny, alert to strategems for survival. Yet he tossed aside a potentially lucrative career for the possibilities offered by **The Philosopher**.

When I said to Tucker, that, given the standard of **Self Portrait**, he could have pursued portraiture, he replied, 'Yes, I know but there were other things I wanted to achieve'. (41)

He was right. Though **Self Portrait** was painted on the durable and expensive material of canvas and **The Philosopher** on cheaper and more fragile cardboard, the future was writ on the latter, not the former. Interestingly, neither painting sold from the 1939 exhibition. **Self Portrait** remained in Tucker's collection until it was bequeathed to the Heide Museum of Modern Art. **The Philosopher** was acquired for National Gallery of
Australia in 1978. It was reproduced in colour in Christopher Uhl's 1969 monograph on Tucker and is regarded as a key painting in the history of Australian surrealism. (42)

There is something curiously inert about Self Portrait, as if, after all the care given to form, modelling, facture and surface, the blood has been expunged creating an exquisite but a rather lifeless object. Compared to The Philosopher which is busy with meaning, its surface thick with endeavour, its forms pregnant with intent, Self Portrait seems a polite exercise in capability.

There may be another reason Tucker eschewed portraiture as a professional calling. Being a commercial artist was no great shame among the young men of his acquaintance - Noel Counihan made a fist of it while Nolan tried and failed. Tucker impressed his contemporaries with his high-minded seriousness about art. His definition of himself as an artist was crucial to the kind of art he made. He chose to be self-consciously modernist, radical and avant-garde.

Tucker was not a Bell-style modernist, at home with the upper-middle-classes. The class backgrounds of favoured Bell students like Drysdale and Purves-Smith were affluent compared to Tucker's. Tucker would not have been comfortable with flattering his clients, even if good money were involved. Being a servant of the ruling elite, the class who would have paid handsomely for his services as a portraitist, was temperamentally - and politically - anathema to Tucker.

More than any artist of his generation, Tucker sought to redefine the moral, artistic and political terms of what it meant to be an artist. He spent the late 1930s and early 40s agonising over that dilemma. The finished beauty of Self Portrait did not offer Tucker the answers he sought. It showed
him clearly what he could do but Tucker was more interested in what lay beyond him, what was difficult and intractable: the realm of the dream, the night and the unconscious, all that frightened and tantalised him, and was juicy with potential.

When England and France declared war on Germany in September, Australians felt distant from the conflict. Even the Communist Review did not make much of a fuss. Until 1941 when Germany invaded Russia, the war was seen by communists as an imperialist one. It was a view shared by Tucker and Counihan in their discussions at Counihan's Russell Street studio.

(43)

But Tucker was unnerved by the Russian-German non-aggression pact, signed in June 1939. De Hartog, too, found it a worrying position. (44) Though Stalin's desire to protect Russia was clear, it shocked many leftists that Stalin would strike a deal with Hitler. Young Marxist Bernie Taft recalls 'it hit us like a bolt from the blue...We told ourselves that the Russians had no alternative but we felt extremely unhappy about these developments'.

(45)

The directive from Moscow was clear. Following the non-aggression pact with Germany, the CPA was ordered to withhold support for the war effort.

(46)

Neville Chamberlin, England's prime minister, had pledged Britain's defence of Poland and its invasion by German troops on September 1 had signalled the end of all hope of peace for the Allies. Hitler wanted to follow his victory over Poland by immediately invading the Netherlands and Belgium but his generals equivocated. The period of inactivity that followed,
during the European winter of 1939-40, was dubbed 'the phoney war'. Hitler and the Allies, however, continued to arm feverishly.

George Johnston registered the air of unreality. 'The time of war began sometimes as a storm begins with nervous little gusts and flurries of excitement, veering this way and that, dropping altogether into waiting gaps of brief calm'. (47)

In October, the first, awful photographs from Poland began appearing in Australian newspapers showing wounded children, burning homes, bombed buildings and people standing bewildered amid the devastation. Australian soldiers were in training but none had departed for the front. Though RJF Boyer, a Queensland pastoralist and a delegate to the League of Nations, warned that 'a universe of life and values has passed away and a world sinister and forbidding has taken its place', Australia's mood of isolation prevailed. (48)

In the midst of this strange period, the Herald exhibition of French and British Painting opened at the Melbourne Town Hall. Courtesy of Sir Keith Murdoch's financial backing and Basil Burdett's brilliant taste and connections, this grand exposition of modern art made Tucker and his friends feel that the world had at long last come to Melbourne. It galvanised and stimulated the local moderns as well as attracting huge crowds. Tucker found 'it was a tremendous jolt for our provincial little world'. (49)

Not only was the exhibition a staggering public and critical success - over 45,000 people visited the show - it linked modernism and the resistance to fascism in the public mind. On its opening day, the Herald editorial (probably written by Burdett) said, 'It is not by accident that such a collection of modern European art is practically confined to works from France and
Britain. It is a form of art that could find inspiration only where freedom of mind is a way of life'. (50)

For weeks prior to the opening, the Herald had pumped up publicity by running a daily article, accompanied by a photograph, that discussed one of the pictures in the show. Basil Burdett, scouring Europe searching for the right mix of paintings, had also sent back interviews with artists, like Fernand Leger, and reports on his progress.

The Herald trumpeted that 'crowds streamed into the Town Hall as soon as the doors were open' to see 'the most important loan collection of art ever to come here from overseas'. (51) Apart from the hype, it was a stunning tribute to Murdoch's faith in modern art and in his intrepid art critic.

Burdett had assembled a selection of 217 works, mainly paintings and mainly French, with a smattering of sculpture. Cezanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh and Picasso made the central contribution while Matisse, Braque, Bonnard, Leger, Modigliani, Dufy, Roualt, Valadon, Utrillo and Chagall were also included. For Tucker, a special interest was de Chirico together with Max Ernst and Dalí's L'Homme Fleur - the talking point of the exhibition. But Tucker remembers it was 'the impression overall' that counted rather 'any one, specific' work. (52)

The exhibition was open from 10 am to 10 pm every day and there was also 'a run on the sales of prints in art shops. Their windows are full of them, and they go almost as quickly as they are shown'. (53) Melbourne had gone modern art mad.

The stalwarts of the CAS gave lectures on the show which, due to public interest, were given three times daily. George Bell, Gino Nibbi, John Reed, Adrian Lawlor, Arnold Shore, Norman Macgeorge, Madge Freeman and Ola Cohn all explained modern art to a bemused but genuinely interested
audience. Adrian Lawlor was rigged up in a rostrum on wheels and he
propelled himself about, haranguing the crowds. The only person who wasn't
there was Basil Burdett.

The luckless Burdett had contracted jaundice on the boat trip home and,
while he wrote furiously from his bed at Alcaston House, he had to hand
over the running of the exhibition to a younger colleague, Peter Bellew. (54)

Tucker and Hester visited the exhibition several times. It was a good place
for catching up with old friends and meeting new ones. Tucker introduced
Hester to Sunday Reed, John's wife. Sunday recalled that 'we just happened
to find ourselves sitting next to each other. Joy was a sort of commo in those
days and she said to me, when we first looked at each other, "Do you believe
in the equality of the classes?" I said that I believed in love. For some
strange reason that seemed a satisfactory answer'. (55)

Tucker was far less sanguine about Hester's behaviour. Bert was leftwing,
and Joy was leftwing, too, though John regarded her 'as a very naive commo'.
(56) Bert remembered Joy 'immediately got into an argument with Sunday.
She attacked her because Joy was very, very leftwing then...and she attacked
[Sunday] for being a member of the wealthy classes. I remember being
appallingly embarrassed at having introduced [the Reeds] to her and then for
her to get stuck into Sunday like that'. (57)

Lean, handsome and stylish with fair hair and forget-me-not blue eyes,
Sunday was born a Baillieu, one of Melbourne's most prominent
establishment families. Educated at home and at an exclusive Melbourne
girls' school, Sunday's upbringing was one of immense wealth and privilege.
She had married John in 1932 after living for several years in Europe and
they set up their home, with its extensive grounds, at Heidelberg. Sunday
was attracted to difficult, questing, creative, young people and, rather than
being affronted, she was charmed by Joy's spirit. As inspired and unconventional art patrons, Sunday and John had opened their home to young artists.

That day at the town hall, Sunday introduced Joy to Sidney Nolan who remembered Joy from their Gallery School days. Nolan had arrived at the exhibition from Ocean Grove with his wife Elizabeth. With no suitable city clothes, all Nolan could find to put on his feet was a pair of rubber milking boots. Melbourne was enjoying an early summer and Nolan's legs were soon aching inside the tight, sweaty rubber.

The Reeds were keen supporters of Nolan's, giving him money to buy paints and materials, lending him books from their extensive library and visiting him at his Ocean Grove home.

Shortly afterwards, Tucker and Hester were invited out to Heide for the first time.

Notes
5. Breton, Manifestoes, op.cit.p.124.

7. ibid.


11. Herbert Read, *Art Now*, Faber and Faber, London, 1934, p.120.


14. op.cit., p.86.

15. ibid.


17. Lewis, op.cit., p.18.


23. op. cit., p. 243.

25. ibid.
26. ibid.
34. George Bell, *Sun*, 6 June 1939.
36. ibid.
44. Dirk and Lesley den Hartog interview, op.cit.


50. *Herald*, 16 October 1939.

51. ibid.


55. Sunday and John Reed. Taped Interview. 5.6.1978. Templestowe.

56. ibid.

57. Blackman, Tucker interview, op.cit.


59. ibid.
7. The Futile City

'Melbourne has been riven by controversy. Earlier in the year, the Australian Academy of Art held its annual exhibition there. In June, the Contemporary Art Society, which has been formed in strong reaction against the Academy, held a show in the same Gallery. Surrealism made its first entry on the Victorian scene. Feeling ran high, and the pictures became almost as common a topic of argument as horse-racing and the international situation'.
Sydney Ure Smith, *Art in Australia*, 1939 (1)

I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

In 1940, the city emerged as the prime subject and inspiration of Tucker's art. Tucker's metropolis is a place of fecund darkness, the location of dreams, symbols and poetic journeys, a site of social satire and disharmony, an arena of shadows, unreality and alienation. From 1940, until Tucker left Australia seven years later, Melbourne forms the compass of his paintings. Yosl Bergner, TS Eliot and German New Realist painting, together with the New Theatre ensemble, all assist in the construction of Tucker's city.

The same year, Tucker became a force in the art world when, through an alliance with John Reed, Adrian Lawlor and Harry de Hartog, he destabilised and ousted George Bell as CAS president. In the subsequent spill, Tucker was elected vice-president, giving him new powers, along with new confidence and direction.
While the city was an environment rich in metaphor and meaning for Tucker's paintings it was, on a more basic level, the place where he and Joy lived and struggled to make ends meet. After Hester quit the Gallery School at the end of 1938, she studied commercial art at the Elton Fox Art Academy but found the highly detailed work fiddly and frustrating. After designing some Christmas cards, she gave it up. (2) Tucker continued with the work he loathed, freelance commercial art for magazines and newspapers.

Tucker and Hester concocted one mad plan to make money. A shop was vacant next door to the Leonardo. They decided to rent it and set themselves up as florists. (3) Neither had a clue what was involved and they took their first order with trepidation. It was a funeral wreath. They stocked up with flowers bought from the Victoria Market and stole the rest in a midnight raid on nearby gardens. After sitting up all night trying to mould the wreath, the final result was a massive, soggy mess. In the morning they ditched it and rushed to Ireland's where they bought a wreath to hand the client. It was their first and last job. (4)

They weren't the only young artists trying to survive by starting a business. Nolan and Elizabeth had moved up from Ocean Grove and lived a few blocks away in Lonsdale Street. Their venture was a pie shop. Well, it was barely a shop, just a hole in the wall where Nolan and Elizabeth fielded orders for sausage rolls. (5) Nolan had quit his job in the art department at Fayrefield Hats where he had worked through the 30s.

After a few months at the pie-shop, Nolan was saved by the de Basil ballet company who were touring Australia early in 1940. Serge Lifar, the company's principal dancer, spotted a Nolan watercolour in Peter Bellew's Sydney apartment. (6) On the strength of it, Lifar commissioned Nolan to design the sets and costumes for Icare, a new, one-act ballet. Nolan fled to
Sydney and Elizabeth closed the pie-shop. The Reeds, who attended the premiere, were impressed by Nolan's spare, geometric designs. From then on, they supported him and the miserable hand-to-mouth existence was over.

Tucker also designed a stage set for New Theatre's *Where's That Bomb?*, a performance of a very different calibre to *Icare*.

New Theatre was Melbourne's best venue for popular, political art. Jack Maughan, who had started the Workers Art Club with Guido Baracchi and Noel Counihan, helped to establish the company in 1937. New Theatre's first home was in a disused loft above a garage in Flanigan Lane, off La Trobe Street. Members and supporters 'bought a plank' for 2/- each to raise money for the stage to be built. Maughan and a loose association of actors, writers, artists and workers also presented agit-prop and some plays at union meetings, factory gates and suburban halls.

New Theatre was daring, energetic and irreverent, a community ensemble that relied on the goodwill and idealism of all concerned and its successes indicate a wartime climate responsive to leftwing art. New Theatre's aim, stretching back to the days of the Workers' Art Club, was to encourage and foster proletarian art. While Tucker's skills were welcome, a broad range of people were encouraged to join the company.

*Where's That Bomb?*, written by London taxi drivers Herbert Hodge and Buckley Roberts in 1936, was a stirring piece of agit-prop regularly performed by New Theatre. A young worker-poet, sacked for publishing a socialist poem, accepts a commission to write a story for the right-wing British Patriot's Propaganda Association. After he writes it, the characters come to life and reject their stereotyped roles and the 'Bolshie', the owner of the bomb in the title, becomes the hero of the play.
Tucker's backdrop was an ingenious piece of trompe-l'oeil, creating the illusion of looking down into a small, sharply angled room with bare wooden walls where a 'window' revealed a city skyline at night. The dizzying perspective produces an effect both unsettling and claustrophobic. Tucker quoted the same cityscape in *Spring in Fitzroy* (1943, NGA).

Tucker was a New Theatre regular, attending plays, assisting in other set designs and photographing productions and cast members.

Yosl Bergner had first tested his skills as a set designer when a local Jewish theatre company staged *The Dybbuk*. 'The English way is to paint a set vertically, the Russians paint it on the floor then raise it. They laughed at me at the theatre when they saw me start from the bottom, because at the end the sky was going to drip on what I'd painted beforehand'. (10) Later he would produce sets for New Theatre, too.

Bergner believed 'I was the first Expressionist in Australia. I brought Expressionism to Australia without knowing it.' (11) While that might be overstating it, Bergner's influence on Tucker, Counihan, Arthur Boyd and Vic O'Connor was remarkable. It was not just the style and mood of Bergner's paintings - the dark, gloowering, eerie cityscapes where the dispossessed, the victims and the loners wander - it was the man himself. Even the story of Bergner's arrival in Australia has the aura of a quest, a fairy-tale.

Bergner's father, the writer Melech Ravitch, was deeply committed to the Yiddish movement in Jewish culture and moved his family from Vienna to Warsaw to better participate in it. (12) The family was desperately poor. Yosl, his sister Ruth and their parents lived in the Warsaw ghetto, crowded together in a fourth floor attic where the roof was 'covered not with tiles but with tarred sheets. The rain came in through the windows, then father would
call in a poet who was also a tinsmith, because father was always looking for jobs for writers'. (13)

Isaac Bashevis Singer, a frequent guest, wrote 'Ravitch was convinced that the world of justice would arrive tomorrow or the day after and sooner or later all mankind would be brothers and also vegetarians'. (14) It was this idealism, and a growing fear of Hitler's power, that lead Ravitch on a bizarre mission to the Kimberleys in 1934. He came to Australia to raise money for Jewish educational organisations and to search for a Jewish homeland. The Australian government was prepared to offer land for settlement in the arid north-west but Ravitch accepted something more useful: immigration permits for Polish Jews.

In 1937, Ravitch left Poland and arrived in Melbourne with Ruth. Yosl and his mother came a little later. Then Ravitch farewelled his family and set off for Mexico. Bergner was miserably homesick, broke and lonely. He worked in Carlton factories and at the Victoria market while teaching himself English by reading Edgar Allan Poe and Gulliver's Travels. (15) Life picked up when he met Judah Waten and Noel Counihan. Through them Bergner fell in with the riotous, hard-drinking, bohemian crowd at the Swanston Family Hotel. At the same time, he joined the Communist Party.

Bergner's painting took off. A brief stint at the Gallery School did nothing to soften his image of the city and what he found there: poverty, hunger, despair and alienation. Courtyard (1938, Private Collection), Alarm (1939, Private Collection) and Father and Child (1940, Private Collection) are imbued with dark, rich, painful memories of the ghetto and the culture that nurtured him, a culture threatened by fascism. Bergner saturated Melbourne's streets with a moving and convincing European vision. While
Picasso's 'blue period' is an obvious source, Chagall's lyricism and Kokoschka's painterliness are other references.

No other painters had dared tackle the representation of Aboriginal people but Bergner identified with their plight. *Aboriginal Family* (1943, Private Collection) and *Aborigines* (1946, NGV) are passionate and sensitive renderings of a dispossessed and beleaguered people managing to retain their dignity and calm despite loss and privation. Bergner not only saw living proof of the plight of urban Aboriginal people in the streets of Melbourne, he was haunted by photographs of Aborigines taken by his father in the Kimberleys and he incorporated them into his paintings. (16)

Bergner re-invented the city for its young painters. Buildings quiver with life, windows stare like eyes, shadows engulf figures and daylight is banished in a perpetual, brooding, sonorous night. The streets of Bergner's city are filled with whimsy, tragedy and vitality. More than any other painter, and more than any other historic force or artistic influence, Bergner set the tone for Melbourne painting in the 40s.

Bergner also provided direct and personal inspiration for what Tucker described as his 'socialist realist phase'. (17) Bergner appeared as 'a kind of living symbol of an oppressed and rejected human being' at the hands of 'these vast national and social forces' while Bergner's paintings gave 'much more reality' to the war. (18) To Tucker, it was Bergner's 'presence more than anything, not even his views'. (19) Vassilief and Bergner were both 'messengers from beyond, from this exotic, unbelievable, remote world'. (20) The city is Tucker's subject in *We are the Dead Men* (NGA) and *The Futile City* (Heide MoMA), the two paintings he exhibited at the CAS in June, 1940. Tucker knew the city well - he had been working in town since 1933 - but
now it appeared with fresh potency, as a site of social criticism, of initiation and phantasm.

Tucker was struggling to make a political art from the revolutionary imperatives of surrealism and 'socialist realism' but what began to emerge was a personal, deeply felt and pessimistic view of society. His language was the urban environment and the distorted or dismembered human body. This bleak, individual expression was shaped by influences aside from Bergner and surrealism - the poetry of TS Eliot and German New Realist painting.

Eliot and surrealism went hand-in-hand for Australian artists and those who were enraptured by the one were usually smitten by the other. This potent combination attracted a sensibility both romantic and radical: James Gleeson and Tucker were fervent admirers of Eliot, especially of The Waste Land (1922).

It wasn't the literary critics of the day who made The Waste Land into 'the most controversial and most influential poem of the twentieth century' (21) but a younger generation who responded immediately to its dissonant rhythms, its startling juxtapositions of ancient myth and urban imagery, its acute and haunting sense of loss.

Tucker discovered Eliot in the same place he had found so much treasure, the Reading Room at the State Library. 'Instantly I recognised a twin soul because [Eliot] was full of ire, outrage, despair, futility and had all the images that went with it. Some of the imagery was superb. It confirmed my own feelings and also became a source, in a roundabout way, of imagery, imagery that would involuntarily crop up while reading the poetry'. (22)

When writing The Waste Land, Eliot was driven by inner as well as outer devils. He captured the mood of despondency engendered by the horrific death and damage of the first world war.
As well, his own life was in turmoil as he watched his wife, Vivien's, inexorable slide into insanity. Final sections of *The Waste Land* were written in Lausanne in 1921, where Eliot was undergoing psychotherapy for stress. (23)

'What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish?' (24)


Those images introduce the poem's vocabulary: parched earth, rocks and desert, dead trees. Tiresias wanders a stricken land, one that has been abandoned by the healing cycles of nature. In the Unreal City, a metaphor both for London and for contemporary alienation, the anti-hero Tiresias searches for redemption and solace but finds only chaos and madness.

Eliot's *The Hollow Men* (1925) also provided imagery and atmosphere for Tucker. Stephen Spender describes *The Hollow Men* as a 'kind of coda to *The Waste Land'* where Eliot 'pushes to its conclusion an idea implicit in *The Waste Land*' that those who are 'physically alive may be less truly living than the dead'. (25) In *The Hollow Men* 'the world ends/Not with a bang but a whimper'.

Tucker's *The Futile City* meets Eliot and surrealism head on. It encompasses Eliot's 'heap of broken images' with the stark disjunctions favoured by surrealism. Impressed by *The Futile City*, Gleeson asked Tucker to describe its genesis for Gleeson's 1940 article "What is Surrealism?" Tucker wrote,
The mood was one of depression - a sense of inadequacy while walking down a city street. There was a relaxation of conscious focussed thought, and the unwitting sensory response to immediate environment - in this case streets, and city buildings. Under these conditions a brief image flashed involuntarily into my mind - an image of a glaring white space, with a large key throwing a thin blue shadow across the bottom and simultaneously the word "futile". I concentrated upon holding the image in my mind and as the word "futile" occurred, it linked immediately with surrounding conditions, thus producing the sentence "the futile city". (26)

When Tucker made a rough sketch, a new image emerged: 'a skeleton caught in a despairing attitude, submerged in the snow'. (27)

Tucker's detailed response indicates how important the painting and its inspiration were to him. He had imbibed surrealism's modus operandi and his 'day dream' allowed a haphazard flow of imagery to surface with startling effect. Gleeson felt the meaning of The Futile City was 'constantly changing - it is at once a parable, a memory, a social indictment, and an indication of the clamorous incognito of the personal unconscious'. (28)

A huge key dominates the landscape. 'We think of the key, each in his prison/Thinking of the key' (The Waste Land). Behind it, a skeleton gestures pitifully, 'the supplication of a dead man's hand' (The Hollow Men). In the distance, the city crouches like an animal under a bleeding, sunset sky. The key is a multi-layered symbol for knowledge, one that unlocks secrets and confers wisdom. It suggests access to a fresh understanding of both the self and the world, the gift of revelation. It also represents the phallus and the penetration of sexual mysteries.

In Tucker's painting the key's role is ironic: enlightenment promises nothing but death in the form of the skeleton, the bleached earth and the
barren tree. 'This is the dead land'. (The Hollow Men). Night falls over the futile city and even the sunset is hideous and unnatural as blood drips from the sky. Like Eliot's Waste Land, the earth is blighted and there is no redemption, no healing in sight.

The Waste Land introduced Tucker to a potent language of myth and symbolism that Eliot derived from the Grail legend and, in particular, from Jessie Weston's From Ritual to Romance (1920). Taking her cue from Frazer's innovative Golden Bough, Weston dealt with the Grail quest as a journey of suffering and regeneration, where the hero's task is to restore fecundity to the Waste Land. (29) Combining cultural anthropology, medieval literature, the arcane symbolism of the Tarot and the myth of the dying god, Weston provided a rich and allusive frame for Eliot to spin a personal and contemporary parable.

But Eliot, like Tucker, dispensed with the land's regenerative power. In ancient vegetation myths, the dying god who secures the harvest will be born again in the spring, and so the cycle of birth, death and rebirth continues. But there is no hope for renewal in The Waste Land or The Futile City.

For the first time, Tucker realises his tragic vision, one that will shape and dominate his work. The painting is seen from the perspective of the hero who is travelling towards the Unreal or Futile City at dusk. Before him stands the key of knowledge, capable of unlocking only images of despair. The vegetation god is resurrected as a helpless skeleton and the land is winter-bound, blanket ed in snow. To the right is a treacherous precipice and a piece of broken jaw, 'the broken jaw of our lost kingdoms' (The Hollow Men). Perhaps the jaw signifies the ghoulish remains of a failed hero, implying the potential of Tucker's failure, his mortality. Ahead lies the city where the
hero's journey should end with honour and rest, but which looms as a threatening place.

Symbolically, *The Futile City* is a diagram of Tucker's world view, one that had been forming since he had experienced the anxiety and instability of the Depression years, the deaths of his brother Jack and his niece Claire and the acrimony of his parents' marriage. The world was a hostile place, a battleground that required every ounce of Tucker's energy and determination to outwit and combat it. He was solitary, terrified of failure, fearful about the future and engaged in a desperate quest for survival. But Tucker's journey was heroic, too, because it conferred warrior status, giving him 'the opportunity to fight the good battle.' (30) Tucker's motto was 'You go out and you fight the world'. (31) Tucker *contra Mundum*.

*The Futile City* summarises how Tucker surveyed life and his own existence: it was treacherous and isolated but equally it had the capacity to be remarkable and heroic, to achieve the quality of a great tale, a legend, a myth.

In 1941, Tucker further homaged *The Waste Land* with a small, lusciously-handled painting of the same name (NGA). Its focus is a small, frail, black-robed figure seated between a gloomy city, red-tinged by sunset, and the rising waves of an ominous, wine-dark sea. It is Tiresias, embattled by the natural and the manmade worlds, with no way out.

The title of Tucker's painting *We are the Dead Men*, also from 1940, takes its cue from the opening lines of *The Hollow Men*:

'We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw'. (32)
a. We are the Dead Men; b. Self Portrait; c. Pick Up; d. The Waste Land
The painting's subject - a marriage between a squat, bald capitalist and his doll-like, skeletal bride - is another quotation, this time from the satirical pen of George Grosz.

Tucker discovered Grosz, Max Beckmann and Otto Dix, the German Neue Sachlichkeit painters, thumbing through a copy of Carl Einstein's Die Kunst des 20 Jahrhunderts (1926) in the State Library's Fine Art Room. Herbert Read had dealt with the German artists of the Weimar Republic, too, in Art Now and Grosz was also a favourite of Jack Maughan's who had introduced his work to Counihan. (33)

Einstein's book was an encyclopaedia of European modernism that included Picasso, Rousseau, Roualt, Nolde, Klee and Kandinsky plus drawings and paintings by Grosz together with Beckmann and Dix. During the Weimar Republic, Grosz unflinchingly caricatured a brutal, postwar society where crippled, destitute soldiers begged in the streets, ignored by fat, repulsive capitalists and fashionably dressed, empty-headed whores. It was a cartoon world, drawn by a master satirist.

Tucker responded rather too whole-heartedly to Grosz, making We are the Dead Men a fierce work but one dulled by a lack of originality. Grosz and Tucker were like minds: caustic, trenchantly critical and both shared a penchant for over-statement. But We are the Dead Men gave Tucker the chance to annotate his symbolic vocabulary: a dead tree, dying flowers, a cityscape that resembles a stage set. All these would be quoted in later paintings. The inhabitants of Tucker's city are objects of scorn, dread and censure rather than pity or pardon. He had learned his lesson from Eliot and Grosz well: there is no redemption. 'After such knowledge, what forgiveness?' Eliot asks in Gerontion (1920).
The feel of *We are the Dead Men* smacks of a bold, raw New Theatre-style production. Action takes places on a shallow stage under dramatic lighting, the scarecrow and the buildings resemble props and the wedding party watches from 'off-stage', ranked and serried in the shadows like an audience.

If *The Futile City* presents the quest of the artist-hero, *We are the Dead Men* announces Tucker's rage at society, one that was directed at both men and women. Grosz gave Tucker permission to give full vent to the anger seething inside him for nearly a decade.

Tucker mocks the society wedding of the capitalist and his bride, along with the Catholic church decorated with its statue of a Madonna and Child. The pathetic scarecrow is the picture's focus, offering more humanity in its helpless, stricken state than the coldly observant audience. Its head is stuffed with straw, its body is empty, one hand points skyward, the other toward the ground. The scarecrow's job, to protect the crops and safeguard the harvest, is rendered null and void in the city. It can provide no assistance or direction. It wears 'deliberate disguises/rat's coat, crowskin, crossed staves' and it is a frightening emblem of the futility of warnings, of protection and help.

Grosz and Eliot's representations of women are uneasy. The painted whores of Grosz's drawings and the neurotic female voices of Eliot's poetry create disturbed and disturbing images. To Grosz and Eliot women are sexually uninhibited and/or mentally unhinged. They are difficult, dangerous, depraved and depressed.

The cadaverous bride in *We are the Dead Men* signals the female prototype who inhabits Tucker's canvases from 1940. Blond and thin with enormous red lips, she is lascivious, menacing, crude and powerful. She will appear in *Pick-Up* (1941, NGA), *Victory Girls* (1943, NGA) *Bride* (1944, NGA)
and *Images of Modern Evil*. It is not difficult to see that Hester, blond-haired and red-lipped, sensual and unfaithful, was acting deeply on Tucker's unconscious in the formation of this image. Tucker may never have meant to portray Hester as the symbol of all that he found most alluring and terrifying in women but, just as he did not 'consciously' know that she betrayed him, he did not 'consciously' set out to portray her as a destructive feminine force, animating his paintings. Nonetheless, Hester was there at the quick of Tucker's inspiration.

In the winter of 1940, the velocity of Melbourne's art politics was on the rise, leading Bernard Smith to describe Melbourne as 'the chief storm centre of Australian art'. (34) Tucker was in his element. On the eve of the second CAS exhibition, he united with John Reed, Adrian Lawlor and Harry de Hartog to eject George Bell from the CAS.

Tucker had been a founding member of the CAS in July, 1938 and was elected to its council when George Bell became president. Its lay vice-president was John Reed [who also drew up the CAS constitution], its artist vice-president was Rupert Bunny while Adrian Lawlor was secretary. Council members were composed of two groups: artists and 'laymen'. Gino Nibbi, Peter Bellew and Dr Guy Reynolds were elected to the former group and Nutter Buzacott, Isabel Tweddle and Norman Macgeorge were included in the latter.

The CAS had started largely through Bell's energies. His pamphlet 'To Art Lovers', distributed to Melbourne's art community, was a riposte to Robert Menzies' sneers about modernism delivered at the opening of the 1937 VAS autumn exhibition.
Menzies had declared that Australia needed an Academy of Art structured like the English Royal Academy which 'set certain standards of art and has served a great purpose in raising the standard of public taste by directing attention to good work.' (35) Menzies got what he wanted and the Australian Academy of Art was a dismal failure. It attracted lacklustre artists like Harold Herbert, WB McInnes and Hans Heysen or those desperate for establishment accolades, including, surprisingly, Arnold Shore. Its first exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria was a flop, a fact noted gleefully by the moderns, and it was untrue to say, as one supporter did, that it was a 'fair mirror of Australian achievement in so far as one exhibition can reflect it'. (36)

In retrospect, Menzies seems an unlikely fountainhead for Australian cultural life. But he was the man who single-handedly brought together, and by doing so, brought to maturity, a generation of artists and thinkers. What Menzies did was to insult the right people at the right time. He inflamed - and thereby united - an unassailable front that included George Bell, Adrian Lawlor, John and Sunday Reed, Noel Counihan, Harry de Hartog, Gino Nibbi and Tucker. This forceful if brief rapprochement among the moderns, ignited by Menzies, confirmed modernism as a force and assigned the reactionaries to history's waste basket.

But the CAS was volatile and it was inconceivable that such a big group of opinionated artists could stay in agreement for long. Bell thought he could rule by sheer force of personality and failing that, by numbers. The CAS council and its membership was made up largely of Bell's friends, supporters and students. But he did not count on the acumen of his opposition.

The coup was well-timed and successful but it divided the art world and embittered and humiliated Bell. When Bell walked out of the CAS in
September 1940, he took a great number of the membership - including most of the women - with him. It signalled the start, not the end, of the battle for the CAS, one that would be carried forward by Counihan and Vic O'Connor against Tucker and Reed. It also raised the pitch of art-political rancour in Melbourne which had become dominantly and aggressively male.

When Bell founded the CAS he had, typically, a very clear idea of what he wanted: it was to be an organisation run for artists by artists. Gino Nibbi was Bell's friend, and a respected critic, but he was a layman, therefore his opinion was welcome but by no means final. Bell aired his views in the debate with Menzies. 'What does a layman know of craftsmanship or draughtsmanship?...It is ludicrous for Mr Menzies to lay down what is good drawing and good art'. (37)

There had already been one internal tussle. During the selection of the first CAS show in 1939, the lay-members of the council were not allowed to vote on which paintings were chosen to be hung. Tucker shared his views about modern art (and politics) with Reed and de Hartog, and certainly not with Bell. With Adrian Lawlor in agreement, they were incensed at Bell's high-handed approach to the selection process. Nolan's provocative abstract Head of Rimbaud (1939, Heide MoMA), his first exhibited painting, was included only because Reed and his cohorts challenged the Bell group. (38)

Of course, there was more to it than that. Bell's position signified a formalist view in art (and Bell himself a patrician presence) to which Tucker and Reed were in opposition. Art in Melbourne had changed dramatically and so had its politics. Bell was no longer deemed the leader of the modern movement. Bell pooh-poohed Reed's pretensions. As far as Bell was concerned, Reed lacked an educated art background. (39)
Nor was Reed impressed with Bell's motives. Bell was a pragmatist who confided to Reed that, as far as Bell was concerned, the layman's role in the CAS was money and promotion: to secure commissions and to provide a nucleus of buyers for the adventurous modernists. (40) In return, the lay members would have the privilege of rubbing shoulders with artists but no real power within the CAS. 'This revelation', Reed wrote, 'came as a great shock to me - I suppose I was very naive - as I had taken it for granted that we were all completely united in a common cause'. (41) After Bell's rather unwise admission of strategy to one of his chief opponents, his days were numbered.

Late in 1939, Lawlor sent off a confidential missive to Tucker inviting him to an unofficial war-council which would discuss 'whether we want to be an anti-academic [in the narrow sense of the word] society, or whether we wish to be part of the modern movement in art'. (42)

After months of behind-the-scenes politicking, matters came to a head in June. At a meeting to discuss alterations to the constitution - packed with Reed supporters - Bell resigned as president. (43) The denouement came a few months later at a ferocious annual general meeting. Reed stormed out after a barrage of accusations, then Bell left and 83 of his followers resigned en masse. Bell declared that in the months leading up to the meeting the CAS had been 'infiltrated and captured by communists in the Stalin style'. (44)

Bell meant de Hartog, who was elected president, and Rem McClintock and Malcolm Good, who were elected to the council. Perhaps it was a jibe at Tucker, too, who assumed greater powers when he became artist vice-president in the spill. Reed reflected that Bell's departure 'was a serious matter...it considerably reduced membership as well as losing the prestige which George Bell's name undoubtedly carried'. (45) But Reed was relieved.
The CAS could continue 'with its constitution intact and it activities unrestricted'. (46)

Lawlor, saddened by the level of personal acrimony the furore had sparked, resigned as secretary, handing the job to Reed. But it had tested Tucker's mettle, and Reed's, too. From now on Tucker and Reed were allies in the 'storm centre' of Melbourne art.

During the CAS exhibition, Tucker received his first taste of publicly airing his views when a battle broke out between the moderns and the conservatives in The Argus. Tucker found a strident and articulate voice perfectly suited to the tenor of the times.

In the 1940s, Tucker's writings indicate the quandary he found himself in as a socially conscious artist who felt increasingly drawn to making a private statement. From 1939 until 1945, when he published his last article, Tucker's writings dealt with art-political issues: the artist's sense of political and moral duty and the vexed business of making art from a leftist perspective. Surrealism helped here, too. It had begun as a literary movement and encouraged a political-poetic expression of artistic aims and arguments.

Ernest Buckmaster was smarting over the lukewarm reception the second Australian Academy of Art exhibition had met. An admirer of Streeon's late landscapes and a fashionable portraitist, Buckmaster had recently returned from Europe where he had had the opportunity to be outraged by modern art at firsthand.

The second CAS show, also held at the National Gallery of Victoria, had done great business, proving just as popular as the first, and the trustees were shamed into accepting paintings by James Gleeson and Eric Thake for
the collection, a victory for the moderns. (47) All this was very annoying to
the conservatives who could feel their grip on public taste slipping.

It was Buckmaster who fired the first salvo. He was disgusted that the
NGV had allowed the CAS to exhibit there, wondering 'why it should be
possible that our National Gallery of all places should be selected as the site
for the public degradation of painting'. (48) Indeed, how George Bell
managed to talk arch conservative director JS McDonald into it a second time
remains a mystery. In a letter to The Argus, Buckmaster called for 'a crusade
against these would-be Nazis of the art world' who 'try to imitate the
unexplainable eccentricities of foreign, here-today-gone-tomorrow daub-
slingers...Shame on these deluded puzzle-makers!' (49)

Tucker bit back and 'The Art War', as The Argus dubbed it, was on. 'Our
academic critics simply do not know that all work produced under the
academic aegis...has no real artistic existence', Tucker declared. 'Its main
ingredients are cheap bravura, a vulgar sense of drama and, above all,
smart-aleck gymnastics and a brush dipped in mud'. (50) 'Good modern
work', he went on, 'participates in the contemporary drama, and includes in
itself the technological and intellectual achievements of modern man and as
such possesses the authenticity of true creative effort'. (51)

Hester joined the fray along with Rem Mc Clintock and Harry de Hartog,
comrades from the artists' branch. Hester's letter bears no evidence of the
deeper issues. She encouraged the National Gallery of Victoria to purchase
'good contemporary work' from the current CAS show. (52) 'Two or three
examples could be selected to brighten our dull gallery walls with some
clean colour and lively invention'. (53)

Tucker had hit his stride. His next letter defined 'the function of the artist'
as 'the endeavour to realise the totality of the relationship between himself
and his time, in terms of his chosen medium...And this is what the moderns are trying to do'. (54) He took umbrage at 'this welter of abuse and infantile derision...directed against modern art' by 'amateur art critics'. (55) He further attacked the conservative notion that '[a] a picture should be beautiful. [b] It should be "truthful" and reflect the appearance of nature'. (56) Tucker dismissed 'the notion of beauty' as 'a delightfully vague abstraction, a meaningless metaphysical term that can be used to describe anybody's erratic desires'. (57)

In his final letter, Tucker contended 'if all the great artists of the past had followed the pleasure principle and debarred tragic themes...Picasso's Guernica and numerous others would never have been created. And this,' he finished, 'reveals another reactionary aspect of academicism - that it is an escapist activity for the timid, convention-bound souls'. (58)

Tucker's ideas were couched in Marxist rhetoric but it was the spirited Marxism of Breton and Read, not Gorky and Zhadnov. As the surrealists suggested, Tucker viewed modern art as the result of a dialectical process, the 'endeavour to realise the totality of the artist's relationship between himself and his time'. Academic art, exemplified by Buckmaster, was reactionary, 'shaped by static concepts'. (59) Worse, it was art of the marketplace that 'slavishly confines itself to saleable, worn-out convention'. (60)

In this brief exchange, Tucker publicly defined himself against establishment art, the art market and against less flexible forms of Marxist theory. It was a bold and difficult move as he struggled to interpret the artist's role. Up against Buckmaster, he came across as a formidable writer and thinker. It was Tucker's first opportunity to characterise himself in words and he relished it. Noel Counihan was right. 'The first person to present a Marxist position on art in this country was Albert Tucker'. (61)
In September, Tucker and Hester set off for Sydney's tamer and more sedate art scene where Tucker was manager of the CAS exhibition. His visit coincided with the publication of Gleeson's article "What is Surrealism?", the best response to surrealism to appear in Australia, which quoted Tucker extensively.

Tucker met Gleeson and Bernard Smith and other members of the Sydney CAS - its autocratic leader Rah Fizelle, Swiss emigre Sali Herman, the watercolourist Francis Lymburner and pioneer modernists Frank and Margel Hinder. (62) Tucker and Hester had a busy time, attending meetings, parties and the opening of the CAS show at David Jones' department store. As manager, Tucker installed and manned the exhibition. There were also trips around the Harbour to Watson's Bay and the Gap. As usual, Tucker took his camera and documented events.

Smith and Gleeson had become close friends when both were organising lectures together in the Teachers Federation. (63) Both men were influenced by surrealism and both were emerging as eloquent writers and speakers about contemporary art. But while the period of the CAS show profiled Gleeson's commitment to surrealism and his role as its spokesperson, it had a traumatic effect on Smith, compelling him to renounce painting for good.

To Smith, his painting The Advance of Lot and his Brethren (1940, Private Collection) was his 'profession of revolutionary faith', a seething, sensual, surrealist, El Greco-influenced landscape, flowing with blood and peopled by battling humanity 'possessed of nothing but hope'. (64) However the critical response to Lot was uniformly negative and, Smith, deeply wounded, resolved to give up painting altogether. He needed 'some kind of symbolic gesture. He took all his smaller works and burned them. And when
the Sydney showing of the CAS exhibition ended late in October he decided not to collect his painting Lot from S.A.Parker's, the framers in George Street'. (65)

In May, Smith had joined the Teachers' Branch of the Communist Party and his political beliefs had galvanised him to find an appropriate form in painting for 'the world-shattering events he was living through'. (66) Smith's renunciation was painful but it was the right choice. He was a far better writer and historian than he was a painter, but it left a scar. Gradually 'the irrational art of surrealism that had once so tempted' Smith became linked in his mind with 'the irrational society of fascism'. (67) It was a common enough position among Party intellectuals during the war but for Smith it was also the result of personal failure, a galling inability to earn respect as an artist.

Smith's political beliefs were another persuasive factor. 'One of the reasons I actually stopped painting myself was I supported the war and I was member of the Party...and I felt that the kind of art that was needed at that time was a more realistic type of art. I also realised although I'd done a fair bit of painting...that my drawing skills were not up to a social realist type of thing'. (68)

Though a testing time for Smith, he was out and about and saw Tucker on several occasions. Tucker impressed him as 'very enthusiastic and energetic'. (69) Smith had just met Kate, his future wife, and the three posed for a photograph together in a Sydney street. (70) Smith observed that Tucker 'hadn't developed any of the uneasiness about the Party he later developed. In his writings, he was criticising contemporary art from a Marxist direction. It was intelligent but it was critical'. (71) Smith admired We are the Dead Men and The Futile City - Smith, too, had been a fan of Eliot's. 'I liked
[Tucker's] work. I supported his work. Actually my work was very close to his work'. (72)

Coinciding with the CAS show, Smith and Gleeson organised a discussion on "What is Surrealism?" at the Federation Art Society and invited Tucker to give a paper. Formerly the Teachers' Federation Art Society, Smith was its treasurer and secretary, and he was instrumental in reforming the Society to become the dynamic educational wing of the Sydney art world.

Tucker's paper was titled "Social Origins of Surrealism" and registers the temper of his anxieties. 'Surrealism', Tucker said, 'will make its contribution when, paradoxically enough, it commences to exercise judgement and reason, when it subjects the new material it has found for us, to a critical analysis. And then it will cease to be Surrealism'. (73)

It seemed just as surrealism was getting under Tucker's skin, he wanted to censure it, have it explain and codify itself. His summation echoes de Hartog's in "Super-Realism" but where de Hartog did not engage with surrealism, Tucker was thoroughly enmeshed and was, more than he realised, dependent on surrealism's particular style of inspiration. Tucker's position is ideological: the committed, wartime artist attempting to make surrealism enunciate a socially conscious expression and control its wayward imaginative drive.

Tucker was concerned that 'the rejection of social content results eventually in the destruction of form, demonstrated in the squares and circles of Ben Nicholson and the white canvas by Malevitch(sic). As it approaches self extinction, capitalism destroys art as well as itself'. (74) He located his dilemma in extreme terms warning that 'the artist is faced with this alternative, economic security and artistic suicide, or maintain his artistic integrity and commit economic suicide. And so the artist commenced
retreat further and further into his ivory tower towards the rejection of content and the cultivation of his sensibility'. (75)

Tucker's account of art history derived from Herbert Read and he described modern art exactly as Read did, in terms of 'Formalism or Abstractionism' which Tucker linked with the 'static, inorganic' qualities of 'Classical' art. 'Romantic' art Tucker linked with expressionism, surrealism and, importantly, with 'social' qualities. (76) But Tucker also recognised that the surrealist method of automatism - 'to relax conscious control in order to reach the deep recesses of the subconscious' - was revolutionary. (77)

Tucker's paper gives an overview of his cultural and economic concerns as he tried to make socially relevant and expressive art in modern terms. Deeper worries are signalled, too. What if he 'commenced to retreat further into the ivory tower'? What if he rejected 'social content' and encountered 'the destruction of form'? Such possibilities seem to suggest a frightening future, an abyss of meaninglessness, an engulfing black hole beyond the clarity and order of Marxist theory.

'On Black and White Marxists', another paper written in 1940, spells out further problems about loss and belonging in Party terms. Tucker writes of the contradiction he observed between the 'artistic progressivism of Modern Art' and the supposed social progressivism of leftwing 'revolutionaries' who saw in modern art 'the expression of bourgeois decadence'. (78) Tucker chastised the comrades, and not for the last time, for their 'over-simplification' of Marxism, 'their dogmatic and too readily expressed viewpoint' about modernism. (79)

Of course, Tucker wanted to be a socialist and a modernist, a Marxist and a surrealist, but he was aware of the philistinism and rigidity that marked Party attitudes towards art, attitudes that even a fair-minded intellectual
like Smith developed in the war years, that damned modernism in general
and surrealism in particular as defeatist and pessimistic. It was the same
attitude that lead Tucker to be censured by Counihan and the artists' branch.

James Gleeson's paper "What is Surrealism?" titled the seminar and was
published in Art in Australia. Gleeson was surrealism's elegant advocate, Dali
with principles. 'Surrealism', Gleeson wrote, 'is not an attempt to abandon
reason but to make reason reasonable. It is the fantastic used as a method of
elucidation'. (80)

Unlike Tucker, Gleeson did not expect surrealism to conform to a social
prescription. He was not a communist and he could afford to ignore political
tensions. Gleeson felt surrealism operated on a personal revolutionary level,
'a vigorous attempt to solve the problems which are facing us today by
drawing attention to the fact that the roots of these evils lie in our own
minds'. (81) Andre Breton would have cheered.

Gleeson saw his first Dali at the Herald show but he had already
developed his history of taste through reproductions of Van Gogh, El Greco,
Picasso, Max Ernst and Dali. At Sydney Teachers' College, Gleeson was
fortunate to find an innovative teacher, May Marsden, who 'did more than
anyone else to encourage you to take risks, to experiment and to question
everything about art that was generally taken for granted'. (82)

Gleeson produced sensual, violent and dramatic paintings, where the body
is pierced, penetrated and ruptured in wild, nightmare landscapes. Gleeson
analysed his Principles of the Ritual of Homicide (1939, NGA) as an Oedipal
drama, 'a universal struggle for the liberation of the individual will [where]
man must metaphorically murder the father, but he can only do so as a
climax to a terrific mental struggle'. (83)
Gleeson's wartime paintings include *Coagulations on the Maintenance of Identity* (1942, Private Collection), *The Five Wounds* (1943, NGA) and culminates in his terrifying masterpiece *The Sower* (1944, AGNSW). Gleeson creates a theatre for the male body where passion, pain and dismemberment are displayed in ceremonies of destruction. Eroticised and imperilled, the body is pitted against relentless forces such as tumescent landscapes and lowering skies that threaten annihilation. Survival is uncertain but the male body's virility and beauty, and its power to endure, is revered. In Gleeson's scenario, any victory will be pyrrhic.

Surrealism provided the release for Gleeson to explore the emotional and imaginative language of his homosexuality. Perhaps another reason why Gleeson was wary of socialist realism was because the representation of sexuality was allowed such a limited spectrum. For George Grosz, sexuality was imaged by tarts and sugar daddies. The survivors of Bergner's dark streets are stiff, their bodies motionless with misery. Gleeson's complex dramas of desire, pain and conquest, located in a god-like male body, did not quite fit the social realist bill.

Tucker admired Gleeson's paintings but he was unable to ignore the complex ties between surrealism and socialism, between art and society, and between himself and the Party line. He was too committed to do as Gleeson did, develop his art with a fine disregard, an individualist position beyond Marxism's great promise. At the end of 1940, Tucker was still a Marxist, trying to weave together the threads of a larger vision.
Notes
3. ibid.
4. ibid.
5. Joan James. Taped Interview. 3.4.99. Middle Park.
7. New Theatre's roots lay further back in Maughan's career and in Melbourne's cultural life. When Maughan started the Workers Art Club in 1931, theatre was already his driving interest. He staged *Masses and Men* by German expressionist playwright Ernst Toller, which met with some acclaim, and his watercolours, like *Civilization* (1933, State Library of Victoria) and the 1931 cover of *Stream*, resemble expressionist stage sets.
9. Hodge and Roberts were pen-names. I am grateful to Professor Angela O'Brien, School of Creative Arts, University of Melbourne for providing me with information from her PhD thesis regarding *Where's That Bomb?*
11. ibid.
14. ibid.
15. ibid.
16. ibid.
18. ibid.
20. ibid.
25. Stephen Spender, Eliot, Fontana/Collins, Glasgow, 1975, p.120.
27. ibid.
28. ibid.
30. Australian Biography, SBS TV, op.cit.
33. Smith, Counihan, op.cit. p.70.
35. Quoted in Lawlor, Arquebus, op.cit. p.17.
37. Lawlor, Arquebus, op.cit., p. 23.
38. Haese, Rebels, op.cit., p.49.
39. Helmer, Bell, op.cit., p. 95.
41. ibid.
42. Adrian Lawlor to Albert Tucker. (1939) Tucker Papers.
43. Helmer, Bell, op.cit., p.95.
44. ibid.
46. ibid.
47. 'An anonymous donor gave a fifty pound prize and agreed that the winning painting be presented to the Gallery on behalf of the Society. Gino Nibbi was the judge and divided the prize between James Gleeson and Eric Thake - a Surrealist and an abstract painting. There was, of course, considerable doubt whether the Gallery Trustees would accept the paintings as the Director would be violently opposed, and most, if not all the Trustees would in reality share his views...It was, therefore, a great triumph for the Society and a tribute to the strength it had achieved in a very short time, when the paintings were accepted and actually hung'. ibid.
48. Argus. 14 August 1940.
49. ibid.
50. Argus. 21 August 1940.
51. ibid.
52. Argus. 23 August 1940.
53. ibid.
54. Argus. 30 August 1940.
55. Argus. 26 August 1940.
56. ibid.
57. ibid.
58. ibid.
59. Argus. 29 August 1940.
60. Argus. 21 August 1940, op.cit.
62. ibid.
63. ibid.
64. Smith, Adeodatus, op.cit., p. 291.
65. ibid.
66. ibid.
67. ibid.
68. Smith interview, op.cit.
69. ibid.
70. ibid.
71. ibid.
72. ibid.
74. ibid.
75. ibid.
76. ibid.
77. ibid.
79. ibid.
81. ibid.
8. The Paradise Garden

'I would like to be in touch with an active, young and developing mind which I could see putting out feelers in all directions.'
John Reed to Sunday Reed. c.1932. (1)

'Each time the three of us are together things seem to go so deep.'
Sidney Nolan to John Reed. 28 February 1943. (2)

'When will I leave my loves alone I wonder? Go quietly into the earth and be as dead as a doornail.'
Sunday Reed to Joy Hester. 1950. (3)

On January 1, 1941 Bert and Joy were married at All Saints Church of England, Greensborough. It was not a romantic occasion. Conscription for home service for single men had come into force in December, 1940 and Joy had the idea that marriage could save Bert from the army - temporarily at least. (3a)

Joy bluffed her way through the wedding ceremony. She dreamed up the name Madge Evelyn for the register and lied about her age [she was twenty]. There was no bridal gown. Joy couldn't afford anything new, even if she had taken the ceremony seriously. In photographs taken by Tucker on that cool summer day, Joy is dressed simply in a dark frock and jacket with her hair pinned back. Clara Tucker made the best of it. She wore her best hat, gloves and a fox fur and looked on with smiling resignation as her son married his wild bohemian girl.
John did not attend and Clara was the only guest and witness. Louise scored a vicious point in her vendetta against Joy when she had the unsuspecting minister sacked for marrying Hester underage. Needless to say, Louise had not been invited.

Tucker had been playing cat and mouse with the military authorities. Letters would arrive at Leeton Court ordering him to report to the Caulfield induction centre with a cut lunch. Tucker ignored them. He had no intention of being called up. What had been a Marxist position about a distant imperialist war became for Tucker a desperate mission not to be conscripted into a process that disgusted and terrified him. His feelings are best described by Herbert Read.

'An immense machine begins to move and we find ourselves segregated, regimented, drafted into navies, armies and workshops. Bull-necked demagogues inject a poisonous propaganda into our minds and then the storm of steel breaks over us...The only individuals who protest against such injustices - or who make their protest vocal - are in effect the poets and artists of each age'. (4)

Nolan and Tucker agreed - conscript = convict. (5)

The phoney war had ended and Hitler's Blitzkreig tactics had conquered Europe. Between April and June 1940, Germany invaded Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France. In July, the Battle of Britain began and England was under seige. Ominously, the Japanese had moved into new areas of Indo-China but Singapore, secured by the Eighth Division in September, was seen as 'the impregnable fortress' which would save Australia from Japanese invasion.

Recruiting for the second AIF had been slow but after May, figures skyrocketed, as Australians identified with the European war, and with
England's plight in particular, and rushed to enlist in their thousands. In June, prime minister Robert Menzies banned the Communist Party - which sent the party underground and effectively ended the activities of the artists' branch - and Sir Keith Murdoch was appointed director-general of information with wide powers to have material compulsorily printed in newspapers. The situation on the home front was changing, too, as petrol rationing came into effect and goods such as cigarettes and tobacco in short supply.

Tucker's nervous, excitable temperament was stretched to fever pitch by the growing threat of conscription and Hester was at her wit's end wondering how to keep him feeling calm and secure. To Joy, Bert was 'the most on edge person I have ever known. Even when he was relaxed he tapped his feet'. (5a)

Tucker couldn't work for fear of being detected by the military authorities and Hester's income was their sole means of support. She worked as a 'hello girl' at Melbourne Taxis in Bridge Road, Richmond. In the days before taxis had two-way radios, the 'hello girls' took incoming calls for cabs, then phoned them through to the ranks. (5b) Of all Hester's jobs, it was the one she enjoyed the most and kept the longest.

By the year's end, Tucker and Hester had left Little Collins Street and taken up residence in a converted tin shed near Heide, rented out by the Reeds for parties and jazz concerts with Graeme Bell's band. Surrounded by paddocks and a tumbledown fence, it was primitive living and Tucker remembered the place as 'all open fields and the cows scratched their horns on the walls at night.' (6)

John Reed was now much more than an art world ally. He and Sunday had become Tucker's patrons, supplying him with a weekly stipend as well as
buying his paintings. Further, Joy had become Sunday's closest woman friend. Also late in 1941, Nolan moved into Heide, making public his affair with Sunday and the menage-a-trois that would last until 1948. Nolan, charming, enigmatic, gifted and ambitious was Tucker's friend, confidante and rival until his death in 1992. Tucker, both grateful and wary of the Reeds' patronage, had entered the circle of friendship that would shape his life.

The Reeds were class traitors. Born to privilege, both chose to flee its strictures and conventions. In their separate ways, Sunday and John had been wounded by their upbringing, motivating their steadfast determination to be distant from it. Neither fitted the mould - John as an establishment lawyer, Sunday as a high society belle.

As a young married couple, they decided to support art, not only through discriminating taste and purchase, but by welcoming artists into their home. In their joint endeavour, there would be no separation between art and life, home and work. It would be one domain: Heide. The Reeds' lives were tragic in many ways, fraught with complexities they never fully solved, causing them, over the decades, pain, humiliation and loss. But despite their personal misfortunes and mistakes, the Reeds have emerged as two of Australia's most enlightened patrons, visionaries who helped to change the culture, philanthropists at a time when few existed.

John was ten in 1911 when his family travelled from Tasmania to England to place him and his older brother Richard as boarders at Pinewood College. Among wealthy colonials it was the done thing to send their children to English schools for a proper education, no matter how much the children loathed the process. John was at Pinewood a year before moving to
Cheltenham College and he never recovered from the brutishness of Cheltenham, which he described as 'ghastly and primitive'. (7) Patrick White, who followed him there, felt exactly the same. The College, which looked like a toy Gothic monastery, was an undistinguished school that fed half its young men into the British Army and 'turned out good chaps who believed in honesty and fair play'. (8)

John, sensitive and bookish, learned a certain brand of stoicism from his schooldays as well as a distaste for the forms and hierarchies of upper class life. John's developing masculinity was at odds with the machismo of Cheltenham. Quietly confident, handsome and self-contained, John seemed to have nothing to prove as a man. He was dignified and patrician, without snobbery or calculated charm, keen to listen and, unless roused by a cause or an issue, relatively subdued. His presence was impressively controlled, tranquil and strong. What John proved best at, and what became his calling, was caring for others.

John was saved from the rigors of Cheltenham by the outbreak of the first world war which brought him home to Australia. Not to Tasmania, where he was born, but to Geelong Grammar outside Melbourne where he finished his education. That was followed by 'three beautiful years at Cambridge from which I emerged with a law degree and the sense of at least the freedom to be myself, something I had never known before'. (9)

John grew up at Mt Pleasant, at Evandale near Launceston, one of the grandest houses in northern Tasmania. It was dubbed Mt Unpleasant by younger sister Cynthia's malicious wit. The family dynasty was founded by John's grandfather Henry Reed who landed in Hobart Town in 1827 before tramping to Launceston on foot. (10)
Rather like Tucker's grandfather, Henry Reed was an astonishing nineteenth century man, a combination of rapacious mercantile industry, tub-thumping evangelism and unstinting philanthropy. Henry's was a big life, encompassing two marriages and sixteen children, together with hugely successful shipping, whaling, grazing and banking interests, as well as a sincere commitment to the Wesleyan Church. In 1847, he took the family home to England where he preached the length and breadth of the country for the next twenty-five years.

Returning to Tasmania, Henry bought Mt Pleasant and renovated it to accommodate his vast entourage. He also preached to crowds in the palatial rooms at Mt Pleasant and built a chapel there. The Georgian-style mansion was hung with landscapes by John Glover, artworks that made no impression on John as he was growing up. (11) The family crest showed a sheaf of wheat over the motto 'nothing without the cross'. Living at Mt Pleasant was rather like living in a palace with its bevy of servants, its huge grounds, bluestone stables and grand drive.

Henry junior, John's father, inherited Mt Pleasant but not his father's vision, only his religious fervour. Apart from Richard and John, there were four girls in the family: Margaret, Barbara, Coralie and Cynthia, the youngest. Mt Pleasant could be a gloomy and severe place for children, controlled by a dreary, stuffy etiquette, where they were expected to be seen and not heard. (12) It grated on the fragile, intense Cynthia who later gave Patrick White bitter descriptions of the 'Tasmanian Gothic gloom' of her childhood home (12a) but John's calm, meditative personality found other outlets.

John loved country life, seeking refuge in the wilderness and the mountains and he became a keen birdwatcher and bush-walker, pursuits encouraged and shared with his brother Richard. (13) Not long before their
marriage, John wrote to Sunday during a trip to Tasmania, 'Mt Pleasant...certainly seems to hold a wonderful beauty and attraction for me - not only the house and garden but everything I see in every direction'. (14) It was something John chose to replicate in his own life: a comfortable home in a beautiful country setting, a life lived close to nature.

Mt Pleasant was also an inspiring place because of Henry senior's commitment to the greater good, to practising philanthropy not as a random gesture but on a systematic basis, even if self-sacrifice was involved. Shocked by the poverty of his congregations in northern England, Henry had provided housing, food and other forms of assistance for them while in his native Doncaster, he bought cottages for the elderly and indigent. It was a fine tradition of noblesse oblige and John was stirred by Henry's example.

John might have trained as a lawyer but he displayed little interest in pursuing a career. John's ambitions were cultural, communal and co-operative: acting in concert, not alone, was his preferred modus operandi. The group - active, political and artistic - was John's ideal environment, one that he pursued in his associations with the Contemporary Art Society, Angry Penguins, Ern Malley's Journal and the Museum of Modern Art. John was a very social being, directed by circumstance, at ease with decisive personalities and inclined to be guided by them. Once decided on a course of action promoted by his chosen group, John was steadfast, astute, courageous and loyal. But there was a strain of passivity in John's character, the negative side of his high-minded dedication, that meant that he could, and did, sacrifice himself to what he perceived was the greater good, no matter the personal cost. Above all, he wanted to be useful.

After coming home from Cambridge, John resolved to keep well away from Tasmania and he settled in Melbourne where he landed a job at Blake
and Rigall's, one of Melbourne's top law firms. But his growing fascination was for art.

Adrian Lawlor's 1930 show at Riddell's Gallery was John's earliest recollection of a modern exhibition in Melbourne. 'It drew so little public attention that I cannot even remember anyone writing an abusive letter to the press about it'. (15) John's friends at the time included Harold Herbert and cartoonist Will Dyson who were conservative in their artistic tastes. John felt he was 'hopelessly immature', an example of delayed development. (16) That changed in 1931 when he met Sunday Quinn.

Not long after John was introduced Sunday at a tennis match she chided him, 'You'd better marry me'. (17) The religious Reed clan was horrified by John's attachment to the twenty-seven-year-old divorcee. Nor was that her only stigma: Sunday was unable to have children. Sunday's first marriage had been a tragic mistake. Leonard Quinn had an unsavoury reputation - Basil Burdett knew him for passing bad cheques in Barcelona - and apparently Quinn had set his sights on Sunday's money. (18) The Baillieu family were against the marriage but Sunday, the beloved daughter in a family of three boys, was used to getting her way. Quinn might have behaved like a wealthy young man but he had no money. He was an adventurer. (18a)

Sunday and Quinn married in December 1926 at St Mary's Star of the Sea, Sorrento. Their wedding reception was held at nearby Merthon, the Baillieu's sumptuous holiday home on the Mornington Peninsula, before the couple set off on a Parisian honeymoon. By 1929, the marriage had ended and Sunday was home. A combination of a botched miscarriage and a venereal disease contracted from Quinn had lead to a hysterectomy. Quinn walked out. Sick,
weak and distraught, Sunday was rescued from London by Arthur, her father, and younger brother, Everard.

Sunday described herself as 'poisoned' by the operation and subsequent treatment. (19) To even her closest friends, and for the rest of her life, Sunday drew a veil over the unhappy period of her first marriage. She desperately wanted to have children and perhaps it was due to the cruel denial of such a great longing that impelled John to grant Sunday whatever she needed or desired.

Sunday's friends were aware how much she longed for a child. Michael Keon recalled that during his stay at Heide, 'Sunday's longing was acute. She talked about wanting a baby'. (19a) Nolan felt 'there was hidden side to this apparently ideal marriage which centered on Sunday's inability to bear children'. (19b) He believed it triggered, not just Sunday's infidelities, but 'the subsequent drift into casual relationships that developed within their circle'. (19c) Nolan's attitude towards Sunday's sterility was hardly gallant. He made a cruel joke in The Paradise Garden (1971) when he wrote that Quinn 'cashed a dud cheque/on your fallopian tubes'. (19d)

It seemed so much had been taken from Sunday, and so brutally, that John sought to heal Sunday, return what was lost, and failing that, offer her other joys and satisfactions. Sunday never stopped longing for a child.

From the first, John was Sunday's caretaker, the executive of the marriage and the manager of her health and well-being, her sensitive temperament, her brilliant, idiosyncratic, volatile individuality. John reflected 'that for Sunday, rules came afterwards and were other people's business'. (20) John's letters to Sunday during their courtship are unwaveringly cheerful, full of kindly remonstrance and sanguine advice. At times he seems to be writing to an indulged, adored and sickly child.
Sunday's youth was luxurious and balls, trips to Merthon and overseas holidays marked the year's calendar. She had been tutored at home before attending St Catherine's, an exclusive girls' school, from 1920 to 1922. She was also presented at court. Balholmen in Struan Street, Toorak was a magnificent mansion and also a convivial, cultured home. Arthur Bailleu, Sunday's father, collected paintings and Ethel, her mother, was a keen watercolourist and reader, especially of Katharine Mansfield. Arthur Streeton was a frequent guest and he painted a portrait of Sunday, dancing in the moonlight at Merthon.

When the fashionable Sydney magazine The Home gave Merthon a two page spread in 1923, Sunday was photographed on the terrace facing the sea in a long white frock. Surrounded by her family, she appeared its shining member: handsome, tanned, energetic and casually imperious. (20a)

But the Bailleu dynasty, presided over by WL Bailleu's dazzling business acumen, held no charms for Sunday and she found the men repellent. 'I always think the men in our family regard their women in much the same light as a nicely arranged bowl of flowers or a good meal!' (21) She didn't approve of her mother's leisured existence either, confiding to one friend, 'The only thing I ever saw my mother do was wash her silk stockings'. (22) Sunday was a loner, chafed by school discipline and too refractory and unconventional for the world into which she had been born.

After John and Sunday married at St Paul's Cathedral in January, 1932, they moved to an apartment in Marne Street, South Yarra. But they had no intention of staying so close to Toorak. Soon they were motoring around the countryside, searching for their dream home. They called the Victorian weatherboard house set on 15 acres of bush and river flats near the Yarra
river, Heide. It was the Reeds' first joint project and from 1934, when they moved there, until 1981, when they died, it was the core of their lives.

Heide was in a dilapidated state when they bought it from Mrs Lang, an elderly widow, but both saw the potential. In those days, Templestowe Road was 'a rough country road and you couldn't see anywhere for apple trees, peach trees. The whole area was orchards'. (23) The modest, three-bedroom weatherboard farmhouse wasn't Mt Pleasant or Merthon but, then, it was never meant to be. Sunday and John had had enough of grand houses and oppressive formality, of other people's rules. Their domestic life would be earthy, simple, relaxed and distinctively modern.

After they set the house to rights, their next venture was to plan the garden. The neighborhood might have been all orchards but Heide itself was barren. After admiring Neil Douglas' garden at Bayswater, they invited him to live at Heide during the week and help to develop theirs. Douglas, a friend of Atyeo's and a former Gallery student, was the first in a long line of friends and helpers to stay at Heide. Douglas remembers,

'Sunday was the creator, John was the executor as far as the garden went. The decisions were always Sunday's. She was the one with the wonderful new vision'. (24)

Together, the three 'pored over rare garden books, old English cottage lore, garden poetry, herb lore, finding the names of plants that had been found in strange places'. (25) While the Reeds did not draw up a specific garden design, Sunday knew of Monet's Giverny and influential English gardens like Vita Sackville-West's in Kent. Such models inspired, rather than directed, the Heide garden. Sunday also established a potager, a French-style kitchen garden, close to the house, filled with herbs and vegetables for the table. French style was important to Sunday. She tore down the iron
lacework on the verandah because 'she wanted Heide to look like a little French cottage'. (26)

The Reeds' next important project was to start building their collection of contemporary art. But their first joint purchase was not modern, it was a romantic celebration of their home and its artistic tradition. Arthur Streeton's *Evening with Bathers* (1888, NGV) is an idyllic image of the local landscape where figures bathe in a pool at evening. The Reeds were dismissive of Streeton's later work but the painting's dreamy atmosphere and delicately handled brushstrokes provide an example of how expertly the young Streeton interpreted the landscape. Often a point of discussion at Heide, the painting proved inspirational to Nolan.

In 1933, the Reeds began buying art seriously. They purchased Jacob Epstein's watercolour nude *Sunita* (c.1925, NGV) and a cubist etching by Ben Nicholson *Still Life* (1928, MoMA at Heide) which they spotted in Alleyne Zander's touring exhibition of modern British art. Adrian Lawlor's *Self Portrait* (1933, MoMA at Heide) was another buy as well as his evocative *Portrait of John Reed* (1938, MoMA at Heide).

The Reeds also bought paintings of Sam Atyeo's including *Organised Line to Yellow* (c.1933, NGA), *Cigarette* (1934, MoMA at Heide), *Abstract Figure with Thumb* (c.1934, MoMA at Heide), *The Thinker* (1933-35, MoMA at Heide) and a portrait of Cynthia (1933, MoMA at Heide). Moya Dyring, Atyeo's girlfriend, painted Sunday cuddling a cat (*Portrait of Sunday*, c.1934, MoMA at Heide), a tender homage to Sunday's feline grace in pastel blues. The Reeds also purchased Dyring's cubist-inspired *Melanchta* (c.1934, MoMA at Heide) from her first solo exhibition.

In 1933 Sunday had studied briefly at Bell's. Atyeo observed, 'You've got quality in your work, Sunday...I am looking forward to seeing you paint in
oils'. (27) But classes and tuition had never appealed to Sunday. She stopped painting and if she had any ambitions, she never mentioned them to Tucker or Hester. But art school was useful for the budding patron, giving Sunday a sense of what an artist needed - advice, support and material help.

John and Sunday seemed a perfect match. They were from the same class, both radicals within that class, both striving for a life that combined an enthusiastic commitment to modern culture with a freer, more natural lifestyle. Yet within a year of this marriage of true minds, Sunday's first affair had started.

Atyeo was the Reeds' first protege. Articulate and impetuous, Atyeo was arguably Melbourne's most promising young painter. 'I know of no figure', John recalled thirty years later, 'who could excel him in dynamic vitality and zest for life...his vivid personality influenced everyone with whom he came in contact.' (28) Atyeo, an early devotee of jazz, made the Reeds keen fans, too. (29) Together, the three read Herbert Read's Art Now which, John recalled, came as 'a bombshell to us.' (30) The book brought Atyeo into contact with cubism and abstraction, causing him 'the most enormous excitement' which John was 'privileged to share as his friend.' (31) Atyeo's groundbreaking abstract Organised Line to Yellow hung over the Heide fireplace.

Sharing an artist's painting, intellectual and emotional life in the most direct and intimate manner was the Reeds' complex enterprise and it began with Atyeo. They were attracted to artists of the highest calibre, to the difficult, artistically radical and ambitious, and once the friendship was struck, there were no boundaries to involvement, creating situations of claustrophobic intensity. As far as Sunday's relations with her artist friends were concerned 'love could have no limitations.' (32)
Atyeo relied on the Reeds, and not just financially. With them he could share his aims, his plans, his sense of isolation. He wrote to Sunday and John about *Organised Line to Yellow*. 'I have risked everything, burnt my bridges. I have painted a very big abstract thing. It is nearly very good. It may be a terribly good painting. Christ I hope it is.' (33)

With Atyeo began a situation of mutual and not always consonant dependencies. The Reeds needed a talented young artist at the centre of their lives and the artist needed their particular style of enlightened patronage. Feelings were generated that were difficult to manage. John reflected wryly, 'Ah, it was so hard to cope fully with life - poor Samuel, poor me, poor you - at any rate we are all in the same boat and love each other.' (34) Yet John's light-hearted tone deflects from what must have been a humiliating predicament for him, and one he became all too familiar with. Cynthia, a friend of both Atyeo's and Dyring's, observed tartly to Sunday 'if I were John I'd be jealous of Sam.' (35)

Atyeo joked that 'Sun and I are going to write a book on relationships, a book of rules' but in fact the person who determined the etiquette for the Heide *menages-a-trois* was John. (36) He not only accepted Sunday's affairs, he actively organised and controlled them, forming close bonds with his wife's lovers.

Early in their early married life, John and Sunday faced the difficult conclusion that John's sexual interests and energies were not equal to hers. His reserved personality may have signalled a repressed libido, he may have been impotent but he was not homosexual, nor did he seek out his own affairs. Sunday was a very sexual woman, seductive, possessive and flirtatious. Rules were other people's business. Perhaps her sterility
encouraged her to experiment, to have liaisons and fill the gap that children and a very different pattern of domesticity would have provided.

In the Reeds' self-consciously modern marriage, there were precedents for such licence. Lady Ottoline Morrell's mansion, Garsington, in Oxfordshire, provided a home for writers, intellectuals and pacifists during the first world war. Ottoline managed affairs with Augustus John and Bertrand Russell while Philip, her husband, stayed discreetly in the background. (37)

Ottoline was friendly with the Bloomsbury group who practiced their own sexual explorations and infidelities. Virginia Woolf's lover, Vita Sackville-West, was married to politician Harold Nicolson. Both Nicolson and Sackville-West were homosexual and allowed one another total freedom to explore affairs. 'Honour was rooted in dishonour'. (38) Nicolson and Sackville-West remained devoted to one another during the long course of their marriage, producing two sons, and planning Sissinghurst, one of England's greatest gardens. Their marriage succeeded because 'each found permanent happiness only in the company of the other'. (39)

John worshipped Sunday and he was prepared to sacrifice himself to make her happy. He was also worried that if he did not, he might lose her. Nor did he comply grimly or miserably, resisting and complaining; he behaved graciously, the warmly welcoming host of wife's liaisons, the master of ceremonies of the menage. Perhaps somewhere in John's complex personality, a degree of voyeurism alleviated and even provided a fillip to the agonies of jealousy he must have suffered. In a letter to Nolan, years after the affair with Sunday was over, John observed, 'I have a certain tough resilience that once served you well'. (40) It was one of the rare occasions when John revealed his feelings.
Sunday was many things John was not. She was the vital, bewitching partner of his restrained, rational personality, the intuitive, creative, provocative artist to his prudent, judicious, responsible curator, the reckless, sexy predator that he was too noble and austere ever to be. Sunday's was the discerning eye and John learned from her and deferred to her in all matters of taste and decision-making.

Nor did Sunday expect John to be a money-producing, status-seeking solicitor. After John quit the law in the mid-40s, Sunday's private income assisted them. She encouraged him to express his creativity in the ways he favoured, such as the publishing venture of Reed and Harris, a financial disaster which lost them thousands of pounds. The great projects of the Heide garden and art collection could not take place without Sunday. But worldly business - CAS meetings and the cut and thrust of art world politicking - was John's domain in which Sunday wished to play no part.

John was grateful to Sunday. She had taught him about depths of feeling, 'not just to have confidence in his own emotions and thoughts - and he needed that damn near all his life before Sunday - but also to have no fear of receiving as much as giving'. (41) He was deeply in love with Sunday and remained so, unwaveringly, as she did with him. But for Sunday, there were two great loves. The first was John, the second, Nolan.

Nolan bowled into the Reeds' life in 1938 and stayed for the next ten years. He was 'the young mind putting out feelers in all directions' that John had dreamed of, the significant modern painter the Reeds had hoped would emerge to translate the Australian modernist experience into paint.

In 1936, Atyeo had left for France where, overwhelmed by the European cultural experience, his art spluttered and died. Atyeo's energies would lead him into two unlikely careers, as a diplomat at the United Nations and a
rose-grower in Provence. (42) He continued to write to the Reeds and the three remained friends, John organising an exhibition of Atyeo's gouaches at the Museum of Modern Art in 1963, but Atyeo's career as an artist of stature was confined to a brief flicker between 1933-35.

The Reeds had the good sense to see in Nolan's early experiments with abstraction and in his blustering bravado, an original talent and a startlingly unique individual, the closest thing to genius Australian painting has produced.

Nolan trod exactly the same path as Tucker. He arrived at Sir Keith Murdoch's Herald office, looking for money to finance his brilliant career. Unlike Tucker, however, Nolan conned his way in, charming Murdoch's secretary and, briefly, Murdoch himself. (43) Then Murdoch viewed Nolan's work, a series of abstract figure studies influenced by Chinese calligraphy and Klee, and gave him short shrift. But Murdoch did suggest Nolan speak to Basil Burdett, and Burdett sent him to John. (44)

Nolan found John in his office at Collins House sitting at his desk reading Wilenski's The Modern Movement in Art. (45) After politely but firmly rejecting Nolan's blatant request for fifty pounds 'and then I can go off to Paris', John invited Nolan to Heide for dinner that evening. (46)

It was the right moment for Nolan and the Reeds. He was twenty-one, talented and supremely confident but his gifts, his direction as an artist, was latent. At that point, Nolan was more a reader than a painter. At Heide, Sunday and John had created an environment that was ideally suited to nurture an artist and they were waiting to be shaped and quickened by a young mind. Sunday and John were an older generation to Nolan - Sunday was twelve and John sixteen years his senior - and, in a sense, Nolan was
their child, a bright, needy and disruptive force that changed and invigorated them, opening them up to a younger generation of artists.

Michael Keon, a guest at Heide in 1942 recalls, describes Sunday's love for Nolan as 'naked, fiery, unappeasable, untractable, sometimes hysterical..Love in storm or out of storm was the condition of things at Heide'. (47) 'Nothing was hidden, not even the physical act of love'. (48) But if John was prepared to allow Sunday and Nolan's passion to burn brightly, then Elizabeth Nolan certainly wasn't.

Elizabeth was irritated and upset by her husband's long stays at Heide and by the obvious attraction the Reeds held for him. By the time the Nolans' daughter Amelda was born in 1940, Nolan had become an increasingly errant husband and they were living apart. The marriage had been given little chance of success - there was the dispiriting hand-to-mouth existence, pressure from Elizabeth's family and, last but not least, the stimulation Nolan derived from the Reeds.

When Nolan moved to Heide, the pretence which his marriage had become was finished. Whatever Nolan's true feelings about Elizabeth and his baby daughter, his manner, once he was established at Heide, was hard-working and high-spirited. Perhaps Rimbaud, the great risk-taker, had inspired Nolan in life as well as in art. Neil Douglas remembered Nolan's boundless energy and enthusiasm while painting, Nolan saying 'simply a million times "Look at this!" - blue eyes, pink cheeks but dark hair - sleeves rolled up and Sun's apron on, those quiet pin-point eyes of smiling elation and fun!' (49)

In Sunday, Nolan had secured his patron and creative partner. Within a year, his painting style had blossomed and Nolan began the Wimmera paintings, a daring modernist reworking of the Australian landscape. Despite
the dubious moral circumstances Nolan found himself in with the Reeds, the artistic benefits were undeniable.

Tucker needed the Reeds, too, but he was mistrustful of them, especially Sunday. They were his patrons but Heide's hot-house atmosphere didn't suit him and he wasn't interested in the kind of closeness Hester had with the Reeds. Nor was Tucker comfortable with authority figures, either male or female, and Heide was ruled by Sunday.

She created a powerfully feminine, subtle, complex, emotional environment. There were the lively discussions about art, politics and literature over the dinner table or 'arvo tea'. There were also the currents of Sunday's affair with Nolan. Then there was Sunday's notoriously fickle temperament which meant she might burst into tears or take to her bed. John was always the mediator and negotiator. Bert found Sunday's moodiness irritating and John's willingness to conciliate weak-minded.

Yet Tucker's photographs of the Reeds speak of different feelings. As Julia Hirsch has written, 'like slips of the tongue, candid photography speaks to us of hidden meanings, of intentions we did not know we had, of emotions we had not recognised.' (50)

For all his reservations, Tucker admired the Reeds. In *Sunday and John Reed* (1943) Tucker snaps them striding down the hill at Heide. Youthful and vigorous, they appear in control of a world where good conversation, food and art were an expected part of the daily routine. Bert's photograph is a glowing homage to a unique partnership. For all their keen gardening, the Reeds rarely photographed Heide in the 40s and Tucker's are among the few remaining photographs.

His photographs also capture tensions. *On the couch (c.1945)* shows Nolan sitting sandwiched between John and Sunday. Plunged in shadow, he gazes
17. In the library: John Reed, Sidney Nolan and Sunday Reed
Heide, Templestowe, Melbourne, c.1942
nervously at the camera, his hands held passively in his lap, a smile flickering across his lips. He seems to acknowledge, almost wryly, that he is trapped. John's body language is defensive, his arms are wrapped around his body and his expression is troubled, but Sunday is a study in aplomb. Nonchalantly she reads the paper, seemingly oblivious to both her husband and her lover.

The shadowy, meditative mood of *In the library* (c.1942) suggests similar pressures, Nolan again positioned between the Reeds. John sits close to Nolan, their bare arms nearly touching. Sunday crouches on a small stool in front of the fire-place, head bowed, smoking an after-dinner cigarette. The energy of the composition, and the room, pivots on Sunday's bowed head.

Tucker was astonished by Nolan's 'terrific capacity and inner strength to be able to operate in that kind of circumstance. I certainly couldn't. Not a hope'. (51) Tucker admired 'the casual precision' of Nolan's painting and felt a degree of kinship with him: they were from similar backgrounds. But Nolan's family was 'sharper...His mother was shrewd and his father was on the ball, with all these odds and ends for survival, including the SP bookmaking thing, whereas my father used to bring home watches from characters at work and sit up all night repairing them for two bob to make a little bit of extra money which was a much politer and duller sort of way'. (52)

Tucker was also in awe of Nolan's apparent sophistication, the confidence that bore fruit in his Wimmera paintings and *Ned Kelly* series. 'Nolan was of a strong nerve and his own inner certitudes which was one of his enormous strengths, whereas I made painting out of my anxiety and despair, Nolan made them out of different things altogether'. (53) Once Tucker observed to
Nolan that 'I was painting hell and he was painting paradise...and I saw a very satisfied grin spread across Nolan's face.' (54)

For Tucker, 'I often defined myself against Nolan: he was important for me as a foil. He was a very literate man, with a great sense of humour and a sharp, surgical mind, quick as a razor, connecting, analyzing and understanding things'. (55)

Their favourite poets signal the temperamental differences between Tucker and Nolan. 'I was the maniac for Eliot whereas Nolan had little interest in him'. (56) Nolan's hero was Arthur Rimbaud whose hallucinatory masterpiece *Illuminations* (1886) was achieved by the poet's systematic derangement of the senses. Rimbaud's was a romantic, lyrical, intense, frantic experiment that pushed all aspects of life and art to the limit. The result are poems of startling, evocative imagery, full of bizarre, kaleidoscopic imagery. Naturally, Rimbaud was claimed as a surrealist precursor by Breton. Rimbaud convinced Nolan that in art 'the screw has to be turned ever further, that one has to be more violent, more abstract, more avant-garde'. (57)

Rimbaud was also one of Sunday's favourite poets and she translated three of his poems for *Angry Penguins*. (58) Sunday read Rimbaud in the original French to Nolan instructing him, 'Paint or write down in English what you think or feel when I read to you'. (59) Under these conditions, Nolan made 'inspired poetry...a phantasmagoria, almost a visual saga, of sheer beauty'. (60) Tucker observed that 'the bulk of the time that Nolan worked [at Heide] Sunday was virtually in his pocket.' (61)

Due to Joy's friendship with Sunday, Tucker and Hester were frequent visitors to Heide. With Nolan, they were invited on holidays to Point Lonsdale and Sorrento and to the occasional Christmas lunch. I stress
Hester's connection with the Reeds because though both John and Sunday were impressed by Tucker's paintings and by Tucker as an intellectual, they were rather wary of him, just as he was of them. Tucker had 'a certain cold passion' that made them uneasy. (62)

John had first met Tucker through printmaker Nutter Buzzacott around 1938. (63) John saw that Bert took himself more seriously than other young painters and was 'more an orthodox student' than they were. Bert was 'the socially conscious one' who 'bitterly resented the social system' which kept him in poverty and 'being both articulate and aggressive, he never failed to let anyone know how he felt'. (64)

'Bert had a positive fixation on posterity and immortality and while others were painting on anything that came to hand, and with the cheapest paints, Bert was studiously poring over the text books and making certain (as he told me with absolute conviction) that his paintings would be as perfect in five hundred years as they were then'. (65)

The Reeds' taste had been formed by a number of forces including Art Now, Atyeo and, most importantly, Danila Vassilieff. The freedom and exuberance of Vassilieff's painting style, his dismissal of traditional art training, his celebration of a naive, childlike, spontaneous approach to artmaking shaped the Reeds as patrons. Tucker had been impressed by exactly the same qualities in Vassilieff but they were not his. He was a sober and methodical craftsman. He simply did not have Vassilieff's elan, and he knew better than to try and emulate it.

Nolan and Hester, the Reeds' most favoured artists, both worked rapidly and effortlessly in public. Hester would sit cross-legged by the fire in the library 'conjuring magical visions with pen and brush'. (66) Tucker recalled 'Nolan would put newspapers and put a board on the [dining room] table and
his cans of ripolin and just bash away and be chatting at the same time about Rimbaud, Kierkegaard, DH Lawrence and all his various interests. I'd be sitting on the other side of the table talking to him'. (67)

Hester and Nolan worked with whatever quick, cheap and ready materials came to hand. Again, Tucker's professionalism eschewed such casualness, putting him at odds with the Reeds. And, finally, Tucker was his own man as well as his own worst enemy. Socially, he was edgy and polite conversation was not his forte. He did not have Nolan's easy charm or Hester's sunny exuberance. He did not set out to please. With Tucker's fiercely held convictions, discussion could rapidly turn into a battle-ground and he was not adept at listening to others' views. As John observed, Tucker was aggressive and his personal insecurities dictated he must be heard, even if it meant ramming his opinions down his benefactors' throats.

Tucker drew a line between himself and the Reeds, a line that neither Hester nor Nolan were prepared to mark. They became dependent on the Reeds, caught in financial and emotional webs that caused pain and bewilderment. For all the Reeds' largesse and their sensitive alliance with their artist friends, they were aristocrats and their friends were impoverished, petit-bourgeois desperadoes, alienated from a society that neither understood them nor offered them a market for their work.

Tucker the Marxist observed the class differences and realised that, for him, there could be no common ground with the Reeds. He also envied the Reeds and saw himself as denied the kind of life the Reeds' enjoyed due to his father's incompetence. It made for strained relations and it is a testament to John and Sunday's good graces that such troublesome, creative folk were welcomed at Heide.
At times, Tucker sent the Reeds up. They had holes in their gardening clothes which Tucker ridiculed as an upper class affectation. 'I remember it used to make me very angry when I'd see them with jeans with great patches on them when I knew perfectly well they could afford to have them in good order'. (68) But 'when Heide was good, it was very good. We'd go out there and have marvellous meals...there were big legs of pork or ham at Christmas time. It was the first time I'd ever seen spoons sticking upright in a bowl of cream'. (69) The library shelves were stacked with the latest art books, novels, poetry plus overseas and local journals. After the chores were done, 'I'd go up to the front room and read my head off'. (70)

Tucker had mixed feelings about Sunday who was 'a very sensitive woman, very penetrating, full of insight, and quite ruthless and quite manipulative. And she had a side to her though that was extremely childish. She was the little rich girl who'd go into tantrums if she didn't get her own way...If there was any tension or trouble or a great argument developed, she'd just silently go off to bed and you wouldn't see her till the next morning. And so she had that kind of sensitivity. She was only interested in dramas when she was choreographing them for her own personal benefit'. (71)

But, over the years, Tucker was unequivocal on one point. 'Sunday was the eye, the central force that drew us together...In the early days, John knew nothing about painting. Sunday put him on the right track and he always listened to her opinion, always sought it out. John never acted without consulting Sunday first'. (72)

Despite the personal clashes, the Reeds' direct financial support of Tucker, once in place, was a security he enjoyed for over a decade. The Reeds paid a stipend of two pounds ten shillings a week into Tucker's bank account,
collecting paintings as 'payment', together with buying others outright. (73) They were paying us what was equivalent or roughly the basic wage at the time. At times, I'd give them a painting...so you could say...they were really buying them on the instalment plan.' (74) Tucker was 'having rows with John all the way through...about policy, about art, about the CAS' and didn't feel the stipend was precarious or that he had to sing for his supper. (75)

Other artists so favoured included Nolan, Hester, John Sinclair and John Perceval. Under this arrangement, the Reeds acquired The Futilé City, Children of Athens (1940, MoMA at Heide), The Waste Land, Fisherman's Bend (1941, Queensland Art Gallery), Journey to Orcus (1943, now lost), two Images of Modern Evil and Vaudevillian (1946, MoMA at Heide). It gave Bert enough money to pay the rent.

Tucker, the independent entrepreneur, had arranged the deal himself. He sent letters to twelve lay members of the CAS proposing that each might consider contributing 7s 6d a week; this would add up to a living income and provide him with freedom and the time to work. After six months, the contributors could each select a painting in effect bought by instalments. None except John and Dr Guy Reynolds bothered to reply. (76)

Under the scheme, Reynolds bought Urban Landscape (Private Collection, 1938) and Self Portrait (Private Collection, 1940). In the living-room of Reynolds' home in Malvern Road, Toorak Bert painted a portrait of Reynolds' daughter Mary (Portrait of Mary Reynolds, 1942, Private Collection) as well as a portrait of Reynolds himself (now lost).

Reynolds had studied psychiatry at the University of Melbourne before establishing his practice at 12 Collins Street. His mentor was another friends of the Reeds, leading psychiatrist and author Reg Ellery. (77) Reynolds' abiding interest in Chinese art and literature, and an innate shyness, didn't
stop him from embracing the contemporary scene. Reynolds's circles of contact included Justus Jorgensen's Montsalvat community as well as the Reeds, Tucker and Noel Counihan, whose work he also bought. Reynolds was a staunch communist.

When Joy and Bert left Little Collins Street for the uncertain comforts of the tin shed, the Reeds helped them set it up and make it cosy.

Hester cherished Heide and was delighted to spend more time there - she regarded it as her second home - but Tucker wished to live separately from the Reeds. It was a bone of contention between them. Bert had no idea how close to Sunday Joy had grown. His lack of observation about Joy included this most important friendship.

Sunday was a role model and a mother figure to Joy. She encouraged Joy, showing a warm, consistent, approving interest in Joy's drawings and watercolours and in the verse she began to write. As a result, Joy's confidence as an artist began to flower.

Tucker was aware of the Heide group's significance. Writing to John, he said, 'It is obvious that we have always regarded ourselves as a sort of cultural vanguard in the community, a spontaneous association of people based on mutual identification of broad aesthetic principles and a common desire to put them out and make them work in the community'. (78) To Tucker, the Reeds, Nolan, Hester and he comprised 'a trend within the national culture...a cultural group'. (79) What he did not admit but his photographs did, was that they were also at the heart of his life.
Notes

1. John Reed to Sunday Reed. Undated. (c.1932). Reed Papers.
2. Sidney Nolan to John Reed. 28 February 1943. Reed Papers.
3. Burke, Dear Sun, op.cit., p.228.
3a. Burke, Tucker interview. 5.7.1979. op.cit.
4. Read, Surrealism, op.cit.p.35.
5a. Burke, Dear Sun, op.cit.,p.112.
5b. Burke, Hester, op.cit.,p.64.
12. ibid.
14. John Reed to Sunday Reed. April, 1931. Reed Papers.
17. Quoted in *Dear Sun*, op. cit., p. 27.
18. ibid.
19c. ibid.
21. Sunday Reed to John Reed. Undated. (Early 1930s) Reed Papers.
24. ibid.
27. Sam Atyeo to Sunday Reed. (1933). Reed Papers.
29. ibid.
30. 'The Lively Arts', Tony Morphett interviewing John Reed. 1964. ABC TV.
31. ibid.
32. Gray Smith to Sunday Reed. c. 1950. Reed Papers. 'You were right when
you said love could have no limitations.'
34. John Reed to Sunday Reed. (1934). Reed Papers.
35. Cynthia Reed to Sunday Reed. (c.1933). Reed Papers.
36. Sam Atyeo to John and Sunday Reed. (c.1933). Reed Papers.
39. ibid.
40. John Reed to Sidney Nolan. 1964. Reed Papers.
43. Adams, *Nolan*, op. cit. p.33
44. ibid.
45. ibid.
46. ibid.
52. ibid.
53. ibid.
55. ibid.


60. ibid.


63. ibid.

64. ibid.

65. ibid.


67. Burke, Tucker interview. 5.7.1979. op.cit.

68. ibid.

69. ibid.

70. ibid.

71. Blackman, Tucker interview, op.cit.

72. Burke, Tucker interview. 5.7.1979. op.cit.

73. Blackman, Tucker interview, op.cit.

74. ibid.

75. ibid.


79. ibid.
9. Bert's War

'Darling - now that you have actually gone - and I realize it - Seeing you so often I'm afraid made me very casual. So now I apologize for my lack of appreciation - I was mean to you & I could never get it into my thick skull that some day you would really have to go.'
Joy Hester to Albert Tucker. 1942. (1)

Pick-Up (NGA), Tucker's best painting of 1941, wasn't hung at the annual CAS show in October. At least one committee member regarded it as 'obscene' and it was refused exhibition. (2) But the works Tucker did exhibit - Spring in Fitzroy (1941, NGA) and Fisherman's Bend (1941, NGA) - established him, together with Bergner, as Melbourne's leading social realist painter.

The third annual CAS show was held at the Hotel Australia in Collins Street. Daryl Lindsay, new director of the National Gallery of Victoria, decided the CAS had ruffled enough feathers and refused the committee's request to show there. Lindsay was also a close friend of Bell's and wasn't going to see him humiliated by the new guard. (3) Glamorous though the newly refurbished Hotel Australia was, it was a down-market venue after the prestigious NGV but the committee took the opportunity to throw a concert where Graeme Bell's Jazz Gang played. The opening was a wild party of 'long-haired intellectuals, swing fiends, hot mommas and truckin' jazz boys', where 'the intelligentsia learnedly discussed differences between rhythms of hot jazz and pigments of Picasso.' (4)
Albert Tucker *Pick Up* (1941, NGA)
Noel Counihan exhibited his first oil painting, a tender study of a Pregnant Woman (1941, MoMA at Heide) - which the Reeds snapped up - and Vic O'Connor, a promising newcomer, was jointly awarded the CAS medal for his magical circus, The Acrobats (now lost). (4a) Tucker thought highly enough of O'Connor's painting to photograph it. Bergner contributed four paintings including Pie Eaters (1941, University of WA), Nolan showed a near-abstract Luna Park (1941, Estate of Sir Sidney Nolan), Gleeson presented a clutch of surrealist paintings while Hester scraped in at the last minute with an oil, Group (now lost).

But the critics were not impressed. George Bell, the disinherited king still raging at his treatment by the Tucker-Reed group, savaged the show. It was 'designed mainly to shock', Bell judged, the two hundred and sixty six works 'jammed together so closely they destroy one another by sheer dynamic energy and clamour'. (5) But Bell's chagrin did not entirely blind him to new talent. He anointed William Dobell, who 'did not beat the drum or scream', as a future 'power in Australian art'. (6) Harold Herbert, predictably waspish, was 'filled with nausea at the ghoulish nature of many of the subjects...The drab squalor of the slum dwellers' was not to Herbert's taste. 'Poor and hopeless', Herbert sneered. 'So are the paintings'. (6a) Even Kenneth Wilkinson, a CAS supporter, writing in the Herald, said nothing of the show's quality and variety. (6b) But the reviews did indicate that social realism had arrived.

Pick-Up demonstrates Tucker's skill as a social geologist recording the seismic shifts in wartime Melbourne's morals and manners and it put sexuality squarely on his agenda. Pick-Up is a cruel, wickedly funny, streetwise and judgemental view of sexual bargains and favours, dripping with gruesome, voyeuristic detail, and it sets the tone for Tucker's painting
of the war years. He charts a domain of moral darkness, symbolised by the night, a place of sexual tension and disgust. **Pick-Up** introduces Tucker's underworld, a medieval hell of demons, licentiousness and moral exile where tragedy is embodied in the self-destructive human beings who inhabit it, Tucker's doomed and insatiable women and men. Tucker was Melbourne's first modernist painter to present sexuality in such a provocative, confrontational manner.

Tucker has described **Pick-Up** as 'a rather nasty little painting in the [George] Grosz area and it's almost a social caricature. [It has] a nasty intensity, a nasty but accurate sexuality in the air then'. (7)

Under a stark light in a city lane, amid empty wine bottles, a pair of squat, ugly men approach two whores. While the men's mask-like faces are animated by lascivious leers, the women are nightmare creatures with frightening grins, scarlet-lipped, crescent mouths agape with prominent teeth, painted, cadaverous faces and bloated bellies. The blond-haired woman touches her genitals through her clinging, diaphanous dress. Her dark-haired companion has a pig's nose. Both women stand with their legs spread, as do the men, underscoring their receptivity, the eagerness of their lust. All is literal, nothing is left to the imagination.

Luridly painted in high-keyed greens and blues, **Pick-Up** is a small painting of tremendous energy, a study of allure and abhorrence. It is as though Tucker could not drag himself away from the scene and while it repulsed him, equally it compelled him. Tucker the puritan was captivated by the sins of the flesh. In this contradiction lies the painting's vitality. Against the backdrop of the city, the human body, and particularly, the female body became the site of Tucker's anxiety and dread in the war years. Tucker transforms the body into a personal icon that represents his inner
fears as well as registering an historical moment. The body itself is contradictory: diseased, wasted, maimed or deformed, it remains terrifyingly powerful.

The crescent mouth, the determining feature of Images of Modern Evil, makes its first significant appearance in Pick-Up. The vagina dentata, the toothed vagina, is an ancient symbol expressing an unconscious male fear a woman may castrate her partner during intercourse. Equally, the crescent symbolises the mouth of hell, the gateway to suffering and damnation.

The myth of the devouring female, the 'terrible Mother', is found in many cultures. Distinctions between mouths and female genitals was blurred by the ancient Greek idea of the lamiae - lustful she-demons born of the Libyan snake goddess Lamia. Their name either meant 'lecherous vaginas' or 'gluttonous gullets'. (8) Lamia was the Greek name for the devouring female serpent goddess called Kundalini in India, Uraeus or Per-Uatchet in Egypt and Lamashtu in Babylon. (9) According to Edward Gifford, Muslim teaching states that if a man looked into a vagina it would bite off his eyeball and leave him blind. (9a) Myths of the vagina with teeth are prevalent in the East, in India, North and South America, Africa and Europe. (9b)

Barbara Creed believes 'the myth about woman as castrator clearly points to male fears and phantasies about the female genitals as a trap, a black hole which threatens to swallow them up and cut them to pieces'. (9c)

Jung traced the archetype of the terrible mother who ruled the underworld and its inhabitants and who suggested 'anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead; anything that devours seduces and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate'. (10) Tucker may not have read Jung in 1941 but he well understood the power of the feminine. Pick-Up suggests a twin dynamic of attraction and loathing and it attests to
Spring in Fitzroy 1941
Oil on paper on cardboard 56.0 x 43.3 cm
Signed and dated l.r.: Tucker 41
Australian National Gallery, Canberra
the alarming authority female sexuality represented to Tucker. He was
disgusted by it and, at the same time, awestruck. Woman was a dark
goddess, relentlessly seductive, and the possibility of destruction was not
only imminent but inevitable.

Sunday Reed probably added to Tucker's immediate fears about women,
fuelling his complex representation of the feminine. Enjoying the sexual
favours of two men living under her roof, wealthy, attractive,
unconventional, intelligent and commanding, Sunday was also Tucker's
patron. A mixture of admiration, financial dependence and irritation
governed Tucker's relations with her. Tucker's photographs like Arvo tea;
Sidney Nolan, Sunday Reed and Joy Hester (1945) and Christmas at Heide
(c.1946) portray Sunday with profound respect. It is not difficult to see how
Heide's emotional economy, ruled by Sunday, could have seeped into
Tucker's consciousness, directing him towards images of women who were
libidinous and dominant and, because of that, threatening and repugnant.

When Tucker did not deal with the sexuality of his subject, the result is
curiously limp and apathetic, like the beaten, emaciated man who stares
hopelessly at the street in Spring in Fitzroy. An aspidistra wilts in a pot near
the door, another quotation of the dying plant, suggesting the impossibility
of growth and renewal, from We are the Dead Men.

Tucker had read George Orwell's novel Keep the Aspidistra Flying (1936),
a damming all-round critique of contemporary society, (11) which was
published on the eve of Orwell's departure to Spain to fight for the
Republican cause. Tucker, who hadn't heard of Orwell before, picked up a
copy of Keep the Aspidistra Flying at the Eastern Market for sixpence. (11a)
Around the same time, he also liked Down and Out in Paris and London
(1933), Orwell's ascerbic account of drudgery and street-life. (11b)
Keep the Aspidistra Flying is the tale of an angry young man, the luckless poet George Comstock, where Orwell took the opportunity to attack the genteel respectability of suburbia together with 'the money-god', advertising, socialism and the self-indulgent posturing of young poets. The aspidistra, a plant favoured by the Edwardian middle-classes, was Orwell's symbol of spiritual death, and Comstock's emblematic companion. Orwell's furious disgust at the state of the world, close to nihilism, matched Tucker's own. In describing the bleak mood of his protagonist, Orwell frames the mood and setting for Spring in Fitzroy.

'He gazed out at the graceless street. At this moment it seemed to him that in a street like this, in a town like this, every life that is lived must be meaningless and intolerable. The sense of disintegration, of decay that is endemic in our time was strong upon him. Somehow it was all mixed up with the ad-posters opposite...After all, there was more there than mere silliness, greed and vulgarity...Desolation, emptiness, prophecies of doom. For can you not see, if you know how to look, that behind that slick self-satisfaction, that tittering fat-bellied triviality, that there is nothing but a frightful emptiness, a secret despair? The great death-wish of the modern world.' (12)

In a passage that foreshadowed the critiques of totalitarian regimes implicit in Animal Farm (1945) and 1984 (1949), Orwell also mirrored some of Tucker's reservations about the socialist enterprise. When Comstock's friend Ravelston, a well-heeled literary editor, asks him what he imagines a socialist society would be like, Comstock replies,
'Four hours a day in model factory, tightening up bolt no.6003...Community
hikes from Marx Hostel to Lenin Hostel and back again...All we know is what
we don't want. That's what's wrong with us nowadays'. (13)

In the 1930s and 40s, Orwell's outspoken criticism of the Party, his refusal to
countenance orthodoxy and his savage moralism were similar to Tucker's.
Like Orwell, Tucker was a satirist and Pick-Up indicates just how sharp that
satire could be. The satirist, as Stephen Greenblatt points out, 'takes the vast
mass of empirical data, and consciously or unconsciously, selects those
details, almost always grotesque and ugly, which justify his attitude towards
experience'. (14) Orwell's 'morbidly sensitive nose for the vile smells of
humanity' allowed a 'descent into a seething squalid inferno, a fantasy world
where all is ugliness, noise, decay, rot, collapse' - Tucker's vision exactly. (15)

But unlike Orwell, Tucker did not only reserve his scathing judgement for
capitalism. Democratic socialism existed as a sustaining vision for Orwell,
keeping him from total despair of the human condition. For Tucker, as Pick-
Up indicates even before his disillusionment with Marxism, it was human
nature itself, the hearts of men and women, where the decay of civilization
bred and flourished. The heart of darkness was for Tucker a very human
place, not an abstract, theoretical or distant terrain but present and visible
on the streets of Melbourne. Tucker's imperative was destined to get him
into trouble with the Left, just as Orwell's had. 'Liberty is telling people what
they do not want to hear.' (16)

Despite the social concerns behind Spring in Fitzroy, Tucker was not
earning favour with the comrades. It was around November, 1941 that he
was hauled up before a hastily convened committee of the artists' branch.
While Tucker's unpaid dues were apparently the issue, his attitude was
the real problem. He was too independent and outspoken, too much his own man. Being on the run from the army was not appropriate behaviour either. Since Hitler had invaded Russia in June 1941, communists were expected to join up and fight the fascist threat.

The Communist Party, while in theory still illegal, was riding a wave of approval and the new public attitude was one of sympathy and tolerance. Membership boomed as communists basked in the reflected glory of the Red Army. In 1940 membership was estimated at 4000; by October 1942 it had grown to 15,000. (17) The Australian public watched Soviet resistance to Hitler's forces - particularly the heroic siege of Leningrad - with an admiration which the media of the day mirrored. The CPA's new slogan was 'Everything for the war effort.' (18)

Tucker's dream of a socially aware art was still motivating and inspiring him, despite the slings and arrows and he set upon a course of making a 'political' art that would be a personal response to his time. It was an endeavour of intellectual autonomy, integrity and maturity that would pay off handsomely for Tucker's art.

When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941 Australia was suddenly under threat of invasion and life altered overnight. The attack came as a complete surprise and over 2000 troops were killed and several battleships lost. (19) Not only did it signal Japan's aggressive challenge to the Allied forces in the Pacific, it made Australians realise how vulnerable, solitary and undermanned their country was.

Labor prime minister John Curtin had been in office only three months when he was awakened on December 7 with the news. Curtin, a former trade unionist and journalist, and a pacifist during World War I, was under no
illusions about Australia's precarious situation. After an all day meeting with the War Cabinet, Curtin announced on radio that evening 'this is the gravest hour in our history.' (20) All Australian troops were ordered to their battle stations, all leave was cancelled, petrol was restricted and transport rationed so the services could have priority. Christmas holidays were cancelled, too.

Life on the home front went dark. By December 12, a partial blackout or 'browout' had begun in most cities. (21) Neon advertising and floodlighting was banned. Shop windows and displays were turned out. Residents were told not to switch on outside lighting and night-time sports events were cancelled. By the end of the month, permanent browout conditions had been introduced and Melbourne was plunged into total darkness. (22) Blackout curtains were hung throughout the suburbs, dark material and paper were tacked up and cracks were sealed while air-raid wardens prowled the streets and angrily notified offenders. (23) Civilians began busily digging bomb shelters and attending air-raid drills.

These activities added to the tensions created by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, and worse was to come. On Christmas Day the Japanese invaded Hong Kong.

Curtin's major concern was that the 6th, 7th and 9th Divisions were fighting in north Africa against the Germans and in Syria against the Vichy French. (24) Australia was open to attack while 120,000 of her seasoned fighting men - and half the Navy - were on the other side of the world. Britain, on whom Australia had relied for defence for so long, was otherwise engaged while the US was reeling from Pearl Harbour. Curtin wanted to get the troops home as fast as possible and set about doing so, even though he would have confront Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt over his
decision. Both Churchill and Roosevelt wanted to deploy the Australian troops in their own pressing theatres of war.

Before World War II, Australia had virtually no standing or regular army. (25) The conscripts in the Australian Military Force (AMF) were a poorly trained, poorly led and motley bunch. The AIF Divisions, all volunteers, were the cream of the pre-war soldiers and their sneering name for the AMF was 'chocolate soldiers' or 'chockos'.

Curtin knew the AMF could not defend Australia. On January 4, 1942, when the Japanese launched an air raid on Rabaul in Australian New Guinea, the war had reached Australian territory. Curtin didn't hesitate and took the radical step of allying Australia with America. In fact, Curtin threw himself on the Americans' mercy in what was the best strategic and diplomatic move he could have made. In response, Roosevelt appointed General Douglas MacArthur as supreme commander of all allied forces in the south-west Pacific region and ordered him to Australia. (26) The old alliance with England was fundamentally changed. Up until then, in the Australian imagination, this country was anchored somewhere off Great Britain and little interest had been taken in the Pacific region.

On February 16, the 'impregnable fortress' of Singapore fell, exactly as Curtin had predicted. (27) Three days later, Darwin was bombed. The town and the residents were totally unprepared for the attack, and many people, including soldiers, simply panicked and fled into the bush. Though details of the extent of the raid were suppressed, with the government imposing strict censorship on news reports, rumours and stories were rife. (28)

Wild policies were mooted in case of invasion, such as 'a scorched earth policy', which the Russians had employed so successfully, burning crops and homes to prevent their use by the advancing German army. (29) Farmers
tried patiently to explain the foolishness of such ideas. (30) But the rate of anxiety only accelerated. Official plans were drawn up for evacuation from coastal cities to inland locations and thousands decamped in anticipation, earning the derisory title 'bomb dodgers' from less affluent and less nervous sectors of the population. (31)

By mid-March the victorious Japanese army had thundered through Asia, conquering Hong Kong, French Indo-China, Burma, Thailand, Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, New Guinea, Guam and much of the Philippines. (32) It is no wonder that when MacArthur arrived in Melbourne on March 17, he was greeted like a saviour by 6000 cheering people. Truth hailed MacArthur as 'the greatest tonic we have had in this war.' (33)

Of course, it was not just MacArthur. It was the 30,000 American troops who arrived with him. There had never been a foreign army stationed in Australia before and Melbourne, the staid city on the banks of the Yarra, had a new atmosphere: lively, crowded, tense and, despite the restrictions, festive. There was more good news, too, on March 21 when the AIF returned home from the Middle East. Suddenly the country was manned not only by new allies but by veteran Australian soldiers.

Tucker was worried. The air-raid on Rabaul had been a blow to the country's morale and invasion was a distinct possibility. Most of Tucker's friends were in the army. Yosl Bergner tried to volunteer as soon as war broke out 'but they wouldn't take me because I wasn't an Australian citizen. Only later they conscripted those they called "friendly aliens" to auxiliary units, and we, of course, wanted to go to combat units, to fight the Germans.' (34) In fact, Bergner spent the war at Tocumwal, near the NSW border, unloading trains of bags of cement, canons and ammunition.
When Arthur Boyd was conscripted in May, 1941 he had initially joined the Light Horse unit. (35) When it was disbanded, he applied for a place in the Cartographic Company where he met John Perceval. Malcolm Good had volunteered for the AIF as a communist fighting against fascism and was sent to New Guinea. Promoted to Lance Corporal, Good was wounded in the shin and returned to Australia on crutches. (36)

Danila Vassilieff and Vic O'Connor were also in the army, Vassilieff only briefly. Basil Burdett volunteered, much to Sir Keith Murdoch's dismay, and joined the Red Cross. The gallant Burdett was killed when the plane in which he was travelling as an administrative officer crashed in Sumatra in February, 1942. (37) Counihan was declared medically unfit because of his recurring tuberculosis. At forty, John Reed did not volunteer for any duties.

Tucker tried pulling strings. Reed and Reg Ellery wrote letters to military officialdom saying that Tucker was unfit for army life. Ellery wrote a medical certificate describing Tucker as 'psychoclimatic', a term Bert didn't understand. (38) Perhaps Ellery was trying to suggest Tucker was acutely sensitive to his environment - which was true enough. However such appeals were useless. After months of being on the run, Tucker gave up and on January 22, he was drafted into the army at Heidelberg. (39)

Because the military police had been on his trail, Tucker enlisted as Herbert Leslie Tucker born at Hurstville NSW on June 10, 1912. (40) He called himself Herbert 'just in case anyone knew me and if they said, "G'day, Bert", it was the same name.' (41)

Three anxious months followed until Tucker was finally called up on April 24. He was sent first to the Caulfield Details Depot at Caulfield Racecourse. There the men were issued with uniforms, none of which fitted properly. The next day they were asked what skills they had and what kind of work
they wanted to do. Most chose combat. Tucker asked to join a medical unit and on April 28, he was sent to Wangaratta, in Victoria’s north-east. (42) It was a training depot and a medical corps, situated at the Wangaratta showgrounds, where Tucker would spend the next five months. Almost immediately, he had a stroke of luck.

'On the very first day I was there I was called for kitchen fatigue and I was busy strapping on an apron to start peeling a mountain of potatoes, and Ronnie came up from the headquarter section for Private Tucker and I was wanted at headquarters...It was the major who was the commandant of the camp and he said, "I see here on your papers you're an artist". He said, "I want some charts for medical lectures, do you think you can handle them?" Of course I immediately said "Yes".' (43)

Commanding Officer Major William Pook explained that during his lectures the illustrations he used from medical books were too small to adequately display. Pook wanted 'a very long strip of paper on a roll with the drawings on that I can wind...and in the course of the lecture, go from one image to another.' (44)

Pook, 44 years old in 1942, had trained as a radiologist at the University of Melbourne and hailed from St George's Road, Toorak. (45) Perhaps he had an interest in art but he certainly took Bert under his wing. Luckily for Tucker, Pook had just returned from a short stint of sick leave and he proceeded to guide Tucker's army life from then on.

After Tucker bought the materials, Pook set him up in a hall in the Wangaratta showgrounds where the lectures were given. 'So the CO sectioned off one little section for me as a kind of studio, and there I was doing
medical drawings which I did for quite a while....I was working on big charts of gas burns, greenstick fractures and things like that, in colour'. (46) Tucker was also able to get some of his own painting and drawing done.

Hester, who had moved into Heide when Tucker enlisted, was thrilled. 'Am very glad the C.O. is a decent sort and that you have sort of found a "possie" up there as far as diagrams etc. go. It sounds too good to be true. Sun and John are very happy at the news.' (47)

Though Tucker had found himself a 'possie', and earned the good graces of his C.O., conditions were primitive. It was mid-autumn and the weather at Wangaratta, not far from the Great Dividing Range, was bitter at night. 'We were sleeping in cattle pens...shivering on these straw palliasses with these icy winds from Mount Buffalo zooming right through the pen and with rats galloping over us in the night.' (48) Tucker's drawing Barracks, Sleeping Figures (1942, Australian War Memorial) shows the dismal arrangements: the men wrapped in their blankets, their thin palliasses on the bare floorboards and no sign of comfort. One night Tucker noticed that his kit bag, which he used as a pillow, began to move. 'I had some biscuits in it...and a big rat had bored its way inside.' (49)

Under these conditions, Tucker began to suffer from respiratory ailments and came down twice with tonsillitis. He recuperated in the camp hospital which provided little refuge. It was 'simply a tent, a big tent, and when it rained heavily the rain would sprinkle through in a fine spray. You see, there was no fly tent over it. And I remember the orderlies would come around and put ground sheets over all the patients and water would come in and...all the hollows in your bed would be full of water, in puddles. And the fellow in the bed next to me, a young fellow about nineteen or twenty, I can
Albert Tucker *Joie de Vivre* (1942, NGA)
still remember his face, a young dark fellow, he died of pneumonia. Just like that.' (50)

Nor did Tucker find much camaraderie among the men. In none of the many interviews Tucker has given over the years about his time in the army has he mentioned the friendship of any of his fellow soldiers. As a leftwing artist, as a touchy and anxious man, perhaps there were few he could feel at home with. Though John Kingsmill, a raw recruit, soon realised 'as a matter of survival...you sense the need to find a place for yourself, a need to fit into some group...mates stick by you', Tucker was not similarly impelled. (51)

For him, it was a brutish, unsavoury environment. 'A lot of the boys would get out over the fence and come back roaring drunk in the middle of the night, pie-eyed and performing. I made drawings of the diggers, all in their baggy army clothes.' (52) Tucker's charcoal sketch _joie de vivre_ (1942, NGA) shows a soldier rolling drunk and vomiting, grasping a bottle of plonk in his hand, with his army greatcoat billowing like a tent.

Tucker had never longed, like fellow artists' branch member Evelyn Healy, for 'deep workingclass experience.' (53) He was a Marxist intellectual who eschewed mundane Party work like selling _Worker's Weekly_ on street corners, who abhorred his experiences in low paid, low status jobs and the humiliation and penury that went with them. Essentially Tucker was a petit-bourgeois determined to rise above his station, a proud and gifted man who perceived himself as belonging to an aristocracy of talent, one who had chosen mavericks as his mentors because he felt an outsider himself.

If anything began to convince Tucker, on a purely visceral level, of the enormous divide between himself and his society, it was his army sojourn. It was one thing to contemplate the revolution from the safety of his Little Collins Street studio, it was another to muck in with his fellow soldiers amid
the cold comforts of Wangaratta. Marxism provided no aegis against icy winds and coarse companions. Tucker's philosophy was useless. Nasty, random experience dominated. 'I went through all the usual feelings', Tucker recalled, 'a grievous sense of injustice and that life was out to get me....I was in a state of outrage and frustration.' (54) Army regimentation chafed at Tucker who wanted nothing more than to be as far away from Wangaratta as possible. Mateship was not for him. Nor was being ordered about.

Recruits were

'roused from our palliasses at six on a brisk winter's day, herded through latrine and ablution huts, fed on a breakfast fit for a navvy' and then told 'to be on the parade ground in ten minutes, "so if you want to pee, peel on the double!"...It was all army-style. The showers allowed for no such refinement as privacy or modesty...nor did the lavatories, which had no doors. Every single thing you did, you did in full public view, as dogs, cows and horses did. It was all part of the process of moulding, changing, the elimination of variations and odd quirks (like modesty) and the creation of a mass-produced soldier.' (55)

Tucker, ever meticulous, was disgusted. But soon he had more to worry about than public toilets and parade drill. In July, the battle for the Kokoda Trail began as the 39th Battalion started a desperate bid to repulse the Japanese and send them back over the Owen Stanley Ranges. The Japanese wanted to gain Port Moresby in order to cut Australian-American communication lines and to control the seas east and south-east of New Guinea. (56)
The situation was terrible for the 39th. Troops battled in torrential rain, in slime and mud, unable to prepare hot meals and many were nearly starving. It was difficult to move out the wounded because of wet and boggy conditions. Morale dropped fast among the young and inexperienced soldiers. (57) Colonel E.G. Keogh remarked that the 39th - all AMF conscriptees - were 'neither physically nor psychologically prepared' for the conditions or the terrain. (58) They were 'always wet, hungry and cold, always faced by superior numbers' and forced to do battle after an exhausting march. (59)

Though the Battle of the Coral Sea on May 7 was a strategic victory for the Allies, Curtin and MacArthur saw it as a short term reprieve only for Australia. MacArthur was concerned about the lack of results at Kokoda as the battle dragged on.

At the end of the three month training period at Wangaratta, Tucker was convinced he was going to be dispatched to New Guinea. (60) 'The Warrant Officer would command me to be at the office at 8am in full kit and I would ask, "Have you cleared it with the CO, sir?"' (61) This happened twice and each time Pook saw to it that Tucker did not go. But Tucker had good cause to remain fearful.

One day, a squad of twelve men was marching past the lecture hall where Tucker did his drawings. 'I had a back view of them as they marched up to headquarters where they had to report in to be shipped out. And this of course was the height of the campaign in New Guinea...Three days later they were all dead. Not just one of them, the whole lot of them'. (62)

But a reprieve was close at hand. Alan Martin, a former Meldrum student who was also at Wangaratta, was offered a job with the Facial Reconstruction Unit at the Heidelberg Military Hospital. He didn't want it but Tucker did. (63) Tucker advised Hester 'not to tell Nolan or John Sinclair because they
might want it, too'. (64) On September 15, while the battle for Kokoda was still raging, Pook sent his draughtsman out of harm's way.

Tucker was 'paraded to the CO' who agreed to help him get the transfer. (65) In fact, unknown to him, Tucker had been assessed as having 'mild schizophrenia' and was sent to undergo psychiatric assessment at Heidelberg. (65a) It's likely that a medical condition was the only way Pook could repatriate Tucker. Mild schizophrenia includes delusions, disturbed behaviour and a withdrawal from reality. Certainly once Tucker was sent to Heidelberg, he received no therapy or medication. 'I was just simply wandering around there. I wasn't getting any treatment, I was just sleeping there'. (65b)

For the next five weeks, Tucker stayed at the hospital, close to Hester and the Reeds, able to spend each weekend at Heide. Ostensibly a period of greater freedom and relaxation for Tucker, it was also one that transformed and deepened his art, coalescing his despairing view of the human condition. But it was not the seductive feminine that now disturbed him but a violent, disordered masculine world, a world gone stark raving mad.

His job in the plastic surgery unit gave him 'a rather nasty close-up of what happened to a lot of these characters'. (66) When Tucker drew his fellow inmates for the unit, he discovered a visual vocabulary of disfigurement, horror, misery and pain, a lexicon he would consult for the rest of his life.

'I remember the first one I drew was a chap there who'd had his nose sliced off in a shell fragment, just flush against his face. And while I was drawing all the nasal cavities and so on he was apologising that he couldn't blow his
nose and all the phlegm was pouring down his face and he kept wiping his face and apologising.' (67)

Each had a different type of injury. One man, 'a young fellow of nineteen, [had] his entire lower jaw shot away.' (68) Others were waiting for flesh to be attached to the parts of their bodies damaged by gun-fire or shells. For Tucker, the abnormal became normal. 'I mean, to see someone who wasn't covered in bandages became abnormal almost.' (69)

But some men were not injured physically. One morning, Tucker woke to find a new patient in the bed next to his, a pleasant, red-haired young fellow. After asking what he was in for, the man cheerfully replied he had got into 'a bit of blue' in the camp. 'Apparently I brained the officer with my rifle.' (70) There was another ward filled with the 'bomb happies', soldiers who had suffered nervous breakdowns after bombing raids and who were 'trembling and twitching violently'. (71) Their 'aversion' treatment was ruthlessly efficient.

Planes would be sent to dive on the wards 'and all these characters inside...they'd go berserk, try and hide under the bed. You would hear them screaming, you know, this mass screaming' until finally the men would realise 'no-one was getting hurt or killed or wounded and they weren't in any danger...The planes would dive down again and they'd remain calm.' (72)

There were other strange occurrences. 'Often ambulances arrived in the middle of the night...they would bring in prisoners-of-war, Nazis and Italians who were still in their uniforms. Apparently when they captured them in the Middle East they would herd them straight down to the ships and ship
them straight on to Australia to prison camp. And so there they would be in full Nazi regalia.' (73)

Essentially, the military hospital was a mad-house, filled with distressed and hurt victims, the 'failures' who hadn't been brave or strong enough who, like Tucker, had to seek shelter from combat, from the threat of death and danger with which they were unfit to cope. There were several suicides while Tucker was there. He had found a hellish sanctuary.

Writing from Heide, Joy was keen to give Bert all the support she could muster. 'I am trying to be the best wife and mate you'll ever have - darling sweet.' (73a) Having Bert's paintings with her was 'such a comfort...it's like having part of you.' (74) But 'I get so lonesome for you...I could cry and cry and cry for need of you.' (75) Hester's letters were full of news, gossip and affection as she tried to keep Tucker abreast of events and keep his spirits up. There was CAS business to discuss, the recently formed Artists' Unity Congress to comment on, as well as friends - and enemies - to mention.

Hester suggested to Tucker that she stand in for him on the CAS council to better represent his views. In Tucker's absence, Counihan was elected to the council. Though the Reeds and Hester agreed that Noel was 'new blood' and could be a valuable member of the council, Hester reacted rather differently when Counihan was overwhelmingly elected at the general meeting. (76)

'Noel got every vote in the room there were only 29 people there and everyone voted for him. Noel who has never even been a member of the CAS, who never took any interest and who got in I feel sure purely on his reputation with the Artists' Congress.' (77)
Tucker was re-elected but only by few votes, Hester explaining that after Counihan, 'Harry [de Hartog] got the next amount and then Glanville Cook and you following...and John Perceval got the least.' (78)

The Artists' Unity Congress had been initiated by Counihan late in 1941 to form a broad front of artists against the war. Backed by the CPA, Counihan began by approaching the arch-conservative critic and watercolourist Harold Herbert. (79) Herbert was a member of the Australian Academy of Art and one of the first officially appointed war artists. Herbert agreed to write a joint statement with Counihan calling on all Australian artists to unite against the common enemy, German fascism. (80) Signatories to the statement included Ernest Buckmaster, JS MacDonald, Max Meldrum and Charles Wheeler as well as Eric Thake, William Frater, Yosl Bergner and Vic O'Connor. These strange bedfellows numbered several key foes of the Tucker-Reed faction and Bert and John would have nothing to do with either the statement or the Congress. (81) Given Herbert's appalling review of the 1941 CAS exhibition, it is no wonder.

However if Counihan thought his Party status would rise as a result of fomenting a united front, he was sadly mistaken. In April, 1942, Counihan, together with his wife Pat, and his friend the writer Judah Waten, was expelled from the Party for 'right-wing deviation'. (82) While Bernard Smith writes it was Counihan's views about the potential of a government of national unity, comprised of Menzies and Curtin, that got him into such trouble with Party hierarchy, Hester put it rather more colourfully. (83)

'Noel C. is a completely bad and vicious man! As you know he is out of the CP...Apparently he is collecting all the sympathy he can from Trotsky elements, saying one cannot open one's mouth and that the CP is not at all
democratic... I feel somehow that Noel has had [Trotskyist] sympathies all along.' (84)

The Artists Advisory Panel, established by the Artists Unity Congress early in 1942, was a more practical concern. It advised the government and manpower authorities on the best use of artists in the armed services and on the home front and it gained some degree of recognition from the authorities as the body representing Victorian artists during the war. (85) Its panel included Rem McClintock, Counihan, Meldrum, Herbert and sculptor Ola Cohn.

McClintock and Counihan gained an interview with General Sir Thomas Blamey. Bernard Smith reports that their negotiations with Blamey led to transfers of over thirty artists to more suitable duties and also secured the appointment as several artists to work in camouflage. (86) But Hester was apprehensive. She reported to Tucker that

'Mac [McClintock] called to see Blamey and Blamey says he quite agrees with the Artist [Advisory Panel] and he is going to see that something is done. He said hell get them all out of the army. But I am still suspicious as I know Blamey's reputation as a bare-faced liar.' (87)

She was concerned that if Tucker were made a camouflage artist 'what will they do with you when all those [government buildings] are camouflaged, and perhaps a state of crisis exists? Shove you anywhere they want I spose.' (88) She felt that Wangaratta was safer for Tucker. 'Somehow I think it is better for you there...as you are fulfilling yourself as an artist.' (89)

There was news from Nolan, too, who came down from Dimboola one weekend 'much to Sun's delight'. (90) As far as Nolan was concerned,
Colour Plate 4
Portrait of Michael Keon (1942)
Oil on plywood
92 x 61 cm
Private Collection, Melbourne
Dimboola was a 'hell hole past Hamilton nearly to the South Australian border but in the Mallee district' where he was 'doing the same sort of work, carting wood etc.' (91)

Arthur Boyd and John Perceval also visited Heide. 'Arthur seems to have a completely pacifist attitude towards criticism', Hester complained. 'He says, how can one criticise music when for all we know may be completely wrong,...I seemed to be the only one arguing.' (92) Perceval insisted 'he did not like the work of Nolan - because it had not literary content - he said a picture to him must have literary content. Well, what of Picasso?...The trouble is that most artists are so bloody conceited they think all work bad unless it is going in the same direction as they are.' (93) But Hester was delighted to pass on the Reeds' praise of Tucker. 'They told me tonight how much they thought of you as an artist, a "high watermark in Australian painting" they said and were tickled pink that you had done so much work while you were up there.' (94)

Hester may have felt guilty surrounded by Heide's comforts while Tucker was sleeping a cattle pen at Wangaratta but creatively she flourished. She produced several oil paintings, perhaps because the Reeds were able to supply her with more expensive materials. Like Tucker's work, Hester's, too, began responding to the wartime atmosphere becoming more intense and expressive in form and subject. She completed Portrait of Michael Keon (1942, MoMA at Heide), A Citizen of Poland 1942 (1942, now lost) and Killer (1942, now lost) together with drawings and poems.

Hester was buoyed by the Reeds' favourable comments about her work. 'The amazing thing is that John thought [A Citizen of Poland 1942] quite good and said he really felt it...So there and Sun liked it.' (95) But Tucker was the person whose opinion Hester sought first and valued most. 'I have done a
Colour Plate 3

Harry (1942)
Brush and ink, watercolour, charcoal and pastel on card
41 × 30 cm
Signed and dated: Joy Hester 1942 in brush and ink u.r.
Collection: University Art Museum, University of Queensland, Brisbane
painting that I have shown no-one and will not till I show you. I am sure that it is the very best or the very worst painting I have ever done. I want you tell me as I cannot see it in any perspective at all.’ (95a)

In fact, Joy was moved to declare to Bert that ‘every word I speak and every thought I have is of you and part of you. You see that's the advantage of knowing you before I was fully grown for as I have grown I have grown of you and with you. You are father brother lover and husband [and I love them all] to me. I only hope that I can be half worthy of you, darling. In my roundabout way I try, oh so terribly hard, you don't know just how hard’. (96)

Maybe Joy was trying hard but nonetheless she was having an affair. Harry, a taxi-driver from the cab company where Hester worked, was her lover and the subject of a watercolour (Harry, 1942, Queensland University Museum of Art). To Michael Keon, a young journalist and aspiring writer who stayed at Heide during 1941-2, Hester confided that her encounters with Harry involved him whipping her with his belt. (97) If Hester's image of Harry captures the man, then perhaps the story is true and Hester's need for a tough male also included rough trade.

Harry is depicted as hairy, squat and naked with full, sensual lips and eyes half-closed in a voluptuous leer. His body is distorted and muscular, his flesh hot-pink and unlovely. Though Harry appears to be standing, his position, one arm crooked behind his head, the other resting on his chest, can be read more easily as a horizontal than a vertical position. Perhaps Hester drew Harry as she remembered him, lying down, a post-coital souvenir of her violent lover.

Joy kept the affair quiet from Bert - but not from the Reeds and Keon. (98) What was she to do? she asked them. Keon argued that it was wrong
because Bert was in the army. Sunday defended Joy's right to have an affair while John refused to comment. (99)

Hester confided her quandaries to Keon as they sat up talking late at night. 'Bert's being killed' was how she privately felt about Tucker's time in the army, undercutting the determined cheerfulness of her letters to him. (100) She was worried about what the war would do to Tucker as a man and an artist, telling Keon that 'despite Bert's hard exterior, he was soft-hearted and gentle'. (100a) She looked to Tucker for guidance in her work and her personality. He was 'a great artist'. (100b)

Hester was frightened, too, like many Australians during the winter of 1942, about the possibility of invasion and believed the Japanese 'could land at St Kilda at any moment'. (101) On May 31, three Japanese midget submarines had prowled Sydney Harbour, terrifying the population and sending people literally scurrying for the hills. On June 7, Japanese submarines fired shells on Sydney's eastern suburbs and on Newcastle. Some damage was caused but no lives were lost.

There were other reasons for fear. A serial killer strangled three women in Melbourne between May 3-18, adding to the threatening atmosphere of the brown-out. From the first it was believed an American soldier was responsible. Private Eddie Leonski was arrested on May 23 after a fellow soldier told his superiors that Leonski had confessed to him. (102) The trial in July made for lurid and explicit articles about the genial, 'baby-faced' murderer. The American army tried Leonski swiftly and he was hanged at Pentridge Prison in November. Hester painted a work inspired by Leonski, The Killer (1942, now lost) which she exhibited at the CAS show in August where she also exhibited Portrait of Michael Keon and Harry. (103)
Hester's worries were compounded by Heide itself, not always the most relaxing place to be. She had feelings of passionate conflict about Sunday which she revealed to Tucker in a remarkable seven page letter. 'I alternately love her, hate her and despise her but also always admire her. It is so old...old as "woman", as sly as witches, cunning as tigers, fascinating and, as vicious, yet so charmingly subtle, something I feel that is eternal and good. So very good. And good again. This is Sun.' (104)

Though Sunday's petty outbursts got under Hester's skin, she observed that 'John will say nothing. It is the same with Nolan...In some indefinable way they like it...it makes them all the keener after her ladyship and they are twice as arduous.' (105) Hester had to admit that 'at [Sunday's] best she is unbeatable for insight and sensitivity' and, prophetically, Joy added, 'that I, in the final analysis, would stick by her as she is now with all her little ways.' (106)

Keon himself ran into trouble with the Reeds. Keon's article "Call Down Today" in Angry Penguins captured the zeitgeist. 'The artist today has to accept the idea of an interregnum of chaos, and be a law unto himself', he declared. (107) 'We can open ourselves to the subconscious, not of the nightdream, but the day-dream, and out of that we will evolve a new art, a new consciousness.' (108) Keon, an anarchist, was a questing young man working at Murdoch's Herald while trying his hand at short story writing. (109)

The Reeds took him under their wing and soon his talents were being put to use organising the 1941 CAS exhibition. Keon moved into Heide where his role was essentially to babysit Sunday while John and Nolan were absent. Nolan, in fact, became rather jealous about Keon's closeness to Sunday. (110)

Relations grew strained and Keon was accused by the Reeds of stealing money from them - a charge for which Yosl Bergner, after his only visit to
Heide, was first blamed. (111) Keon denied the charge. He believed his only
crime was carrying messages from Elizabeth Nolan to her husband, messages
that Sunday discovered when going through Keon's room. (112) Reg Ellery
weighed into the ugly personal fracas by declaring Keon was mentally
unstable and likely to end up in prison. (113) In response to these events,
Hester's *Portrait of Michael Keon* depicts Keon's face as a glowering mask.
Keon was banished from Heide, not to return in the Reeds' life-time.

On September 27, within a few days of Tucker's arrival at the Heidelberg
military hospital, he began to draw the patients. Poignant and gripping, these
drawings exaggerate space and physiognomy creating a male domain of
anguished and forlorn misfits. Tragically, it is also a domain of lost youth.
These young men were the psychological and physical casualties whose war
ended not in public honour but in shame and secrecy, in hideous operations
and treatments, in the wards of the failed, the sick and the distraught. They
are truly the wounded: unheroic, unmanly, terrified and lost.

*Psycho* I (1942, NGA) sets the tone for the series. A man with large,
exaggerated eyes, his mouth fixed in a hostile slit, grimaces with inner
turmoil, his face a rigid mask. The scale of the eyes suggests the man's vision
of the human condition has been grotesquely enlarged but the knowledge is
unbearable and the result is madness. In *Psycho* II (1942, NGA), drawn on
September 29, Tucker transformed the face into a cubist-oriented study in
claustrophobia and fragmentation. *Psycho* II shows the same desperate eyes
but the head has literally split apart. Cubism supplies the formal means to
suggest breakdown and alienation while surrealism provides the room's
dislocated, overwhelming space, a symbol of paranoia and mental trauma. At
the same time, *Psycho* is beautifully rendered, an alert and compact drawing, sketched lightly in vivid, rainbow hues.

Two days later, Tucker produced a third *Psycho* (1942, NGA) where an inmate crawls across his hospital bed, his enlarged nose and sharp teeth suggesting humanity has been abandoned for bestiality: the man's features resemble a rat's. The same day, Tucker completed *Floating Figures* (1942, NGA) that includes a self-portrait where the artist-as-witness observes two men, perhaps fighting, perhaps flying, whirling helplessly through space. It is a weirdly dreamlike, playful image where male strength has no force and where men are reduced to defenceless children unable to keep their feet on the ground. The artist, his own face twisted into an ironic mask that could be read as either laughter or terror, watches the figures as they veer towards him. Are they real or nightmare emanations from the world of lost men?

Tucker had the presence of mind to transform his horrific observations into coherent aesthetic statements on the spot. He would reflect in later years that 'the very things that traumatised me forced insights that I would never have acquired in any other way.' (114) At Heidelberg, Tucker developed a clinical ability to observe highly charged material and subject it to a rigorous artistic process. He did not glamorise or heroise the men. Quite the reverse.

Tucker recognised, and not for the last time, that his vision would not tally with the official image of the war, of soldiering, even of defeat. Nor was it one that would be approved by the Party faithful. 'It was almost considered unpatriotic...at the time. Officialdom would have preferred to push that piece of history under the carpet than drag it into the full light of day.' (115) For Tucker, as for Orwell, 'liberty is telling people what they do not wish to hear.'
While Tucker's soldier-patients are real men with acute physical and mental problems, equally, they are symbols of a particular kind of failure, one that Tucker had destested and that he now had to admit was his own. John, Tucker's father, had retreated from the challenge of being a successful man in the world. Unfit for a harsh, male environment of competitiveness and commercial realities, John withdrew to a monotonous job and emotional seclusion. Tucker had set out to best his father and had done so, establishing himself as an important young painter and a respected voice for progressive art and social change. He had even managed to secure intelligent patrons who praised and supported him.

But the difficulties Tucker had faced and conquered as an artist were of a different order compared to those he confronted in the army. It was a new world, where he had no purchase on power, authority or freedom. Psychologically, Tucker identified with the men he drew, the crushed and frightened creatures who surrounded him. His drawings can be read self-portraits. He was not the man he thought he was, up to any crisis, courageous and hardy, toughened by the Depression years to cope with circumstance. He was not a 'manly' man. Like his father, he was in hiding from the threats life offered.

Recognition of Tucker's own frailty gives the drawings their intensity. Tucker identified with the men he drew because experience had taught him he was one of them.

Tucker's discharge on October 26 came as a welcome surprise. He had been been at Heidelberg for five weeks when he was summoned by the medical officer. (116) After Tucker saluted, the officer said, 'Private Tucker, we've
been going over your records'. (117) Tucker noticed a letter on the officer's table. Even upside down, he could make out the signature of CO Pook. (118)

'Do you like being in the army?' Tucker was asked.

Bert, on his mettle, replied cautiously, 'Well, we all have to do our duty, sir'.

'We've decided to discharge you', he was told, 'as unfit for military service. You'll be better off in civilian life'. (119)

Perhaps once again Pook's intervention had delivered Bert. He was sent off to the Caulfield induction centre where he was given a suit and, still wearing his army jumper underneath, he hurried to Leeton Court, half an hour's distance up Dandenong Road, to tell Clara the news. 'I was walking on air.' (120) Bert's war was over.
Notes
2. Uhl, op.cit., p.20.
4a. Donald Friend was the co-winner.
5. George Bell. Sun, 14.10.1941
6. ibid.
7. Gleeson interview. op.cit.,
9. ibid.
9b. ibid.
9c. ibid.
11b. ibid.
13. ibid. p.110.
14. Stephen J Greenblatt, "Orwell as Satirist", in Raymond Williams (ed) 
George Orwell, A Collection of Critical Essays, Prentice-Hall International, 
15. Ibid.
19. Peter Charlton, War Against Japan, Time-Life Books, North Sydney, 1988, 
p.28.
20. Ibid.
21. Brian McKinlay, Australia,1942, End of Innocence, Collins, Sydney, 1985, 
p.40.
22. Darian-Smith, Home Front, op.cit., p.20.
23. Ibid.
24. Michael Andrews, Australia and the Pacific War, Dreamweaver Books, 
Sydney, 1985, p.13
25. Charlton, War, op.cit., p.142.
26. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Nancy Keesing (intro) The Home Front Family Album, Remembering 
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
33. Charlton, War, op.cit.,p.118


39. I am grateful to Defence Personnel Executive, Central Army Records Office, Melbourne for their assistance in obtaining Tucker's army records.


41. Ibid.

42. Blackman, Tucker interview, op.cit.,

43. Ibid.

44. Central Army Records, op.cit.

46. Blackman, Tucker interview, op.cit. Unfortunately, no drawings completed for CO Pook or the plastic surgery unit at the Heidelberg Military Hospital have survived. See Uhl, op.cit., p.88.


49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.


59. ibid.
61. ibid.
64. ibid.
65. Albert Tucker to John Reed. (August, 1942) Reed Papers.
64a. Central Army Records, op.cit.
65c. Blackman, Tucker interview, op.cit.
67. ibid.
68. ibid.
69. ibid.
70. ibid.
71. ibid.
72. ibid.
73. Mollison and Bonham, op.cit., p.33.
78. ibid.
79. Smith, Counihan, op.cit., p.175.
80. ibid.
81. Haese, Rebels, op.cit., p.130.
82. Smith, Counihan, op. cit., p.175
83. ibid.
85. Smith, Counihan, op. cit. p.176.
86. ibid.
88. ibid.
89. ibid.
91. ibid.
95a. ibid.
99. ibid.
100. Keon interview, 30.4.1980, op.cit.
100a. ibid.
100b. ibid.
101. ibid.
103. Burke, *Hester*, op.cit., p.64.


105. ibid.

106. ibid.


108. ibid.


110. ibid.

111. Reed, "Artobiography", op.cit., p.56.


114. Mollison and Minchin, op.cit., p.8.


117. ibid.

118. ibid.


120. ibid.